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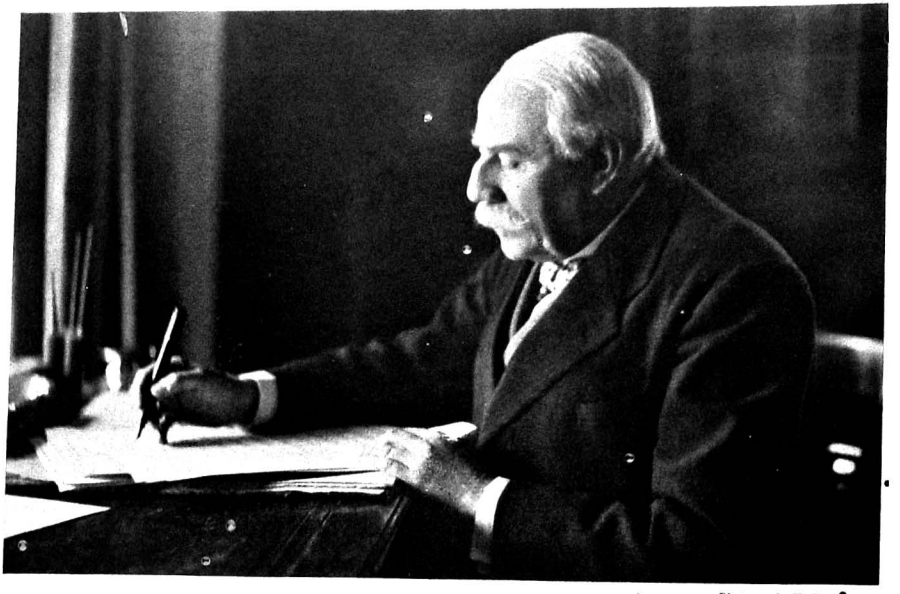

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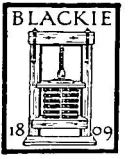
EDWARD ELGAR

1932

SIR EDWARD ELGAR

BY

THOMAS F. DUNHILL



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BOOKS about composers in this country are almost invariably written by professional music critics. For one composer to write at length about another of his own time is a rarity, and perhaps excites suspicion, for composers are seldom the best judges of the works of their contemporaries, or even of their own.

Nevertheless it is possible that a general practitioner may have peculiar opportunities for forming judgments upon the work of a specialist, and that these judgments may contribute something to an ultimate valuation, which can only be formulated by slow degrees. In the hope that this may be so, I have attempted the difficult task of preparing a critical study of the most outstanding figure in our English musical life of recent years.

This book makes no claim either to completeness on the biographical side, or to absolute freedom from bias in its estimates of Elgar's music. But it is, at least, a conscientious attempt to review, in concise form, the leading events and achievements of a great career.

My best thanks are due to the composer's daughter, Mrs. Elgar Blake, not only for her ready kindness in supplying me with helpful and invaluable information, but also for permitting the reproduction of various photographs and manuscripts in her possession, most of which are here published in facsimile for the first time.

THOMAS F. DUNHILL.

HAMPSTEAD, *April, 1938.*

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER

IN THE BACKGROUND

Invention, strictly speaking, is little more than a new combination of those images which have previously been gathered and deposited in the memory: nothing can come of nothing: he who has laid up no materials can produce no combinations.

Sir Joshua Reynolds. (*Second Discourse on Art.*)

TO understand and to value aright the significance of any great artist's rise to supremacy in his own particular sphere it is necessary, first of all, to reconstruct the surroundings from which he emerged.

If we study the musical conditions in England during the period when Edward Elgar's development as a composer was beginning to arrest attention, we shall realize that, whereas the British public was ready to give ear to a newer form of musical speech provided it came from abroad, there was little disposition to encourage anything of a modern character if it happened to be a home product.

Thus Wagner had already become known to us, and, through the persistence of the cult which sponsored his claims, had even won some general recognition in England, despite the almost comic opposition of certain prominent " die-hards " of the time. Brahms, too, had almost established himself in the legitimate succession of the great classical masters, and his works were listened to with respect, if not with enthusiasm. On the horizon the alert hopeful figure of Germany's new prodigy,

young Richard Strauss, was quickly discerned by those who made it their business to be on the look-out for exciting novelty. Dvořák already had a certain following, and Englishmen were beginning, also, to awaken to the fact that music of some consequence was being created in Russia.

Those who thought about their native music at all, however, thought about it in quite different terms, and applied different standards in forming their judgment. The one generally acknowledged British composer was Arthur Sullivan, who had earned for himself an affection which was, perhaps, without parallel in our musical history. Sullivan, nurtured in the Leipzig traditions which followed Mendelssohn's ascendancy, had taken London by storm in the early 'sixties. Neither at that time nor later did he attempt to break away from the facile methods of composition in which he had been trained. His personality, however, was marked, his melodic gifts were exceptional, and—"in spite of all temptations to belong to other nations"—he remained "an Englishman". He had no disposition to make experiments, and certainly showed little desire to enlarge the boundaries of his musical thought. He was, in short, an easy-going musician, content to do what he knew he could do, supremely well.

Sullivan won his lasting fame, of course, with his comic operas, which, contrary to all contemporary predictions, have refused to fade or grow old-fashioned, and have acquired a permanence to which the serious English music of the time (whether his own or that of other writers) has failed to establish a clear claim.

Sullivan's supremacy seemed to convince our musical public (ready though it was to welcome the work of Wagner or of Brahms) that the proper place for English

music was the light-opera stage. This made it extremely difficult for the more progressive spirits in British music of the period to make any headway. Such ardent pioneers as Alexander Mackenzie, Hubert Parry, and Charles Villiers Stanford, whose compositions began to be known amongst a limited circle of admirers in the 'seventies and 'eighties (after Sullivan had become firmly rooted in his position of leadership), found it almost impossible to elicit any response from the wider musical public. From time to time it was asserted by the intelligentsia of the period that one or other of these composers had produced a masterpiece which heralded the dawn of what they believed to be a *renaissance* in English music.

First of all it was *Prometheus Unbound*, a cantata by Parry (produced at Gloucester in 1880). But this met with a chilly reception from the critics of the day. The public, unready to receive such a work at such a time, allowed it to be forgotten without even giving it a chance to become known. Then, in 1881, Stanford's opera *The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan* claimed attention because it achieved production in Germany, a rare honour for a British composition. But it was only given a single performance in England, at Covent Garden, and that not till some twelve years later, when nobody but the composer's special friends could be expected to remember anything about it. A similar fate befell Mackenzie's much praised orchestral ballad, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, for, after its initial performance by the Philharmonic Society of London, in 1882, it was allowed to be shelved and forgotten.

Yet all these works, our musical commentators continue to tell us, were "landmarks" in our musical history. A strange use, it seems, of the word "land-

marks"! They were, apparently, but footprints in the sand, for, however much they may have deserved a different fate, few persons now living could recall a single bar of the music which they contain.

The odd thing about English musical history is that, unlike the musical history of any other European country, it deals almost entirely with works which are absolutely unknown to ordinary music-lovers, even in the land of their birth. The big names in English music up to the close of the nineteenth century, according to our books on music, are Byrd, Purcell, Bennett, Mackenzie, Parry and Stanford. With the exception of Purcell, and perhaps Stanford, the music which these composers created represents a sealed book to the present generation, which accepts the writers' reputations on trust, perhaps, whilst it continues to enjoy what it knows of the music of Morley, Sullivan, Edward German and Coleridge-Taylor.

What should we think of a history of literature or drama in which the leading names given were those of writers whose works are never read or spoken, or a history of architecture which dealt, in the main, with buildings which had never been erected? Perhaps some day an enterprising English musical commentator may base a chronicle of the chief happenings in his art upon the music which survives as music, instead of upon that which only exists (if indeed it can be said to exist at all) on paper. A chronicle "bright with names that men remember", rather than "loud with names that men forget", would be well worth attempting.

At the same time we must make allowances for the peculiar apathy of the average Englishman towards his own country's contributions to musical art, and it would be ridiculous to deny the powerful inner influence

of such men as Mackenzie, Parry and Stanford upon the course of English music in the latter half of the nineteenth century. They were all prolific composers. They rightly seized every possible opportunity to contribute to the musical life of the country and to make their presence felt. They were all men of high ideals, and as such it may be said at once that they greatly helped to pave the way for the coming of Edward Elgar, and played no inconsiderable part in the struggle to establish our music on the European map. They were versatile, alert, vigorous, and undeniably competent in technique. They succeeded very definitely in lifting English music of the more serious type out of the rut of conventionality into which it had fallen. They discarded the oppressive formulas which had deadened the work of their predecessors: they brushed away the blight of textbook harmony and mechanical counterpoint which had for so long masqueraded as serious music-making in England. If they were, even so, a little behind their continental brethren in modernity of style, as well as inferior to them in inspiration, it must be remembered that they started late in unsympathetic surroundings, and had a great deal of headway to make up. As time went on they, in their turn, formulated their own ways of composing, and the small section of the public which was interested in such matters began to know what to expect from them, and did not mind if it got nothing more.

This condition was not peculiar to music. It prevailed in English art of other kinds—in literature, in the drama, in painting.

Poetry, dominated by the commanding figures of Tennyson and Browning, was certainly on a far higher level than music, and, with the best of the novelists—Stevenson, Meredith and Hardy—at the height of their

splendid powers, the reading public was well supplied. But it knew what to expect—and got what it demanded.

If you went to the Lyceum Theatre in the 'eighties or early 'nineties you knew that you would see Irving and Ellen Terry acting superbly in a superb setting, whether the play was worth seeing or not. If you went to the Criterion you knew that Charles Wyndham would be setting straight some domestic disturbance in which Mary Moore was involved. The Bancrofts and the Kendals, in plays of homely sentiment; Toole, Edward Terry, Mrs. John Wood, and Nellie Farren, in farce and burlesque; Henry Neville, William Terriss, and Wilson Barrett, as the handsome heroes of romantic melodrama—all were depicting recognized types, which scarcely varied, year in and year out, and nobody wanted any change.

It was the same with painting. If you went to Burlington House during the summer season you could count on finding some colossal example of Leighton's cold classic dignity occupying the place of honour in the principal room; you would see also Alma Tadema's marble, Leader's conventional country prettiness, Peter Graham's rocks unscaleable and roaring waters, Edwin Long's crowded representations of historic episodes, whilst you could always make zoological comparisons between Sidney Cooper's lowland and Macwhirter's highland cattle. British art of all kinds seemed, in short, to be in a peculiarly static condition.

Why should music be different? In some respects it was even more stereotyped and unchanging. Whilst there was always a welcome extended to executive brilliance from abroad, and great artists like Rubinstein, Pachmann, Sarasate or Ysaye had their devoted followers, no British players exercised the same kind of

appeal. Glorious voices, of course, were to be heard in plenty, but the public taste in song was deplorable—a condition of affairs deliberately fostered and exploited by the music publishers, who ran concerts for the sole purpose of advertising the pot-boilers with which they flooded the market.

The more intelligent supporters of music flocked to the Saturday and Monday "Pops", at St. James's Hall, to worship at the shrine of Joachim and his associates, or were led into the way of truth, orchestrally, through the authoritative guidance of Hans Richter. Only at the Crystal Palace, under Manns, and occasionally at the Philharmonic concerts, could symphonic music by British composers obtain a hearing in London. Enthusiasts who could afford to do so journeyed, periodically, to the big provincial festivals to hear the choral works which our best-known composers (and several others less notable and less advanced) wrote to order, with comfortable regularity, as each festival came round. Occasionally the Royal Choral Society, then a lethargic unwieldy body, were moved to give one or other of these choral works a single performance in the echoey vastness of an almost empty Albert Hall. This, however, was very exceptional.

It will be seen, then, that an infrequent field-day was the most that any British composer, no matter how able, could expect to enjoy. If conditions are more favourable to-day, and few will deny that they are, it is unfair to withold our meed of praise from the three or four valiant spirits who provided the music for these rare events, and had so little opportunity to acquire mastery in their craft. Nor can we altogether blame them if, with such scant encouragement to widen their outlook, they accepted the conditions of the time and provided

what was expected from them. For it was inevitable that the youthful fervour with which their careers began should evaporate to some extent.

If Parry never quite recaptured the first fine careless rapture of *Prometheus Unbound* he was able to give us, in *Blest Pair of Sirens* and *De Profundis*, choral masterpieces which, in their kind, have not been surpassed, or even equalled, in this country. If Stanford lost, in some measure, the melodic spontaneity which he had shown in the *Eumenides* at Cambridge in 1885, his mastery and easy assurance did not fade, and he lived to produce the beautiful Irish rhapsodies and the *Stabat Mater*, and to enrich our music with, perhaps, the finest examples of English (or Irish) song which any composer has yet produced.

In estimating Elgar's outstanding achievements as a creative artist it would be a sheer injustice to deny the importance of these, and many other notes of presage, which too often fell upon ears unable, or at least unready, to admit their true significance. Nor, despite the assertions of some of Elgar's admirers, can acceptance be accorded to the view that such things had no influence upon the young composer who was struggling to achieve self-expression in an English provincial town, with few to criticize his efforts or lend him a helping hand.

As will be made evident in the pages that follow, Elgar was, quite early in his life, an active participant in the performances at each of the annual Festivals of the Three Choirs. He became familiar from the inside, therefore, with many of the chief works of the leaders of musical thought in this country. He was an earnest student; he was observant; he was impressionable.

It is difficult to see how an enthusiastic tribute to a

composer can be heightened or rendered more convincing by the wholesale condemnation of his more experienced fellow-professionals—still less by depicting them as snakes in the grass. In the present writer's opinion several of those who have written in praise of Elgar have to a large extent defeated their own ends by viewing his works through a telescope, and then reversing the telescope to look at those of his contemporaries through the wrong end. The ultimate supremacy of Elgar, which they set out to establish, would surely be rendered all the more impressive if his figure were given the natural prominence to which it is entitled rather than an unnatural isolation and aloofness. A giant amongst pygmies may be more spectacular, at a circus display, than a giant amongst big men. But in the affairs of real life a giant has a more commanding position as a leader if his leadership is established amongst those who have already proved themselves to be powerful.

It is clear that Elgar himself, at all events in his early years, was quite unconscious of the supposed organized opposition to his progress which some of the admirers who surrounded him thought fit to create, in order to magnify the stature of their chosen idol. He had the modest temperament which so often accompanies a highly nervous disposition. He grasped with gratitude every guiding hand that was stretched out to him, for he knew he had much to learn. Pride in being self-taught is a very natural feeling, but curiously enough Elgar did not seem to possess it. In his later years he was far more often heard to lament the fact that he had had little systematic training than to glory in the circumstance that he was obliged to pick up his knowledge of music for himself and to acquire his technique without skilled assistance.

When he first advanced beyond the stage of local eminence he had, indeed, little reason to be dissatisfied with his reception. It so happened, however, that the chief British composers of the time (with the prominent exceptions of Sullivan and Cowen) were connected with teaching institutions in London, and were occupied, quite naturally, with administrative affairs and the progress of the student composers who were being trained under their care. Elgar never came under their direct influence, and it is not surprising that they failed to observe the promise shown in his earliest successes, but to assert that his rise to fame was deliberately unnoted in what was called the " academic circle " in those days is contrary to the known facts.

The *Sea Pictures*, amongst the first of Elgar's mature works, were performed shortly after their original production (in 1899) at a students' concert at the Royal College of Music, as all who were pupils at that period will remember. They were sung by Muriel Foster (then a scholar at the institution) and conducted by Stanford. A little later Elgar was invited by Stanford to come to the College to conduct his *Enigma* Variations, and the invitation was accepted. These early demonstrations of an appreciative and friendly spirit on the part of one we are continually asked to regard as Elgar's most deadly enemy are conveniently forgotten by persons in the habit of using the telescope in the manner previously described.

Whatever may have been the cause of the bitter estrangement that unhappily marred the relationship between these two outstanding musicians (and the full story of this has never been told), it is clear that it sprang, in the first instance, from no determined professional opposition on the part of the older man, and

from no antagonism by the Royal College authorities. Indeed Parry, the Director of the College, went out of his way to be generous-spirited on Elgar's behalf. The most notable of these friendly exertions was that occasion when he tucked the score of the *Enigma* Variations under his arm, rushed off with it to Hans Richter, and insisted that the great conductor should give the work a hearing as soon as possible—an outburst of impetuosity which resulted in bringing Elgar prominently before the London public at the most opportune moment, and did more than any other single action to establish his position in the world of music.

If a faithful picture of the background from which Elgar emerged is to be presented circumstances such as these cannot be ignored, and it would be doing a disservice to his memory to ignore them. At the same time to assert that Parry, Stanford, or Mackenzie were fully alive to the greatness of Elgar's most mature work would be to err in the opposite direction. They were not. They belonged, after all, to a previous school of musical thought. They could hardly be expected to welcome the modernisms of *Gerontius*, or the *Symphony in A flat*, which were outside their ken altogether. The strictness of their early training, combined with the experience of many years spent in teaching, and curbing the excesses of headstrong musical youth, had very naturally set marked limitations to their outlook. They were all of opinion that musical freedom had limits beyond which it could not be allowed to stray without danger to the purity of the art.

For those to whom an art without boundaries was inconceivable the novelty of Elgar's harmonies and the lavishness of his orchestration were naturally disturbing —and what was, perhaps, even more disturbing was the

growing eagerness of the public to accept these allurements.

"The English public is curious," said Parry to one of his teaching staff, shortly before he died. "It can only recognize one composer at a time—once it was Sullivan—now it is Elgar." There was not a trace of bitterness in his tone. It came as an almost impersonal statement from a musician who had never sought popularity himself, and invariably mistrusted it. To him this was just a strange, disquieting circumstance. Sullivan, with his facile tunefulness, his transparent sentiment, his light-hearted gaiety, had eclipsed all his contemporaries in popular favour: now this same public had swung suddenly round to more serious things, and had found in Elgar something in which it could take a new kind of interest. It was a public difficult to understand, and, as it seemed, difficult to trust.

The very people who had never been greatly swayed by the type of British music which Parry and his earnest colleagues had felt to be most honest were being lifted off their feet by a new skill and brilliance which appeared to deviate sharply from the normal line of progress, in a way that our music had never done before. Was it possible that such enthusiasm could continue?

Perhaps one important factor had been overlooked. Herbert Spencer once said that "opinion is ultimately determined by the feelings and not by the intellect". What seemed inexplicable to Parry can be accounted for by the philosopher's dictum.

Elgar's music first arrested attention with its buoyant freshness and variety. But its ultimate appeal was to the emotions and to the imagination. The musical people of Britain are mostly cautious, restrained, and

not easy to rouse. Nevertheless, however inscrutable their attitude may be towards composers, they are invariably constant in their devotion, when once they have acclaimed a hero and taken him to their hearts.

A new personality had triumphed and Elgar, no longer a young man, was now in the foreground. And there he remained, until his death, the most popular and the most revered figure in English music.

Chapter II

EARLY YEARS

1857–1889

The great artist in any craft is one who begins with a spirit which cannot be acquired by education, and goes on to develop its expression by rigorous labour at his job.

St. John Ervine.

EDWARD WILLIAM ELGAR was born at Broadheath, near Worcester, on 2nd June, 1857.

The romantically inclined have not failed to note that the name Elgar is of Scandinavian origin—an English form of Aelfgar, or Oelgar, which signifies the "fairy spear". Whatever may have been the occupation or environment of Elgar's far-off forbears there was certainly nothing particularly romantic about the family bearing that heroic name at the time when the future composer first saw the light. Like many of the greatest creative musicians (including Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann and Brahms) he was born of parents who occupied an honourable but humble position in what may be termed the unambitious middle-class section of the community.

Edward was the fifth of seven children born to W. H. Elgar and his wife Ann Greening. W. H. Elgar, a native of Dover, after a short period of service as a salesman with a firm of music dealers in Soho, London,

settled in Worcester in the early 'forties of last century, and soon established himself as a useful general practitioner in the life of the city and district. His activities, indeed, appear to have been very numerous and varied, and they were all exercised in the service of music. He was organist for forty years at the Roman Catholic Church of St. George, he sang and played accompaniments for the meetings of the Worcester Glee Club, he was in great demand as an orchestral violinist, and he travelled about the surrounding country (on horseback) to tune or repair pianos in the homes of his patrons. In course of time, searching for further means of increasing a slender income, he went into business partnership with his brother, to establish a music shop in one of the main streets of Worcester. He was evidently an industrious man.

Of Ann Elgar, his wife, mother of the composer, we know less. Burdened with the cares of a large family, and living in a country cottage, three and a half miles from the centre of her husband's activities, she seems to have led a somewhat monotonous life, but to have found constant solace and refreshment in reading. The few who knew her spoke of the quiet grace of her personality and testified to her wide knowledge of the best English literature. She appears to have been entirely self-taught, and to have formed independent judgments upon the works which she assimilated.

It may be gathered, then, that Edward Elgar, through his father's many musical interests and his mother's literary tastes, inherited or acquired much that was to be of value to him in his future career. He does not seem, however, to have given any very early signs of exceptional ability; at all events he was not singled out from the rest of the family as being worthy of special

attention in the matter of education. During the impressionable years of his boyhood no doubt some indelible marks were printed upon his character, but rather through his own curiosity and instinctive awareness, one surmizes, than through the direct influence of any particular persons. He cared little for games and sports and had few companions of his own age, but he loved the country and was by nature observant and studious. Sometimes, when he was a very little boy, he was allowed to accompany his father, in a pony trap, on some tuning expedition. Whilst the pianos were being attended to he would wander through the grounds of some big estate, making friends with the grooms or the gardeners, perhaps, until it was time to be driven home. These were red-letter days which were registered firmly in his memory.

A little later he was sent to an ordinary "ladies' school", and here he received the usual elementary piano lessons. He was encouraged by his father, too, to take up the violin, and was placed under the care of a local teacher named Frederick Spray, in the hope, no doubt, that some day he might add to the family earnings by playing in an orchestra. In due course, when the time came for him to pass beyond the preparatory-class stage, he was entered as a pupil at a rather more important private school, near Worcester, called Littleton House. Here he remained until he reached the age of fifteen, when his regular education ceased.

During the last few years of his school life Edward Elgar became determined to apply himself to the study of the violin with greater seriousness: he also tried his hand at the viola, the 'cello, and the bassoon, becoming sufficiently proficient in the last-named to be able to

play in a wind quintet, which he formed in company with his brother Frank (who played the oboe), and three young friends (a clarinettist and two flautists). Some of his earliest attempts at composition, it may be noted, were written for this delightful if somewhat intractable combination of instruments. There is little doubt that the experience thus gained helped him to acquire that special facility which he invariably showed, later on, in his treatment of the wood-wind in orchestral writing.

Furthermore he found time to practise the organ, and very soon was able to give occasional assistance to his father at the services in St. George's Church. He was a constant visitor to the cathedral, also, so that he became acquainted with a wide range of church music of varied types. The cathedral organist of those days was William Done, who occupied this prominent position for over fifty years—from 1844 till 1895. He was a musician of the old school, steeped in the traditions of the Anglican communion and somewhat stubbornly unreceptive when it came to any deviation from that prescribed line of thought. In fact he was what would be called to-day a "die-hard". Well versed in all matters which appertained to his daily duties, and in the classics as represented by Handel, Haydn and Mozart, he was violent in his opposition to all works which showed more modern tendencies. His special bugbear appears to have been that "preposterous" composer, Schumann!

William Done's influence upon the young Elgar may have been of some importance in impressing upon him the need for close study of a pure style of vocal writing. But it led to strong reactions. Perhaps it was a natural rebelliousness against those severe inculcations of a prejudiced mind which led Elgar, when he had the opportunity, later on, to make a special effort to become

acquainted with the art of Schumann. There were other and more immediate reactions, however. Curiously enough he seemed little drawn towards the English music of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Familiarity with the more austere type of church music (such as that of Byrd, Tallis or Gibbons) bred in him, not the admiration which generally results from such a study to-day, but a restless dissatisfaction and impatience, if not quite the proverbial contempt. Such works, he felt, were just " museum " pieces—and, oddly enough, he retained this opinion to a certain extent to the end of his life.

With the restlessness of youth he was craving for something more sensuous and less impersonal, and in the church music which he tried to write at this time we find an unmistakable effort to escape from the severities of diatonic construction and modal purity. Nevertheless he schooled himself with great pertinacity in everything he could get hold of upon the subjects of harmony and counterpoint. Few students who have been through the mill at any musical academy or college can have assimilated so many systems, or pored over so many dry and musty treatises as he did. He seems to have been determined not to allow his natural inclinations too free a rein.

It was the same with musical history, and with instrumentation. He actually constructed a symphony, almost bar by bar, on the model of Mozart's famous work in G minor, scoring it for the same instruments and in the same way. It is interesting to note that a similar, if even more drastic, method was regularly adopted by Stanford for training his young pupils in orchestration. They were made to score Mozart or Beethoven from piano arrangements, and then fill in

EDWARD ELGAR

At the age of 13 or 14

the real original scoring afterwards in red ink—an uncommonly laborious business!

What is surprising in Elgar's case is that such rigid methods of study as this should have been self-imposed, and continued without encouragement or guidance. When one realizes, also, how little spare time he can have had for the exercise of these disciplinary processes, one comes to understand more fully the immense mental force and conviction which he brought, even thus early, to the shaping of his career.

When Elgar left school, at the age of fifteen, there seems to have been a proposal afoot to send him to Leipzig to study music. Apparently the project received insufficient backing to materialize, and, instead, he entered the office of a firm of solicitors in Worcester. Here he passed a year in somewhat uncongenial surroundings, at the end of which he gave up all thoughts of the legal profession, and decided that he would be more in his element helping his father in the music shop and in the organ loft. This at least had the advantage of keeping him in contact with some kind of musical life, however humdrum. He was able, besides, by taking odd engagements to play the piano or the violin, to earn a little extra pocket-money. The small sums thus acquired were carefully saved and eventually amounted to sufficient to enable him to travel to London, in 1879, for a few lessons with Adolf Pollitzer, a well-known leader of orchestras in his day and an able violinist. Extremely pleased with the progress of his new pupil, Pollitzer, rightly or wrongly, urged him to continue to strive towards a position as a solo violin player. Elgar, fired with a new ambition, worked for a time with feverish energy towards that goal.

Ultimately, however, he lost confidence. Dissatisfied

with his progress (especially in the matter of volume in tone-production) and convinced that he could never become a real virtuoso, he abandoned, once and for all, this short-lived aspiration. He had, however, by no means wasted his time. His periodic visits to London had given him some opportunities of hearing fine orchestral music well performed. The famous concerts conducted by August Manns at the Crystal Palace were then at the height of their success. At these Elgar heard the symphonies of Beethoven, Schubert and Mendelssohn, which naturally aroused in him a deeper interest in the creative side of music, and made him resolve to apply his energies to a more serious type of composition than he had hitherto attempted.

The increased skill which had been acquired through his lessons with Pollitzer enabled him to take a more important part in the musical life of his neighbourhood. He became a really useful and reliable orchestral musician, and for several years he played in the first violins at the Three Choirs Festivals, and also in an orchestra at Birmingham directed by W. C. Stockley, a conductor of some eminence in the Midlands.

He also undertook, in 1879, one of the most curious tasks that can ever have fallen to the lot of a working musician—he became bandmaster at the Worcester County Lunatic Asylum. Why a bandmaster should be required at such a place has always remained something of a mystery, but apparently some of the governors believed in the beneficial effect of music upon those suffering from mental distress. With this in view the attendants and officials at the institution were induced to organize a little band amongst themselves, over which Elgar was engaged to preside. His duties were by no means confined to conducting. He coached the

players individually, and was required to write a number of suitable compositions for this unconventionally assorted combination of instruments to perform. In this matter he was not allowed quite a free hand. For some inscrutable reason only one type of composition was considered suitable for the mentally afflicted to enjoy. He was required to supply quadrilles, and quadrilles only. And so he poured them out, as delectably concocted as he could contrive to make them, for a fee of five shillings a time.

In a sense, perhaps, the practice of writing in a very limited shape has its uses. It is good training for a composer and sharpens his inventive faculty. But this was carrying limitations beyond the limit—if such a contradictory description may be allowed. It is hard to imagine any restriction more crippling than that which imposes adherence to the same number of bars and the same conventional dance-rhythms for each section—for these were the necessary characteristics of this oddly stilted, and now defunct, ballroom diversion.

Elgar continued his heroic efforts to alleviate lunacy, however, for five years. By this time he was twenty-seven years of age. He had picked up many stray jobs, here and there, which brought him experience of various kinds, a little money, but scarcely any kudos. He had managed, too, to snatch a brief holiday in Germany at the end of 1882. Here, in Leipzig, he heard Schumann's *Overture, Scherzo and Finale* played by the Gewandhaus Orchestra under Carl Reinecke. This is a work seldom played in England, but it contains some of Schumann's loveliest music, and reveals a lightness of touch in orchestration which is seldom associated with his more pretentious symphonic compositions. It is easy to realize that this made a great impression upon the

young Englishman. It is something more than idle conjecture that prompts the belief that this vivid impression laid the foundations of many of the characteristics of Elgar's instrumental style, particularly in his methods of thematic development, which so often recall those of Schumann.

This brief holiday may have been mentally unsettling, but he returned to England eager for fresh experiences. The daily round, the common task had to be resumed, but now and again there were encouraging incidents to break the monotony of his life. In December, 1883, for instance, a small piece by Elgar, called *Mauresque*, was played at a concert given by the orchestra of which he was a member at Birmingham, under Stockley's direction. It was not a very striking composition, nor was the occasion of its production an important one, but the piece attracted some attention locally, and the composer received some welcome pats on the back from the Pirmingham press.

It was not until 1884 that Elgar had any chance whatever of showing his powers of musical leadership. In that year he became conductor of the Worcester Amateur Orchestral Society. In 1885 he gained further prominence in the musical life of the city by succeeding his father as organist of St. George's Church. Neither of these appointments was sufficiently lucrative to enable him to give up his teaching connexion, and for four more years he was obliged to lead a life which was more active than congenial, and more irksome than prolific. But at the same time his reputation in the Worcester district was significantly enhanced. He was, by now, an esteemed professional man in his own small circle.

In 1889, when Edward Elgar was thirty-two years of

age, and still quite unknown to the outer and larger musical world in England, he took what proved to be the most decisive step of his career—he married.

Great musicians have not invariably found in wedlock that harmony of mind and purpose which leads either to artistic development or prosperity in their life. There have been notable exceptions, of course—J. S. Bach perhaps, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Verdi and Stanford amongst them. Many of the world's greatest composers, however, have shirked the adventure altogether, preferring to plough a lonely furrow. Others have taken the plunge only to suffer themselves, or (perhaps more frequently) to inflict unmerited suffering upon the partners of their choice. Of many more it may be said that they have deserved, domestically speaking, the sarcastic comments of A. P. Herbert's Earl of Tantivy, who wondered

> " Why flutes and harps
> And flats and sharps
> Should lead to indiscretions,"

and lamented the circumstance that the number of a musician's wives

> " In fact exceeds
> The normal needs
> Of almost all professions."

There is no doubt, however, that in Edward Elgar's case the step was a wise and even a providential one. He found in the partner of his choice a real and constant helpmeet, whose understanding mind, devotion, and unceasing confidence in her husband's genius, unquestionably strengthened his powers of self-reliance, and had a large share in bringing about the success which he was so soon to achieve.

Elgar's bride, Caroline Alice Roberts, was the daughter of Major-General Sir Henry Gee Roberts. She sang in one of the choral societies of Worcester, and the composer had first formed a friendship with her through meetings at rehearsals. Her interests were musical and literary, and she showed some ability in the writing of verse. As a companion she had brought to Elgar an encouraging sympathy which he had needed and never previously experienced; as a wife she shared all his anxieties and had pride in all his triumphs. She was an understanding as well as a tactful critic. She guided him in all difficult decisions. She supported him in every conflict, whether inward or outward, which he was called upon to face during his artistic career. Few great men have been so fortunate in their domestic life, and it is clear that Elgar became more and more dependent upon his gentle partner as he won his way to the forefront of the English musical world.

Chapter III

EARLY WORKS

Even our failures are a prophecy.
George Eliot.

IT is customary, in examining the early works of a composer who has achieved great things later on in his career, to search for incipient signs of the special qualities which give distinction to his mature art. We feel especially proud of our insight if we are able to place a finger on some melodic phrase or some crude harmonic progression, and say "Look at this!—it could only have been written by so-and-so." The formation of a personal style, however, generally results in such radical transformations that what a composer has left behind him during the early stages of his progress bears very little relationship to what has been evolved in the later stages.

Few composers who make names for themselves begin by writing music utterly unlike that which has gone before. With some the changes are rapid, and they reach a happy maturity, with a settled manner of expression, at an early age. With others the process is gradual—their whole career resembles a constant uphill climb, in which the outlook is ever-changing, and the foothold at times insecure.

Elgar's development is peculiar in this respect—he seems to have formed a style in his youth which took

so firm a root in his nature that he was never able entirely to cast it off. Indeed, he showed no desire to do so. It was a genuine part of himself, and he was not in the least ashamed of it. But, happily for us, it was not the whole Elgar. There was another style, born of inner cravings and strong ambitions, struggling for an expression which was only fully attained quite late in life. In the first style the music was a pleasing diversion; it sought to solve no problems, and flowed so easily that it sometimes sounded commonplace. But in the second style the music was a kind of sacrament, an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual creative grace.

The odd circumstance, in Elgar's case, is that both of these co-existent styles were characteristic of the man. While it was the second style that established his greatness, and won for him the admiration of those who love the highest forms of art, the first style (although it often made "the judicious grieve") helped him to secure popularity, and the approbation of thousands of honest but uncritical people.

It is not at all surprising that a survey of Elgar's early published works reveals little that is indicative of the high quality that belongs to his masterpieces. Since several of the more ambitious of his youthful efforts (including a Wind Quintet, a String Quartet, and a Sonata for piano and violin) were never printed, it is not possible to say to what extent they anticipate future happenings. But we cannot fail to be surprised in discovering that the foundation-stone of his lighter style is so well and truly laid.

In his early salon pieces for violin, for instance, there is little that is tentative and a good deal that is charming. One may single out as an illustration of this the so-

called *Morceau de Genre, La Capricieuse* (Op. 17), which is perfect in its delicate miniature way, and most admirably suited to the instrument. There is not a trace here of the commonplace phraseology that we find in the well-known *Salut d'Amour* (Op. 12), to the strains of which we have so often consumed our restaurant dinners. It is interesting to note, however, that Ernest Newman has put in a little plea for indulgence in regard to this latter work, asking us, if we are able to forgive Wagner his vulgarity in *Rienzi*, why we should not forgive Elgar " the bib and pinafore psychology " of *Salut d'Amour*. The composer's early love of sentimental expression is further evidenced in the two pieces *Chanson de Nuit* and *Chanson de Matin* (Op. 15), but the sentimentality is here tempered with superior musicianship, and softened by gentle elegance. In view of what has been said about the survival of this particular style concurrently with the composer's spiritual development, one may note without consternation that two pieces of precisely the same character—*Carissima* and *Rosemary*—were written and published as late as 1914 and 1915, after the completion of *Falstaff*!

Elgar's very early choral works are so slight in interest that they need hardly be noticed here. The little *Ave Verum* (Op. 2) written for use in St. George's Catholic Church is, for example, quite unpretentious, and although some have seen in its final chords a glimpse of the composer's later style, its pleasant boyish tunefulness has little distinction.

For some positive evidence of the technical mastery which was early gaining ground, we must turn to consider the short orchestral pieces through which Elgar's prentice hand was directed towards more ambitious achievement. The *Sevillaña* (Op. 7) is not

particularly enterprising (or, for that matter, particularly Spanish) but the scoring is undoubtedly picturesque and effective. The three pieces of Op. 10 merit closer inspection. The first, a *Mazurka*, is rather square and trite in design; the second, the *Serenade Mauresque*, has a fresher rhythmic plan, and contains less angular melodies, though the title does not convince one of its aptness. The third, called *Contrasts*, is, however, distinctly more important, because it embodies a basic idea of some novelty. The composer places side by side two *Gavottes*. The first of these, in G minor, purports to be in the style of 1700, whilst the second, in G major, aims at capturing the more animated treatment which the gavotte rhythm might be expected to receive in 1900. Curiously enough Elgar is far more successful in portraying the quaint graces of the early eighteenth century than in reflecting the spirit of the dance in his own day. The minor melody is charming—the major one, which begins with a phrase very suggestive of Edward German, wanders along in a rather aimless way, and even introduces a series of "Scotch snaps" which do not naturally fit in with the style of the piece at all. There are some extremely pretty touches in the orchestration, particularly where the 1700 gavotte returns, and the wood-wind are heard alone.

The *Sursum Corda* (Op. 11) is a far more significant as well as a far more elaborately planned work, laid out for brass, organ and strings only. It is akin in type, though not in style, to a later and more familiar piece —the *Solemn Melody* of Walford Davies. But there is greater attention to detail here, more thematic development, and stronger emotional intensity. The strings are treated with real freedom: the brass is sparingly used except in the *fortissimo* sections. There are some

very deftly devised dialogue passages between strings and organ. The music unfortunately suffers from a lack of variety in tonality. In such a long movement as this one wonders why Elgar did not give us, at least, a change of key-signature for the *più mosso* section in the middle. There are no modulations at all from first to last, except merely transitory ones to nearly related keys. Therefore there is bound to be a certain feeling of monotony in performance. In every other respect the music shows enterprise and inventiveness.

It is not too fanciful to see in this immature but sincere devotional, deeply-felt piece a prophetic quality. The Elgar of *The Dream of Gerontius* and the oratorios is, for the first time, faintly foreshadowed, and, if the composer's second style had yet far to go before it convinced the world of its reality, it was already in course of formation. It still needed that expansive personal vision and that determined personal purpose which were destined to acquire an urgency that no discouragements could quell. What this urgency, if it came into being, would bring forth none were able to foretell—least of all, perhaps, the modest composer himself.

Elgar, one is apt to forget, was nearing the prime of life when *Sursum Corda* was written. Yet he was younger and less settled in his ideas than many a student of twenty-one. His musical training had been of such a patchy and desultory character that later development was inevitable. It was not long, however, before he became fully conscious of the creative energy which was within him. When that consciousness came he was able to bring the full force of his manhood to bear upon the problems before him, and to profit by the habit of perseverance which a difficult early life had forced him to acquire.

Chapter IV

LONDON AND MALVERN

1889–1904

From ill to well, from better on to best, Arts move.
Robert Louis Stevenson.

ON his marriage Elgar resigned his organ post and settled with his wife in London, hoping no doubt to find surer scope for material advancement, and an entry into a more important artistic circle. There, at all events, he would be able to hear plenty of good music well performed. It would be unnecessary to sever all at once his connexion with the Worcester district; he could continue to hold some of his more lucrative teaching posts by taking a weekly journey.

The prospect at first seemed fairly cheering. During the first two years of his residence in London he found time to write his first really important orchestral work—the overture *Froissart* (Op. 19). This was first performed, appropriately enough, at the secular concert of the Worcester Festival of 1890, and this was the first occasion on which Elgar's name had appeared in a really important musical programme. It would hardly be true, however, to say that the work itself was strikingly successful. Nevertheless, it marked a stage in the composer's development. It will be dealt with more fully in a later chapter.

None of the other compositions completed during the

first two years of Elgar's married life are of much importance except, perhaps, the beautiful little Serenade for strings, which probably dates from this period.

He seems to have been busy knocking at the doors of various publishers with manuscripts under his arm —manuscripts of salon pieces of slight value, some of which he managed to sell outright for small sums, only to find to his chagrin, many years afterwards, that he had filled the pockets of his purchasers (and, incidentally, suffered some loss of reputation as a serious writer) without any financial benefit to himself.

In the year 1891 his short and rather bitter experience of London conditions induced him to seek a permanent abode in a more placid atmosphere. He settled in Malvern, in the shadow of the hills he had always loved so well. Here Elgar and his wife dwelt quietly in congenial surroundings for a period of thirteen years, and here his real steady activity as a composer began.

He was still actively engaged in teaching, an occupation he sometimes likened to " turning a grindstone with a dislocated shoulder ". Often enough he was only able to find time for creative work in the evenings, after busy days of tiring drudgery, but he summoned the energy, nevertheless, to embark upon several big-scale compositions and to carry them to early completion. During the first five years of this period, for instance, he wrote a cantata called *The Black Knight*; an oratorio *The Light of Life*; and a series of scenes for chorus and orchestra which, grouped together, appeared as *King Olaf*. The oratorio was performed at the Worcester Festival of 1896, and *King Olaf* at the North Staffordshire Festival at Hanley, in the same year. The latter achieved a real success, attracting attention at once by its spontaneity and stirring independence of style.

Elgar by this time was just on forty years of age. Purcell, Mozart, Schubert and Mendelssohn had completed their life-work and bidden farewell to the world without ever reaching that milestone. Beethoven, before he was forty, had completed his first six symphonies, all of his concertos for solo and orchestra, and his Razoumowsky Quartets. Schumann had written his best piano music, his loveliest songs, his opera *Genoveva*, his epoch-making Piano Concerto and still more epoch-making Piano Quintet. Wagner had moved the whole of Europe to wondering admiration with *Tannhaüser* and *Lohengrin*, and had already embarked upon the composition of *The Ring*. Brahms had completed his Requiem, his Concerto in D minor, and much of his finest chamber music including the two monumental Sextets for strings.

The whole history of music contains no parallel instance of so compelling a power so long deferred. At an age when most great creative minds are at the height of their inventiveness Elgar had scarcely given more than a hint of the strong individuality which was later to make itself felt. Nor did the two works written in 1897, in celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee—the *Imperial March* and the patriotic cantata *The Banner of St. George*—register progress of any kind, though they may have played some part in making the little-known name of Elgar more familiar to the general public. It was a case of talent marking time till genius could find an opportunity to declare itself.

A commission which came to Elgar to compose a large-scale choral work for the Leeds Festival of 1898 was undoubtedly, however, an incentive to the composer to aim at something of a higher order. It was, besides, an acknowledgment of his gifts, and a welcome expression of confidence. The result of the commission was the

cantata *Caractacus*. The subject was not, perhaps, too well chosen, and the libretto was hardly even an example of made-to-order competence. But Elgar, having decided upon what he was going to do, put his whole energy into the task of endeavouring to recreate interest in ancient Britons, Druids, and such-like remote figures of history, which are peculiarly difficult to bring to life. If he did not quite succeed, and the work failed to capture or hold the interest of its first audience, yet there was, technically, some advance shown upon what had gone before. *Caractacus* at least contained some vital moments of vigorously-felt music.

Nobody who heard it, however, even the most ardent believers in Elgar's ability, can have been prepared for the two masterpieces which came to light in 1899 and 1900. These were destined not only to establish Elgar as the greatest living force in English music, but to give him a high and honoured position amongst the leaders of musical thought in the world. These were the *Enigma* Variations for orchestra, and the setting for soli, chorus and orchestra of Cardinal Newman's poem *The Dream of Gerontius*.

The Variations had been begun in 1898. They were brought to a hearing in London by Hans Richter in June of the following year. The music met with some slight criticism, it is true, from the famous conductor himself as well as from others whose opinions were valuable, and Elgar was wise enough, a little later on, to make some alterations in his score (notably in the finale), and these were undoubted improvements. But from the start there was no question as to the enthusiasm that was evoked by the music in all responsible quarters. For the first time in his life Elgar had the satisfaction of obtaining and enjoying a unanimous verdict in his favour

from the press, the musicians and the public alike. He had, in common parlance, " arrived ".

Strange to say, although the orchestral masterpiece won such prompt recognition, the choral masterpiece of the same period took a few years to establish itself in favour, even with the most cultured and the most musical sections of the public. It is interesting to recall the fact that when Elgar was invited by the Birmingham committee to provide a work for the Festival of 1900 he contemplated embarking upon an oratorio dealing with St. Augustine and the early British church. It appears that some of his friends dissuaded him from this, believing that the subject was too controversial and that such a work might meet with clerical opposition. It would be strange if he did not foresee controversial difficulties in the way when he turned, instead, to Cardinal Newman's poem. But obviously religious convictions, and a strong feeling that he could surrender himself entirely to the spirit of a fantasy so truly in tune with his own beliefs, over-rode any practical conditions. The poem had been constantly in his mind since 1889, when he had received a copy of it as a wedding present. He had always meant to set it some day. It was significant that when that day arrived he was technically almost at the height of his powers, and his vivid imagination was at its strongest. He could afford to throw all other considerations to the winds.

When *The Dream of Gerontius* was first performed at Birmingham, with Richter in command, its magnitude was apparent, but somehow it " missed fire ". There were several reasons for this. Many people were repelled by what has been called the " theology " of the work, which really may be better described as the ritualistic or incense-laden character of some of the episodes.

The religious music of England had never taken on this complexion before. Handel's sturdy Protestantism had dictated and dominated all the traditions of our native sacred music. Here was an English composer, a Roman Catholic and proud of it, creating music which was foreign to our natural religious temperament—as foreign, that is to say, as those processions and genuflexions and adorations of the sacrament which no doubt induce religious devotion through the senses abroad, but mean nothing at all to the average Britisher. How could an English composer, however devout, be so utterly and entirely un-English?

Then again this performance at Birmingham had been unsatisfactory from many points of view—the members of the chorus had been inadequately rehearsed and " floundered pitifully through a work which proved itself completely beyond their powers ". Even Richter himself, it was said, " demonstrated a strange inability to grasp the subtleties of Elgar's thought ".[1] The exponent of the leading solo part, too, had been chosen unwisely. Edward Lloyd was a famous tenor singer with a very fine voice, but to entrust him with the interpretation of the character of Gerontius was to ask him to do something for which he was totally unfitted. And manifestly a great deal depends upon the way in which the tenor soloist is able to impart reality to the mingled fear, mysticism, aspiration and exultation which are so vividly portrayed in the music.

This inadequate representation of Elgar's moving conception, and the cool reception accorded to it, must have been deep disappointments to the composer. But evidences that the value of his work was at last to be

[1] Vide *Elgar as I knew him*, by Sir Richard Terry (*The Radio Times*).

granted tangible recognition may have brought some consolation.

In 1900 he was offered an honorary degree of Doctor of Music by Cambridge University, which, after some demur, he accepted. Meanwhile he was busy with other enterprises of a less exalted kind. The first two *Pomp and Circumstance* marches, and the flamboyant overture *Cockaigne*, were produced in 1901, whilst for the coronation of King Edward VII he composed an Ode (planned for performance on a special gala occasion at Covent Garden, but postponed owing to the King's illness, and not actually heard until the Sheffield Festival, in the autumn of 1902).

The production of such popular-type works at such a time, after the high level to which Elgar had climbed in 1899 and 1900, was almost enough to jeopardize his newly acquired position as a composer of the first rank. But luckily *Gerontius*, which had been so unfortunate in its first performance, received, in 1902, a second performance, the fame of which attracted so much attention that it saved the situation. The text had been translated into German by Julius Buths, and the work in its new form was given at the Lower Rhine Festival in Düsseldorf.

The pæans of praise which *Gerontius* evoked in Germany, and especially the enthusiastic compliments publicly paid to Elgar by Richard Strauss (the world's most famous composer at that time), impressed the slow-moving British public enormously. There was a strong feeling that a fine work had not been given a fair chance in the land of its birth. It must be listened to again in England. The Worcester and Sheffield Festivals of the same year included it in their programmes, and, chiefly through the exertions of the late Sir Richard Terry, a big-

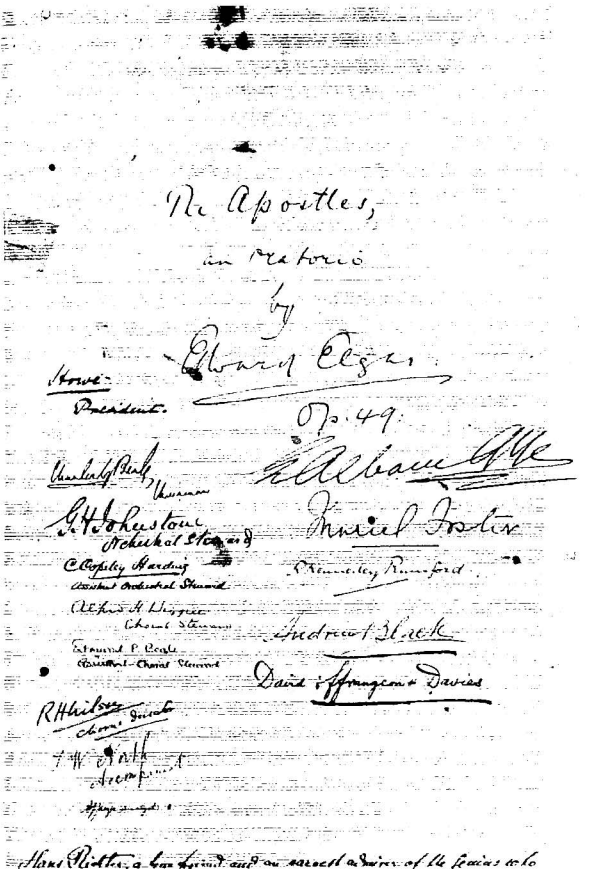
scale performance was organized for the metropolis, and London heard the work for the first time within the bare walls of the Roman Catholic cathedral of Westminster, then unfinished, on 7th June, 1903. The Hanley Festival Choral Society journeyed south on purpose to take part in it, Ludwig Wüllner (who had sung the chief rôle in Düsseldorf with so much success), Muriel Foster and ffrangçon Davies sang the solos, and the composer himself conducted. Under such conditions the stature of the composition was better realized by the English people. It was no longer regarded as an impossible problem to tackle: it took its place straight away in the repertory of established choral works, side by side with *The Messiah* and *Elijah*. This position has not only been retained, but strengthened, with the passing of years.

Meantime Elgar had not been resting on his laurels. He was busy completing another big sacred work, the oratorio *The Apostles*, and this came to light at the Birmingham Festival of 1903, with Richter once more in charge. It was clear that the composer had no intention of repeating himself. The style of the music and the methods of construction were totally unlike those of *Gerontius*. The text was compiled by Elgar himself from passages in the Scriptures. He made great use of representative themes in order to give unity to the narrative, but the effect of the work as a whole was panoramic rather than cumulative: a series of pictures—some contemplative, some emotional and poignant, some intensely dramatic. He made no attempt to revert to that almost eerie mysticism which had given *Gerontius* its curious and unique appeal. In this he was extremely wise, and although the result was accounted disappointing by some, the full range and fine quality of the composer's

imagination had never before been so sharply revealed as it was in this beautiful and eloquent score. *The Apostles*, however, did not secure the affection of the public with any certainty, and a subsequent performance in Germany failed to call forth the outbursts of enthusiasm which had greeted its predecessor. Perhaps even to this day it has not been granted the wide admiration to which it is entitled.

The year 1904 was destined to be a most eventful one in Elgar's life. He became a Doctor of Music (Honoris Causa) of Durham University. He was the hero of a special three-days' festival devoted entirely to his works, at which a beautiful new overture, *In the South*, was first performed. The honour of knighthood was bestowed upon him by King Edward VII. And, lastly, he left Malvern, where he had spent what may well be called a lucky thirteen years, to take up his residence in Hereford.

At this point it may be appropriate to pause for a moment to speak of the importance of Elgar's social gifts, which developed rapidly after his marriage, until he had gathered round him a remarkable circle of congenial companions. Dr. Johnson, it may be remembered, once said that a man "should keep his friendships in constant repair". Elgar followed that advice. During his residence in Malvern he retained most of the friends of his early years, but he added many to their number who became, in their turn, as devoted to him as he was to them. Amongst his brethren of the musical profession he enjoyed particular intimacy with G. R. Sinclair (of Hereford), Lee Williams, and Herbert Brewer (of Gloucester) and Ivor Atkins (of Worcester), all of whom had reason to be grateful to Elgar for practical assistance from time to time. He



TITLE PAGE OF THE MANUSCRIPT FULL SCORE OF "THE APOSTLES"

With signatures of the soloists, &c., at Birmingham, and a tribute by Hans Richter

also cultivated the companionship of many leaders of the more social side of the artistic world, such as Mrs. Stuart-Wortley, afterwards Lady Stuart of Wortley (the daughter of Sir John Millais, who inherited much of her father's brilliance and charm, and was so great a devotee of music), A. E. Rodewald (of Liverpool), Edward Speyer (that enthusiastic amateur who had been a friend of Brahms), Arthur Troyte Griffith (architect), and many more. There was one friend, in particular, who exercised an influence of the greatest moment over his life and work, and so stood a little apart from the rest in importance. This was A. J. Jaeger, a member of the firm of Novello & Co., the publishers of most of Elgar's works. For some time the association between the two men was of a formal kind, and the cordiality developed gradually. Jaeger, in his business capacity of musical editor, was constantly in correspondence with the composer. He was a man of fine character endowed with critical insight of an uncommon kind. On occasion he would make suggestions for drastic alterations in Elgar's music before publication: there would, perhaps, be a breezy passage-at-arms between the two men, but never a disturbance of their friendly relationship with each other.

In course of time Elgar came to depend upon Jaeger as he depended upon no one else. Much as he might chafe at his friend's seeming perversity, as often as not he would bow good-humouredly to judgments which he respected and valued. The correspondence between them is remarkable, too, for the prevalence of a spirit of bantering fun, particularly on Elgar's side, which is in queer contrast with all ordinary methods of business.

There were, possibly, amongst those who gathered around the composer, a few whose influence was not so

salutary, and some who, quite unnecessarily, took pains to fan a tendency to bitterness which was apt to show itself when he recalled his early struggles. Sometimes, also, he was too child-like in his trust to distinguish between good counsel and that which was less reliable. But in the main Elgar was fortunate in the service and loyalty of those who surrounded him, in his private as well as in his public life.

Chapter V

CANTATAS AND ORATORIOS

1893–1904

The power of seeing beauty, and the love of beauty, are not all that makes the great artist. He must also have the power of shaping the beauty which he sees, and in a way peculiarly his own.

Stopford A. Brooke.

The Black Knight

THE fluency and vitality of Elgar's first cantata is surprising. Surprising not only because it is a setting of a terribly poor text, but because the composer has made matters even worse than they might have been by indulging in continual repetitions of trite and vapid lines, until they jingle in the memory. The music which illustrates them is, however, so spirited and so skilful of its kind that one wishes that the composer (before he outgrew the idiom) had recast the work in a purely instrumental form. It is worth noting, in passing, that *The Black Knight*, when first published, was called a Symphony for Chorus and Orchestra, which suggests that Elgar regarded it more as a musical design than as a subject-picture.

The verses (a translation from Uhland) are by Longfellow, be it said, though they are worse than even the worst of his more familiar rhyming narratives. Probably the rather eerie story appealed to Elgar as a good

subject for musical illustration: it is difficult to believe that the quality of the verse attracted him. He seized upon the dramatic points with avidity, but sometimes be prolonged them to such an extent that they lost their meaning. When the Black Knight rode into the lists, for instance, and " the castle 'gan to rock ", Elgar made it rock for a space of fifty-five bars, with endless repetitions of the word " rock ", set to wailing phrases in falling semitones. The music in itself is quite impressive at this point, but the words are mere obstacles that stand in the way.

Verbal exaggeration is as disastrous in music as in verse-speaking, and in this case it is particularly ill-judged in effect, since it occurs before the fight, which is rightly the climax of the scene. Throughout the work the composer seems unable to resist the temptation to indulge in vocal and instrumental strenuousness, in and out of season. This is a thousand pities, because there is so much inventiveness and so much musical quality that can be sincerely admired. The lighter sections of the cantata are especially charming: a pleasant spring-like mood is well sustained throughout the long opening chorus, and the dance scene is delightfully fresh and happy in its graceful rhythms.

The essence of a narrative setting should surely be swift forward movement. Elgar, in pursuit of excuses for symphonic developments in this work, appears to have sacrificed the main necessity of plain direct statement. This has greatly endangered the effect of his score. Nevertheless there is much in *The Black Knight* that will continue to be acceptable to choral societies, despite the poverty of the literary material, and the singular lack of judgment betrayed in the manner of its musical illustration.

The Light of Life

Elgar's first oratorio is short, fairly well designed, and for the most part unambitious. The text, which is partly Scriptural and partly the work of the Rev. E. Capel-Cure, deals with the incident of Christ's healing of the man blind from his birth. There is an expressive instrumental Prelude (called a Meditation) into which several themes to be used later are introduced. Following this there is a well-constructed Chorus of Levites, interspersed with the prayers of the blind man (a tenor soloist) for the restoration of his sight. As Jesus passes by, the disciples mutter " Who did sin, this man or his parents?" in somewhat dull and pedantic phrases. The interest revives, however, in an expressive (if rather Mendelssohnic) solo for the blind man's mother, who appeals for her son. The comforting words of Jesus lead to a splendid chorus, " Light out of darkness ", which is more than an anticipation of the solemnity and dignity that Elgar was to show in *The Apostles* later on. It is a pity, however, that some very solemn words, in a curious middle section, are glibly set to a slightly jaunty rhythm which neither expresses them nor fits their natural accentuation.

The performing of the miracle is interrupted by a vocal duet (or two-part chorus), " Doubt not thy Father's care ", where, once more, the music is clearly modelled on Mendelssohn, and contains no hint of Elgar's individuality. The composer was moved to far more personal expression in the succeeding ensemble, which depicts the wonder of the onlookers, and culminates in a fugal treatment of " The wisdom of their wise men shall perish ", with a sudden outburst at " the

eyes of the blind shall see ". A dramatic touch, deftly conceived, comes when the chorus asks, on a monotone, " Where is He?" and there is a magic modulation from D major to E flat, which ushers in a solo for the blind man, " I know not: as a Spirit didst Thou pass before mine eyes ". This solo is by far the most original and moving number in the oratorio: it expresses the blind man's gratitude with rare intensity and finely sustained fervour. It is strange that this touching song, which might easily be detached from its context, is so little known. An artistic tenor could make a telling effect with it.

The section which follows brings a touch of agitation, and with it a change of musical colour: the tenors and basses, representing the Pharisees, contend that Christ cannot be of God " because He keepeth not the Sabbath ", and the sopranos and contraltos respond with " How can a man that is a sinner do such a miracle?". This leads to a kind of vocal fight between the sexes—dangerously near the borderland of the ludicrous, but saved by the felicitous use of instrumental rhythms, which bind the answering phrases together. The blind man is cast out by the Pharisees, but rival contentions are further prolonged. The mother joins with the women in denouncing the attitude of the " shepherds of the flock ", who have not healed " that which was sick ", or sought " that which was lost ". There is some admirable choral writing here, and the solo part is also well sustained.

Jesus then returns, and receives the man's confession, " Lord, I believe ". There is an expressive solo, " I am the good Shepherd ", and a final chorus, dignified and spacious but not over-prolonged, ends in an exultant strain of thanksgiving, invoking the Light

Eternal and praying that it may shine for evermore.

As a whole the oratorio dwells on a dignified plane, and one rejoices that it is so seldom allowed to lapse into commonplaces. It is marred by an inconsistent mixture of styles, it is true, and some of these styles (especially in the solos) seem to represent concessions to what was expected in an English oratorio of those days. A more serious fault, however, is that the story is too short to fill a work of such length with commentary which can hold the interest. Consequently one feels that the music drags in some places, and that it is merely marking time in others.

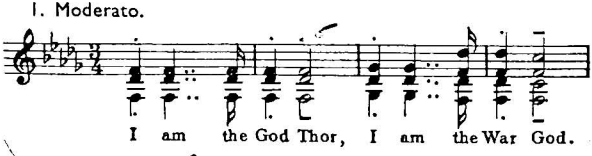
Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf

This was Elgar's most successful choral work prior to *The Dream of Gerontius*, and, furthermore, it was the first that gave clear evidence of the arrival of a new and strong personality in English music.

The old Norse legends provided congenial material for vigorous musical setting, but unhappily the hotch-potch of incidents from Longfellow's poem, with some added verses by H. A. Acworth, did not make a good libretto, and Elgar was once more unfortunate in his choice of text. Most of the stanzas selected, however, proved more adequate for the composer's purpose than the jingling vapidities of *The Black Knight*. It was Elgar's wish that we should look upon the performers as a gathering of skalds, or bards. "They all, in turn, take part in the narration of the Saga," he says, "and occasionally, at the more dramatic points, personify for the moment some important character." There are three soloists—soprano, tenor and bass. The work comprises an attractively devised choral Introduction (in which the

picture-book, so to speak, is opened), eight Episodes, and an Epilogue. An effort is made by the composer to give homogeneity to the conception by the use of themes typifying characters or moods, but *King Olaf* remains a series of isolated scenes rather than a unified whole.

It must suffice here to outline the most important incidents treated. Episode I, " The Challenge of Thor ", gives us a highly forceful and dramatic choral impression of the Thunderer reigning in his fortress amongst the icebergs, smiting giants and sorcerers with his hammer. The vocal harmonies are appropriately stark and bare:



A quiet opening gathers impetus as it proceeds; the rhythmic grip is not relaxed, and the music becomes more and more turbulent. There is a tremendous climax, a sudden drop to *pianissimo* at the words

" Thou art a God, too,
O Galilean,"

and then a *crescendo* leading up to the war-god's final defiance of Christianity (Ex. 1, sung *fortissimo*).

The second Episode consists wholly of a tenor solo, which assumes the proportions of an operatic Scena. King Olaf, hearing the cry of Thor, accepts the challenge:

" To avenge his father slain
And reconquer realm and reign."

This long descriptive solo is an ably wrought piece of work, firm of purpose, picturesque, and alive with

rhythmical impulse. It has its tender moments, too. One phrase in particular (associated with Olaf's recollection of his mother) remains in the memory as a very lovable thing:

2. Tranquillo.

A chorus, mainly in unison, opens the third Episode, "The Conversion", simply and effectively. It describes how Olaf and his followers land on the golden shores of Nidaros, and how they are met by the Pagans, led by one, Ironbeard. King Olaf blows his bugle and calls upon the Pagans to abandon the gods of their fathers, and embrace the Christian faith. Met with a refusal from Ironbeard he shatters the golden image of Thor with his axe. As Ironbeard springs forward fiercely he is shot by one of Olaf's retainers, and dies in the faith of his ancient gods. But on the exhortation of Olaf, who offers peace instead of serfdom to the Pagans, those who have previously followed Ironbeard promise to engrave the Cross upon their shields, and join in a choral prayer. This sounds very like a "bald and unconvincing narrative", and so it is, but Elgar contrives to give it "verisimilitude" with his dramatically planned music. The best section of the Episode is the defiant solo of Ironbeard, with choral interjections. A fine bass phrase for the orchestra, treated in sequence, is worthy to be remembered:

3. Più mosso.

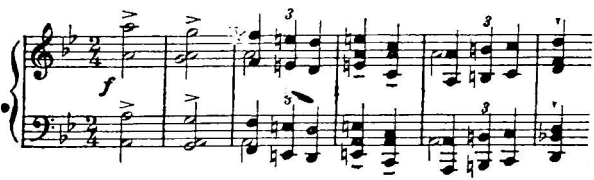
There is a strong visionary sense, too, in the choral passage which tells how, when the helpless image was broken, " the power of Christ was felt ".

Section IV is entitled " Gudrun ". It describes how Ironbeard's daughter, Gudrun, wedded to Olaf, conspires to kill him on the bridal night. The King, however, stirs and awakens in the nick of time, and catches the gleam of her dagger in the rays of the moonlight. Her treachery discovered, Gudrun is forced to depart from Olaf's sight, " ere the earliest peep of morn ". There are obvious chances here for striking musical illustration. The first part, which deals with the stealthy Gudrun planning the assassination, is admirably realized with much varied orchestral colouring, and the dramatic moment when Olaf wakes is also vividly done. After that the duet between them is very disappointing, partly because the words are quite unsuitable for a duet setting, and partly because they are emphasized with so little regard for their actual meaning. The brief description, in choral fragments, of Olaf and Gudrun riding away, " for ever sundered ", forms an imaginative *coda* to the scene.

" The Wraith of Odin " (Episode V), which follows, is masterly in construction. The hoary skalds are gathered together as the guests of Olaf at a banquet. The door opens, and a mysterious one-eyed guest enters the hall; he is bidden to sit at the table and encouraged to relate old sagas to the assembled company. Olaf falls asleep. He wakes next morning to find that the guest has vanished, although the doors of the castle had been barred. Olaf realizes that the strange visitor was the wraith of Odin, the old Pagan god. " I know that Odin the Great is dead," sings the chorus, impersonating the King, " Sure is the triumph of our Faith."

In the illustration of this weird scene, which forms a complete ballad in itself, Elgar rises to the height of his imaginative powers. The story is told by the chorus alone, the music is both graphic and exciting, and there are no tiresome repetitions of words, such as we find in *The Black Knight*. The climax at the "triumph of our Faith" is most thrilling, with a splendidly ominous phrase from the orchestra dominating the situation:

4.

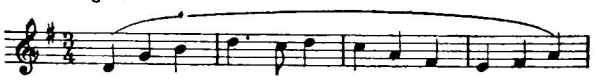


Section VI introduces us to Sigrid, the Queen of Svithiod, who appears to be a haughty lady of uncertain age, with no beauty and considerable independence of spirit. Olaf, however, desires to marry her in order to enlarge his kingdom. But when he insists that she should first renounce her Norland gods and become a Christian she refuses to do so. Olaf then denounces her as a "heathen dame", smites her with his glove, and departs—as the saying is—in high dudgeon. The naturally indignant Queen (who cannot have formed a very favourable opinion of Christian morals or Christian manners from Olaf's behaviour) then swears that she will compass his death.

The text here appears to be the work of H. A. Acworth, who does not seek to gloss over the grotesque repulsiveness of the Episode, but rather to accentuate it. The music certainly brings a change of colour into the work, but it is on a far lower level of invention than that of the

previous section. It is carried out by a chorus of female voices, with Olaf and Sigrid (a soprano) as soloists. The dramatic absurdities do not seem to have worried the composer, but, naturally enough, they have not inspired him to give of his best.

Both Elgar and Olaf are more fortunate in the seventh Episode. The chorus, which once more takes up the task of story-telling, sings of Thyri, sister of Svend, the Dane, who has come to Olaf's court to escape the unwelcome attentions of King Burislaf the Vend. Olaf makes her his Queen, although it involves him in war with both Svend and Burislaf. This is a splendid piece of musical illustration; a mixture of romantic tenderness and stark strength. It is carried along entirely in triple time, the most important phrase



being adapted with equal success to both moods. The imminence of conflict stirs Elgar to some of the most virile and assertive music he ever wrote—"a full-throated outburst", as Ernest Newman says, "that is magnificently suggestive of letting loose the dogs of war". The long love-scene between Olaf and Thyri which follows is less convincing, for the music here becomes lukewarm, and the style somewhat recalls that of Gade. Nor is the short choral recitative, which rounds off the Episode, outstanding in interest, although it has an intense ending. It tells us, in straightforward tones, that Sigrid has become the bride of King Svend, and has incited him to be avenged on Olaf. It would be difficult to blame either of them—but unless we are

particularly interested in their characters (which is unlikely) we do not feel greatly concerned. Nevertheless this recitative serves to connect up the story with Episode VIII, " The Death of Olaf ".

This opens with a scene at sea, with the piping south wind driving Olaf's " dragons " forward across the waves. The music surges along with genuine impulse here: it becomes more stormy when the Danish ships come in sight, and strikes a strong heroic note when it describes Olaf standing on deck with his " helm of gold and jerkin red " and his " war-axe grasped in both his hands ". Tenors and basses, with a mighty shout, tell how

" First of his fleet he leads the van,"

and the battle begins. The music here reaches a high pitch of frenzy and sweeps all before it. Olaf is defeated and as his " sea dragons are o'erwhelm'd " we have a vivid piece of tone-painting. Olaf's helm sinks, sparkles and disappears, the clangour of battle subsides, and the scene closes with a melancholy picture of the sullen surge rolling over his body.

For the Epilogue, which comes rather as an anti-climax after such a picturesque scene, we are transported to a convent at Drontheim. A bass singer relates how Astrid, Olaf's mother, whilst at prayer, hears a voice speaking through the darkness, and acclaiming the triumph of Peace over War. In this Finale occurs the suavely pleasant unaccompanied part-song to the words

" As torrents in summer "

which is familiar to all small choral societies in its separate form. There is (to follow) a soprano solo,

"Stronger than steel is the sword of the Spirit". This section is somewhat in the vein of the Epilogue to *The Golden Legend* of Sullivan, but the tune is not so attractive.

> "A strain of music ends the tale,
> A low monotonous funeral wail,
> That with its cadence wild and sweet
> Makes the Saga more complete."

Terribly lame words with which to crown a work of such stern quality, it is true, but there is a gentleness in the music itself which disarms criticism, and, if the innocent melody of the chorus does not quite bear the fervent expansion to which it is driven at its *forte* climax, at least we are at no point offended by undue sentimentality of expression.

It is a pity that *King Olaf* is so shiftful in its level of interest. The principal figure, as imagined by the poet, and emphasized by the musician, is drawn with such inconsistency that the work is bound to suffer thereby. He is a provoking mixture of sturdy Norseman, contemptible bully, fortune-hunter and plaster saint, and it is only in the first rôle that Olaf convinces us of his reality. With such a handicap it is almost a miracle that Elgar has been able to give us music which is so vibrant and, even in some of the less-inspiring pages, so full of spontaneity and sincerity.

The Banner of St. George

Very few words will suffice to describe this short cantata, composed by way of celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897. The words by Shapcott Wensley are sheer hack-work on a very low level of literary style, and the music registers no kind

of progress in Elgar's development. The work seems to have been planned mainly to please small provincial choral societies and unsophisticated audiences. Its best pages have a certain rhythmic attractiveness, and many people have been known to appreciate the tune of the final patriotic chorus, " It comes from the misty ages ", which has the fluent breadth of style we associate with Elgar in his popular vein. But, truth to tell, *The Banner of St. George* fails to stand out with special distinction from dozens of works by lesser composers who have traversed similar paths.

Caractacus

The libretto for this large-scale composition was put together by H. A. Acworth, who, it will be remembered, was responsible for sundry additions to Longfellow's verse for Elgar's setting of *King Olaf*. As a piece of construction it is fairly competent: it tells the story in a straightforward fashion which gives the composer chances for variety. Ernest Newman has described the verse as " respectable " but somewhat " jog-trot and square-toed ". This, on the whole, is a generous estimate, unless the word " respectable " is used derisively.

The main plan of the " argument " may be stated very briefly, without details. Caractacus, King of Britain, driven towards the Welsh borders by the Romans, establishes a camp on the Malvern Hills. Warned by a Druid maiden not to advance into the open country, he seeks the advice of a solemn assembly of Druids, to whom certain " omens " have brought gloomy warnings. The Arch-Druid, however, deceives Caractacus as to

their character, and invites him to advance against his enemies. Defeated and betrayed into the hands of the Romans, Caractacus, in the final scene, is brought before the tribunal of Claudius in Rome. Despite the clamour of the citizens who would slay him, he is pardoned, since the blood of Britons "would curse the ground to which it grew". As this is a cantata the librettist has introduced Eigen, the daughter of Caractacus, into the narrative, and has provided a tenor lover for her, in order that there may be sentimental interludes from time to time. The crowning incongruity, however, is reserved for a final chorus, in which the Romans sing of the "glorious ages coming", when the Roman Empire shall crumble and the flag of Britain shall rear its triple crosses!

An examination of the music shows that, despite such crippling absurdities, there is evidence of some advance, technically, on Elgar's previous choral writing. Not that it is specially adventurous. Coming after *King Olaf* this elaborate work is, frankly, a great disappointment. It does not anywhere attempt to flout the normal designs and conventions of English cantata, as upheld by J. F. Barnett, Cowen or Sullivan, but it moves easily and with a certain distinction within them. It enjoys, of course, a far more masterly grip of orchestration than the earlier English writers were able to command. This alone distinguishes it from its fellows in the same *genre*.

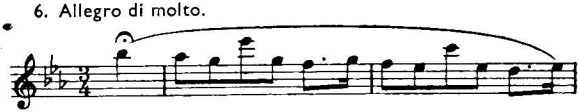
There is strong writing in many of the choruses, but the treatment of the solo sections is generally less fortunate, being fluent rather than distinctive. There is even a certain amount of sugary sentiment, particularly in the solo for Eigen and in the succeeding duet with her lover, which occur in the third scene. But what, one

may ask, can a serious composer be expected to do with such stuff as this?—

> " My heart is bright as morning light,
> And tender as the flower,
> For here I rove to meet my love
> In this, the chosen hour,"

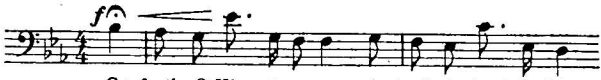
—a quatrain suggestive of the poet Bunn at his ripest in collaboration with Clifton Bingham. If we realize how impossible it is to set such insincere artificiality to music that is other than trivial, we may be induced to forgive the composer some of his lapses from a decent level of style. Where there are healthier sentiments to express the music is often bracing enough, even in the solo sections. The most notable of these is the rousing setting of " Leap, leap to the light " (known as the Sword Song) which seems to be the one separate number of the cantata that is likely to survive. If not quite Elgar at his best, it has spirited energy and rhythmical independence.

In other directions, unfortunately, we must continually lament the circumstance that the librettist is dragging the composer down when he would probably have preferred to keep his head above water. As an instance, Elgar has invented a pleasant instrumental melody, which he associates with Britain:



This attracts us by its grace on its first appearance, but it becomes utterly vulgarized when it is used to illustrate words in the second scene:

7. Molto grandioso.



and still more insufferable when it is enlarged into crotchets and minims and blazoned forth by the whole chorus at the end of the cantata, in connexion with the bombastic words about Britain's future.

So, while we readily acknowledge the skill which Elgar showed in putting together this big-scale work, we cannot but regret that he was so unfastidious as to choose for his text a libretto which drew out his worst qualities, and gave him so little chance to display his best.

Taken as a whole, *Caractacus*—produced at one of the most important musical gatherings in England—is a work which must have jeopardized the composer's growing reputation, for it fell far short of what might have been expected from him at an important stage in his career.

The Dream of Gerontius

Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* is generally referred to as an oratorio. It was not so named by the composer, and it does not come within the accepted definition of that form, since it has no direct Scriptural basis. Cardinal Newman's poem, which is here somewhat shortened and set to music, is an attempt to peer into the unknown through Catholic eyes—the materialization, as it were, of the spiritual processes which he associates with the departure of a human soul released by earthly death. The poem is a remarkable conception, rich in picturesque and moving details, but only partially successful as a work

of art. The theme of it, however, is highly imaginative, and as such it is particularly suitable for musical illustration. It is strange, indeed, that no composer before Elgar's time had been inspired to undertake a setting of it.

The scheme of the poem may be briefly outlined in a few sentences. Gerontius, lying on his deathbed, chill at heart, with dampness on his brow, cries aloud to his Saviour and to the Virgin to be with him in his extremity, and beseeches his friends on earth to pray for him. Roused by their supplications he prepares to meet his Maker, with a creed upon his lips and faith in his heart. At first he is unable wholly to allay the fears which beset him. Wearied with pain, but calmed by the encouragement of a priest who speeds him on his journey, at length he falls into a deep sleep. From this he awakens refreshed. He hears no more the "busy beat of time" but he is conscious that he is being borne forward on his way. He hears the voice of the Guardian Angel who has had charge of his soul on earth, and he speaks with him. The Angel hails him as child and brother, and tells him that he is hurrying with the extremest speed toward the Just and Holy Judge. Gerontius is confronted with the "fierce hubbub" from the demons who assemble close to the threshold of the Judgment court. But he has quelled his fear, and the distant voices of angels soon disperse the ugly menaces of the evil spirits, the "low-born clods of brute earth" who "aspire to become gods". He crosses the Threshold, and the Heavenly Choir, in a glorious outburst of song, proclaims the presence of the Almighty:

"Praise to the Holiest in the height,
And in the depths be praise:
In all His words most wonderful;
Most sure in all His ways!"

This is the climax of the poem. But the tribulations of Gerontius are not yet completed. His soul is safe,

" Consumed, yet quickened by the glance of God,"

but it has yet to pass through the regions of Purgatory. Fortified by the petitions of the Angel of the Agony, the " dearly-ransomed " soul of Gerontius is tended and nursed by loving hands, as it passes rapidly through the flood,

" Sinking deep, deeper into the dim distance ",

whilst the voices of souls in Purgatory and far-away angels mingle their supplications and songs of praise.

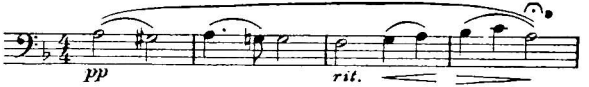
Here is the barest outline of a story which unquestionably stirred Elgar to a tremendous degree. Whatever we may think of this poem (and it may well be disliked not only by Protestants of the " muscular " order, but also by some of the more reticent Roman Catholics), there is no doubt that the type of thought and feeling it embodies was entirely sympathetic to Elgar. Before we consider or venture to value the music it is, indeed, necessary to recognize the fact that it seeks, first and foremost, to be an interpretation in complete unity with Newman's cast of thought. As such it must be said at once that it is a masterpiece of musical illustration. As the late A. J. Sheldon said, " We can never now think of the poem without thinking of the music." One feels, further, that the music springs not merely from the poet's vision, but from the intensity of the composer's belief. It glows with a passion that is, at times, disturbingly neurotic, and its moments of fear, exhaustion and despair are frequently so poignant as to be almost too harrowing. But everything that is in the music is dictated solely by Newman's text.

Elgar divides the poem into two parts and plans his illustration of it on an imposing scale. Part I opens with

an orchestral prelude, the principal themes of which clearly foreshadow the varying moods of the work. These themes have been labelled by Jaeger and others, "Judgment", "Fear", "Despair", "Prayer", &c., a process of ticketing which apparently had the sanction of the composer, though it is hard to believe that they embodied his own spontaneous suggestions. For the themes are not used in a consistent way to represent definite ideas, in the sense that Wagner employs *leit-motiven*. They are emotionally, as well as structurally, plastic, and even interchangeable. It will be best therefore merely to quote them in the order in which they appear, and to suggest that the prospective listener might note the significance of their application to various incidents as the work unfolds itself.

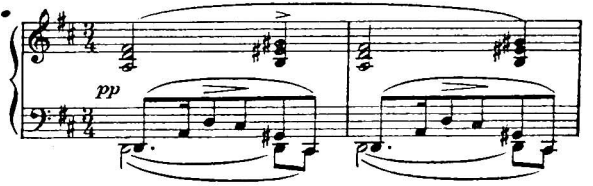
First the clarinets, bassoons, and muted violas in unison establish a mood of quiet mysticism:

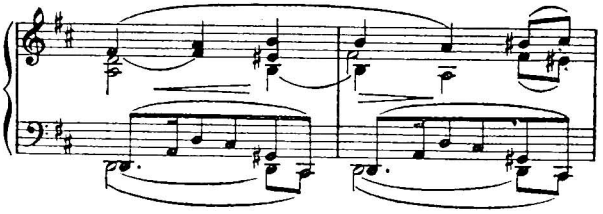
8. Lento mistico.



The continuation of this leads quietly to a drowsy melody, the first part of which is actually only used twice again, though the gently-swinging bass figure which accompanies it frequently recurs in various forms:

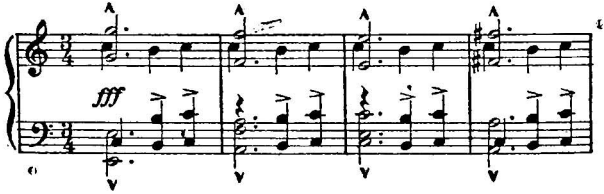
9. Più mosso.





This, in turn, gives place to a bold and sternly resolute passage, scored for full orchestra:

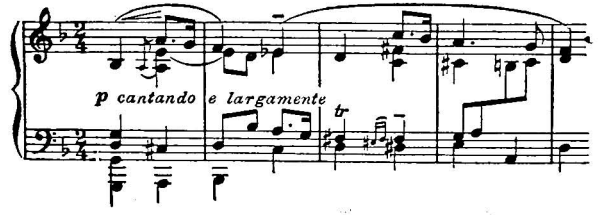
10. Moderato.



Once again the connexion with what follows is not thematic, but mainly anticipatory.

The most developed section of the prelude, which succeeds to this, begins thus:

11. Andantino.



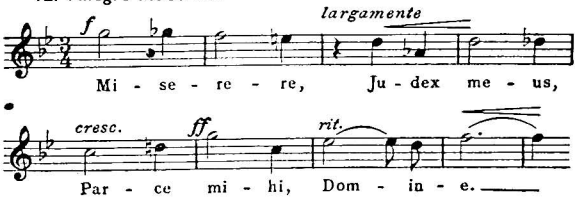
The application is more direct in this case. It is based upon a passage of a declamatory nature sung by the chorus at the words:

"Go forth in the name of the Apostles and Evangelists,"

and, though it is presented here in a dissimilar mood, it is brought to a strong climax. A gradual diminuendo, with a single stroke on a gong at its softest point, brings a return of the two first themes (in reversed order) and leads, without break, into the long monologue for tenor voice.

The treatment of this solo shows a regard for apt accentuation of the words—not invariably a strong point in Elgar's vocal writing—and the orchestration is beautifully varied and restrained. The monologue is interrupted by the choral prayers of the "Assistants", mostly of fugal construction, and (except where the petitions require more fervent expression, as at the words "Save him in the day of doom") always treated as a quiet background of tone. The climax is reserved for the soloist, when Gerontius cries aloud in the intensity of his agony:

12. Allegro moderato.

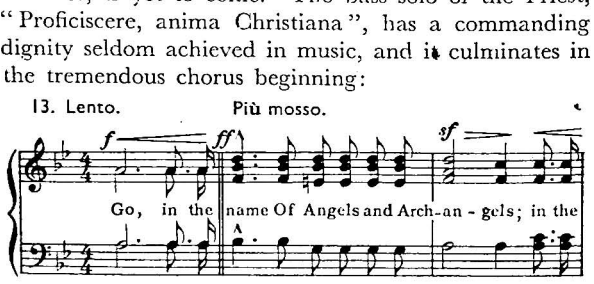


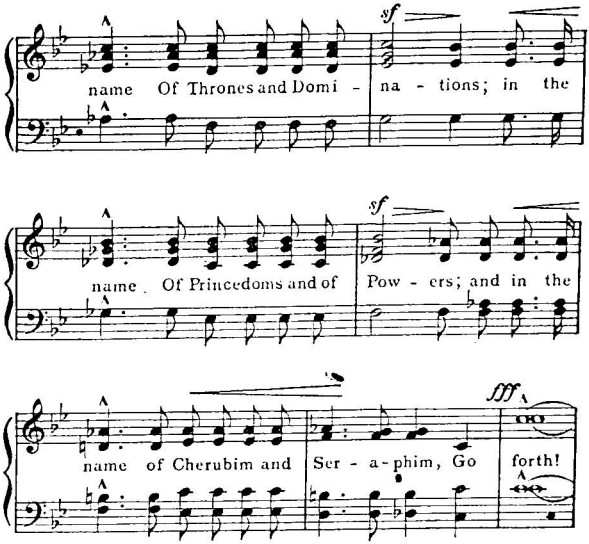
leading up to the impressive affirmation of his faith that "God is Three and God is One", his hope in "Man-

hood crucified", and his veneration of Holy Church and her teachings.

The whole of this section has a sustained intensity which is most moving. Elgar's rich harmonization shows a fondness for chromatic sequences, and has been criticized for "mawkishness" on that account, but the chromaticism here is coupled with such firm melodic outlines that the total effect is one of great pathos charged with dignity. Moreover, it is immediately followed by a powerful dramatic section expressive of the cruel and restless fright which overtakes Gerontius, where the music leaps at once into a rhythmic energy which completely dispels the former mood. This, in its turn, gives way to the modal simplicity of the choral repetitions which tell of God's mercy of old in rescuing "Noe from the waters", Job from "all his multi-form and fell distress", "Moses from the land of bondage and despair", and "David from Golia and the wrath of Saul". Here we are granted exactly the relief required at exactly the right moment, and nowhere has Elgar shown more clearly his sense of the true value of the contrast which the simplest outlines can afford.

The boldest and most powerful section of Part I, however, is yet to come. The bass solo of the Priest, "Proficiscere, anima Christiana", has a commanding dignity seldom achieved in music, and it culminates in the tremendous chorus beginning:

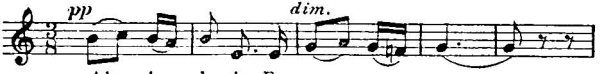




Here, surely, the device of the chromatic sequence can no longer be criticized adversely, for the composer, using it at one of the strongest points of the whole work, climbs up to the Holy Mount of Zion with strains which vibrate with healthy triumphant energy.

Part II contains many remarkable features upon which one might linger profitably. Amongst these are the song of the Guardian Angel, which is marred, it is true, by some imperfect word-setting and false accentuation in places, but contains the lovely cadence—several times repeated in the course of the work, but never too often:

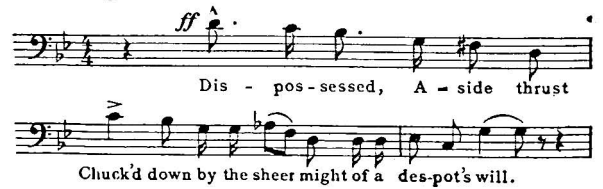
14. Andantino.



In its setting this is given a fascinating remoteness, hard to describe but due in part to an unusual distribution of the instruments in the orchestra. The first violins play the melody an octave above the voice and the double-basses (without cellos) duplicate it four octaves below the violins.

Then there is the famous Demon's Chorus. This was a stumbling-block to the singers when the work was new, but it is now so familiar that the charge of undue difficulty in execution is no longer brought against it. Indeed the tendency to-day is to underrate the ferocity of the music, one prominent modern critic having gone so far as to say that "it might frighten small children under seven years of age at a Christmas pantomime". This is a foolish commentary which can well be answered by saying that the intention of the composer at this point is not to frighten anybody, but to present a vivid picture of the malicious beings which the soul of Gerontius encounters on its journey. The music is sardonic, pungent, vitriolic perhaps, but never deliberately hideous. When we listen to the crooked rhythm of the fugato which begins

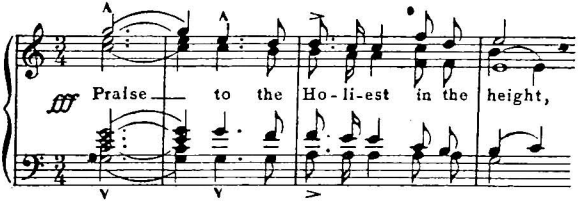
15. Allegro molto.



we recognize the tumultuous cries of baffled humanity, not the raving of irresponsible beasts. Surely this is the right conception, and nothing would be gained by employing a more brutal species of distortion. Elgar was alive to the power of suggestion in music, but he was not a musical realist. If he had set out to terrify his listeners at this point the scheme of the whole work would have suffered. As it is the chorus takes its place in the poem without displacing the value of anything else.

The greatest thrill of Part II, however, is reserved, and rightly so, for the moment at which the soul of Gerontius, with its Angel-guide, arrives at the threshold, and the full Heavenly Choir "Utters aloud its glad responsive chant":

16. Maestoso.



It is impossible to hear this without clenching the hands, or clutching the arms of one's seat! The phrase has been heard before, but in the distance and in quieter keys. Here it attains its full glory. The composer knew (as Handel knew before him) that a vocal climax is best achieved by the simple expedient of pitching all the voices high. On paper this is just an ordinary chord of C major, but heard in its context it is a sudden blaze of scorching fire.

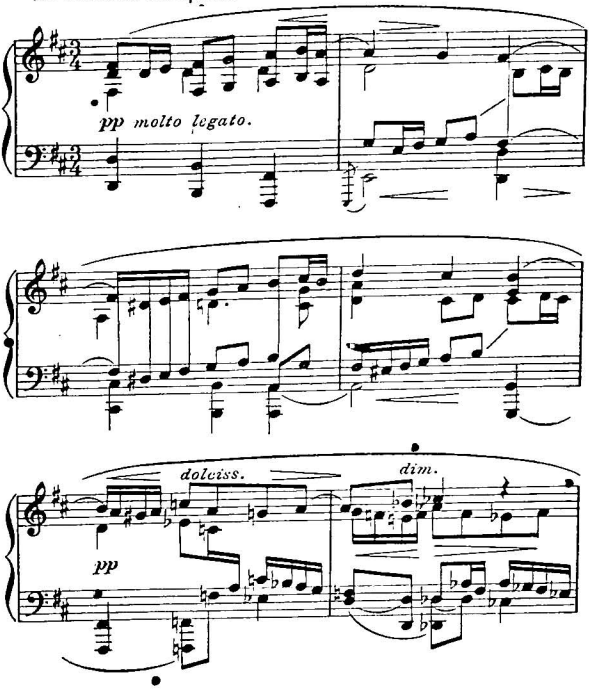
Perhaps it is inevitable that the tension cannot be held for long at such a white-heat of fervour. Nor could we wish it to be. Nevertheless the section which follows the first fourteen bars of this superb climax is, musically, the weakest part of the whole work; particularly the rather square and formal treatment of the verse:

> " O generous love! That he who smote
> In man for man the foe,
> The double agony in man
> For man should undergo."

The chorus, however, recaptures its first impulse at the return of the first verse, and it is brought to a triumphant finish.

The bass solo for the Angel of the Agony is a fine piece of writing, over-restless in tempo and agitated in mood, perhaps, and once again sequential in treatment and intensely chromatic. There is a deep hush as the soul whispers the words " I go before my Judge ", against awe-inspiring harmonies on the lower strings and the brass, and then the voices on earth are heard pleading for divine mercy. Once more the Angel sings a tender Alleluia, and we are brought to a return of the opening theme of the prelude, impressively coloured with the most solemn harmony. The final petitions are then uttered; the soul of Gerontius cries " Take me away, that sooner I may rise and go above," in one last passionate entreaty, and voices from Purgatory are heard chanting " Lord Thou hast been our refuge in every generation ". As these sounds die away a new and beautiful theme is heard from the orchestra:

17. Andante tranquillo.



Thus begins the epilogue to the story—one of the loveliest and most sublime pieces of pure music to be found in any sacred choral work. It has some of the reverence and serenity we associate only with Bach. The spirit of unrest has departed, and the scattered beauty of much that has gone before is gathered together, as it were, and set flowing in a continuous stream of

limpid melody which seems to express a perfect fulfilment of contentment and faith. The Angel's song:

> " Softly and gently, dearly ransomed soul,
> In my most loving arms I now enfold thee,"

a touching strain of melting tenderness, is in the foreground: the yearning souls of the departed are hushed to a whisper, whilst the ethereal voices of the angels, still hymning praises to the Holiest, descend from aloft, subdued, yet ever radiant and clear.

The Dream of Gerontius as a whole is a work of unique appeal. It may be true, as Walford Davies has said, that its effect largely depends upon Elgar's power to make the orchestra " tell every marvellous shade of compassion for the human lot, every tinge of the tenderness and wistful longing which the transitoriness of life transmuted into music in his sensitive mind ". Certainly it was the first English sacred work in which the orchestra played so full a part in rousing the listeners' emotions and in intensifying the eloquence of the message conveyed by the music.

No verbal description, however, can probe to the heart of a conception such as this, or apportion the share played by its component parts in the total impression which it produces. Elgar was a great craftsman, but the wide appeal of this music depends upon its craftsmanship only in a minor degree. He had his visions of the life which is beyond this life, and he was able, with the aid of a machinery so perfect that it was almost unconsciously under his control, to inspire us with a sense of their beauty and reality.

The Coronation Ode

The ode written to celebrate the coronation of King Edward VII is planned on broad lines. It has the advantage of a dignified text of good literary quality, by Arthur Christopher Benson, which gives it greater significance than most occasional pieces possess. It is also historically of some interest, since it contains a song which has achieved a wider popularity than all the rest of Elgar's music put together—the famous "Land of Hope and Glory". The best pages of the ode are to be found in the ceremonial breadth of the opening chorus, "Crown the King with Life"; in the boldly declamatory bass solo, with chorus, "Britain, ask of thyself"; and in a beautiful unaccompanied movement for quartet and choir, "Peace, gentle Peace", which does not deserve to be wholly forgotten. The heartiness of the "Land of Hope and Glory" tune (borrowed from the first of the "Pomp and Circumstance" marches) is, however, the dominating feature of the score. The melody appears at the end of the opening chorus, and it is resuscitated as a contralto solo at the close of the work. It is not quite clear if it is the author's fault or the composer's that the words do not quite aptly fit in with the music in places. If the verses were written for the tune it is hardly fair to blame Elgar for the blemishes and the false accentuations which occur. The public, having taken the song to its heart, makes light of such defections, and, whenever the tune is sung in "community" fashion (as, of course, it often is), the original points of Elgar's emphasis are very generally ignored.

The ode, as a whole, is a significant response to

a loud call for patriotic demonstration. Both poet and musician were adequately equipped for such a task.

The Apostles

To give a satisfying description of *The Apostles* without following every incident, and concurrently tracing the evolutions which each main theme undergoes in the course of its illustrative purpose, is impossible. Nor is one able, as one is in the case of *Gerontius*, to register a clear general impression of the work as a whole. For, as has already been stated, the oratorio is panoramic in its effect. We listen to the musical unfolding of one scene after another with intense interest, and although many of the sections represent a personal commentary rather than a statement of incidents, what remains in one's mind is a series of reverent pictures. In style the music is more complex than that of *Gerontius*, but it is almost equally consistent. The picturesqueness of the orchestration is once more a paramount factor in the general effect. More often than not the orchestra paints a landscape for us, against which the principal figures in the drama stand out prominently. Characterization is a strong feature of Elgar's conception. There are brief interludes of narrative, where these are necessary for explanatory purposes, but they are comparatively unimportant. Sometimes they are sung by a solo tenor, sometimes by a contralto, and occasionally by sections of the chorus in unison. The story is told wherever possible, however, by the words of the characters themselves, and these characters are clearly differentiated from each other.

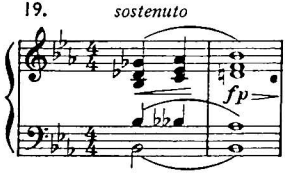
Elgar divides his work into two parts. The first part opens with a chorus " The Spirit of the Lord is upon us ", in the middle section of which occurs the theme:

18. Lento. (*Più mosso.*)

This should be noted as it is consistently used throughout the oratorio in reference to the foundation of Christ's Church.

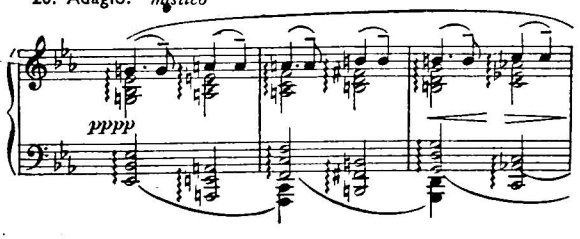
This choral introduction is followed by an important section headed " In the Mountain ", where pastoral and mystical moods are deftly blended, and some arresting harmonic progressions (hardly to be described as themes perhaps) emerge from the texture. Three of these should be specially noted as they assume great importance as the oratorio proceeds. They are, first:

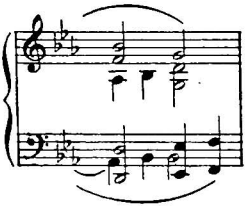
19. *sostenuto*



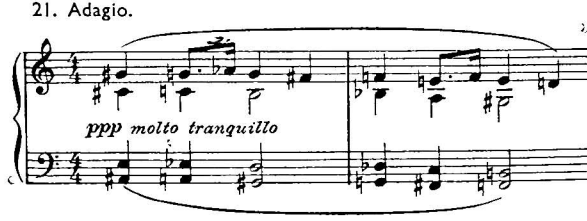
typifying, it is understood, " The Man of Sorrows ": second, a more prolonged chromatic progression beginning:

20. Adagio. *mistico*





which quite clearly is expressive of " Prayer ": and, third, a mysterious passage descending in semitones in all the parts:



suggestive of " Loneliness ".

These easily identifiable motives all occur in the course of illustrating a soprano solo for the Angel Gabriel, " The voice of Thy watchman ", which is mainly a song of hope and joy.

When dawn comes we hear the notes of a Shofar (or Hebrew ram's horn) and the voices of Watchers on the roof: the tenor narrator tells us how Christ called His disciples together and named them, and there is a broadly conceived ensemble, " The Lord has chosen them ", where the solo voices of John, Peter and Judas participate with the full chorus, towards the end of which the voice of Jesus is heard saying " Behold I send you

forth, He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me ".

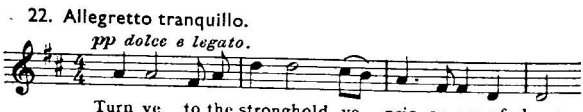
The next section, " By the Wayside ", has been much criticized. The composer's aim here has obviously been to present, in the quietest and most restrained manner, an everyday occurrence. The disciples and Mary Magdalene are conversing together as they walk along. Each beatitude is uttered by the Saviour simply, as a kind of personal reflection—not as something of memorable or everlasting import. Many may feel that this lessens the significance of the scene, and that its uneventfulness is over-prolonged, but if the music is well sung it creates a serene and thoughtful mood. The ensemble at the close of the scene, in particular, has a reflective beauty of its own, as if this calm conversation had sunk deep into the souls of the speakers.

In the succeeding episode, " By the Sea of Galilee ", we have a moving monologue for Mary Magdalene, to which is added a rather curiously devised " Fantasy ", where the chorus mutters, beneath the solo part, " Let us fill ourselves with costly wine ", and so forth, representing the worldly temptations from which she is escaping. This passes on rather suddenly to a short but graphic description of the storm on the waters. At first Mary Magdalene, watching from her tower, describes vividly what she sees—the ship distressed with waves, and One coming unto it, walking on the sea. With the cry of the Apostles, " It is a Spirit ", we are all at once transported to the scene itself, and Mary Magdalene's comments fall into the background. This is a highly dramatic, almost a theatrical touch. A climax is reached with Peter's appeal, " Lord save me, I perish ", the voices die down as the Apostles turn to Jesus to proclaim Him the Son of God, and we

are brought back to Mary Magdalene's monologue (now turned to a confession of faith) as the reality of the scene fades away. The effect of this extremely imaginative treatment of the episode is, perhaps, to present the events on the Sea of Galilee rather as a vision seen by Mary than an actual happening, and, as such, it may be open to criticism.

We pass without break to the next section, "In Cæsarea Philippi". Here we have Peter's acclamation of Christ as the Son of the living God, and Christ's words "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church": next the incident of Mary Magdalene washing the feet of her Master with her tears, and anointing them with the ointment: and finally Christ's pronouncement "Thy sins are forgiven—go in peace". This section is almost entirely carried out in dialogue by the characters concerned, and the tenor narrator has little share in it. The chorus is sometimes supplied with commentaries, and it may be noted that it is the *women* who sing the Pharisee's words, "This man if He were a prophet would have known who and what manner of woman this is"—not strictly Scriptural, perhaps, but a touch of very human observation on the composer's part.

Part I then ends with a long big-scale chorus, with quartet, "Turn ye to the Stronghold". This has a splendid unison opening:

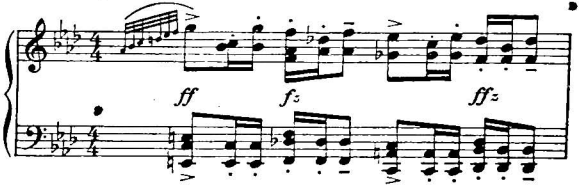


and the choral writing throughout is finely wrought and

broad in style. It seems, however, deliberately to avoid the strong climax that might be anticipated at this point, and it ends quietly without having brought us in contact with any very stirring emotional moments during its progress.

Part II of the oratorio opens with a short instrumental prelude. The function of this appears to be to keep us in touch with the representative motives and progressions of the work, most of which have already been quoted. There is practically no new matter here. It passes into the scene of the betrayal of Jesus. This is one of the finest and most strongly depicted sections of the work. We are gradually led on to the point where Satan enters into the heart of Judas, and the ambitious apostle goes his way to commune with the chief priests and captains. The rhythms become menacing and incisive

23. Allegro moderato.



as he bargains with them, and, when they weigh unto him thirty pieces of silver, there is a remarkable passage of realistic colouring in the orchestra. The incidents follow one another swiftly. The band of officers comes "with lanterns and weapons", and Judas eagerly exclaims "Let Him make speed and hasten His work that we may see it".[1] Jesus is betrayed and led away to

[1] For Elgar's interpretation of the character of Judas, see p. 200 of this volume.

the High Priest. Then follows Peter's denial, and a searchingly poignant setting for unaccompanied chorus of the words " And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter, and he went out and wept bitterly ". A solo contralto voice next takes up the narrative (with choral as well as orchestral accompaniment) and the scene of the repentance of Judas is begun in broken phrases against the same background, assuming a mood of passionate contrition which is prolonged until we reach the desolate human agony of " My hope is like dust that is blown away with the wind ". Then come the fateful cries of the populace " Crucify Him ", which grow in force until a climax of ferocity is reached. But, even now, Judas is in the centre of Elgar's painting, and it is his tragedy which survives to the end of the scene.

How far this powerful deflection from the main purpose of the drama is justified by the result it must be left for each listener to determine for himself. Judas as a human figure is convincing enough, and Elgar is determined that we shall be convinced. The composer's imagination, at the height of its strength, is concentrated upon what is, after all, a subsidiary character. The pathos of Judas is, indeed, magnified to such an extent that the other Apostles recede into the background, and even Christ Himself, and the horror of the Crucifixion, lose their rightful prominence in the narrative. Elgar probably felt this himself to some extent, since the scene on the Cross is represented by seven bars of hushed chords for muted strings, during which the sacred words " Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani " are expressed in a phrase of music which is not sung. Both this and the dialogue between the Virgin and Saint John, which follows it, are inadequate, unless one is prepared to give

pride of place to the betrayer, which few will be found ready to do. As it stands, the climax of the drama, as Elgar illustrates it, is not the Supreme Sacrifice, but the deliverance of the Saviour into the hands of the mob. The trial of Jesus is not touched upon at all, nor are the sorrow and anguish of Mary, and those who loved Him, more than dimly suggested in a few isolated melodic fragments.

There is some lovely music to come, however—perhaps lovelier than any which has gone before. So we must try to accept the scheme as it is offered, and not fail to be grateful to Elgar for the beauty of his scene, "At the Sepulchre". Here, after a brief allusion to the music of the Watchers (from the Dawn episode in Part I), we have the soft holy voices of Angels (trebles and altos, unaccompanied, in four parts) weaving calm alleluias, and chanting celestial melodies to the words "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen." The contrast with the Judas music, where the force of brutal human will is so strongly asserted, is grateful to the ear in itself, and all the more welcome because the music is so serenely expressive. Elgar, perhaps, is not often at his best when he is simple—but we cannot hesitate to grant that in this instance the simplicity has that touch of wonder in it which only the most consummate art can achieve.

The final pages of the work deal with Christ's promise to the Apostles that they shall receive power from the Holy Ghost. Then the contralto narrator, in simple words simply set, describes the Ascension, after which an elaborate ensemble is built up with quartet, chorus, and semi-chorus of Angels, blending together the petitions and devotions of the Virgin, Mary Magdalene, and the Apostles with the alleluias from Heaven. Most

of the leading themes are brought to mind in the course of this impressive finale, which reaches a *nobilmente* climax. Just before the end the solo voices sing a phrase in unison, which (consciously or unconsciously) is strangely suggestive of the cry of Gerontius "Thou, Thou art calling me", occurring at the very beginning of the earlier work. Its appearance in this context (if it is consciously used) is puzzling; it stands out prominently for a moment, amidst the intertwining alleluias, and subsides immediately, as the alleluias lengthen out into the final sustained chords.

So ends a most elaborate conception, the coherent value of which it is extremely difficult to assess. Undoubtedly *The Apostles* contains many passages of the highest musical interest and beauty, and it is not marred at any point by the facile commonplaces which are apt to disfigure most of Elgar's choral compositions prior to *Gerontius*. The chief fault of the work, as a continuous piece of music, is that its representative themes, so constantly introduced, are seldom given new aspects. Ernest Newman has pointed out, very truly, that these short phrases often "succeed one another in obedience, not to musical, but merely to literary or pictorial suggestions". Furthermore these motives are not woven into the texture, as Jaeger's analysis of the work claims, but "pasted together".

Nevertheless the power of the composer is demonstrated, over and over again, throughout the oratorio with such force that we cannot deny the greatness of the mind that conceived it. Perhaps the glowing splendour of the high-lights, however, compels the critical listener to be all the more conscious of the places where the composer's imagination grows dim, and where inspiration gives place to mere statements of the main

musical ideas, one after another. Maybe Elgar was too anxious to play the part of theologian, and was willing to sacrifice development, at times, for the sake of a didactic religious purpose.

The Apostles depends greatly for its effect not only upon the true manner of its performance (which is rarely achieved) but upon the atmosphere and surroundings in which the performance takes place. It will be well to bear this in mind, and to remember that it is not a concert work, and was never intended as such. Interpreted before a congregation assembled in some great cathedral, in a devout or at least a reverent frame of mind, the composer's two-fold purpose can be convincingly achieved. Those who have heard *The Apostles* at Worcester or Gloucester or Hereford will be able to confirm this statement. Individual listeners may instinctively feel that some episodes are more moving than others, but, unless they pause to analyse their feelings, they will probably accept the music as it comes, whether it stirs their emotions deeply or whether it simply forms a background of colour before which the familiar figures of the Gospel story move and play their appointed parts.

Chapter VI

ORCHESTRAL WORKS

(From "Froissart" to "In the South")

The value of art consists in this, that it is a means of communication; if it were not, it would only be a game for experts. By means of it the artist does communicate to other men his own most intense and valued experience, often especially in music, not so that particular experiences can be ear-marked; rather it is his own mind as made by that experience that he communicates.

A. Clutton Brock.

Overture, "Froissart" (Op. 19)

THIS overture is practically unknown to the present generation of concert-goers, but it is significant inasmuch as it is the first of Elgar's mature and fully developed orchestral pieces. The score is prefaced by a quotation from Keats:

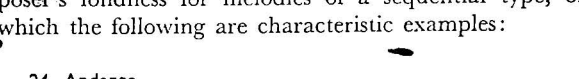
> "When Chivalry
> Lifted her lance on high."

This aptly expresses the mood. The work seems to have been inspired by a conversation between Claverhouse and Morton, in Scott's novel *Old Mortality*, in which Froissart is discussed in picturesque language. Without going into details, Elgar's overture may be regarded as a musical impression of high-bred Knights in Armour, with their loyal faith towards God and King,

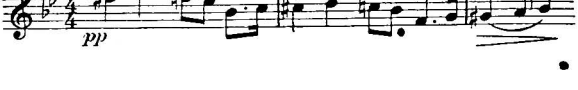
their gallantry in fighting, and the romantic fervour of their love-making.

The music is full of sharp lines sharply drawn with rhythmic incisiveness. The composer is lavish in the provision of themes. There are no less than five important subjects brought up for discussion, which is more than the average listener is accustomed to cope with in the course of an overture. Some of them are distinguished by melodic charm, in welcome contrast with the flourishing vigour of the main current of the music, and it is interesting to note, already, the composer's fondness for melodies of a sequential type, of which the following are characteristic examples:

24. Andante.



25. Allegro. (*poco meno mosso.*)



Even those who have never heard the work will find it profitable to look closely into the above quotations in which many themes now familiar to us are so strikingly foreshadowed.

The scoring throughout is clear as daylight, without either the rich elaborations or the subtlety that mark Elgar's later methods of orchestration. Yet it is already brilliant and confident, and the effects aimed at never miss their mark. None of Elgar's previous

works for orchestra had given even a hint of the certainty of grasp which is evident in this piece. *Froissart* deserves more prominence than can be given to it here. It is a vigorously wrought and stirring composition in its own way, blustering in places, perhaps, but entirely free from the flaring vulgarity which thoughts of pageantry are apt to evoke when translated into music. It is a far finer overture (and far better scored) than most of those of the same calibre which are trotted out day after day at popular spas and health resorts, and it is equally lively and attractive. Why is it not more often performed?

Serenade for String Orchestra
(*Op. 20*)

The Serenade for strings, which bears the opus number next in order to *Froissart* (although probably it was composed earlier), is a work of an entirely different character—as intimate as the overture was frank, and as pure and sensitive as the most classic type of chamber music. It shows a very human and lovable side of Elgar's art. Not even the more elaborately developed compositions of his later years can entirely cast it in the shade. It is of interest to recall that Elgar himself had a special affection for this little work, for as late as 1904 (after the production of the Variations, *Gerontius* and *The Apostles*) he was heard to say " I have never written anything better than the Serenade for strings ".

It is planned in three movements. The first and last movements (which are thematically connected) are delicate and charming, but the *larghetto*, which comes between them, is something more than that. It dis-

closes what may be described as an affectionate melody, which is not only beautiful in its outlines but penetrating in its expression. The Serenade has won a place amongst the classics of string music, and as it is suitable for performance by small bodies of strings, and can be effectively tackled by players of modest attainments, it has been the means of familiarizing performers and audiences in small towns with Elgar's music at almost its best level. Although the composer recaptured the mood of the work to some extent in his String Quartet, written many years later, the Serenade occupies a somewhat isolated position amongst his productions. Its pensive subject-matter seems to belong to an age in which music was an escape from the stress of life rather than an expression of its turbulent emotions.

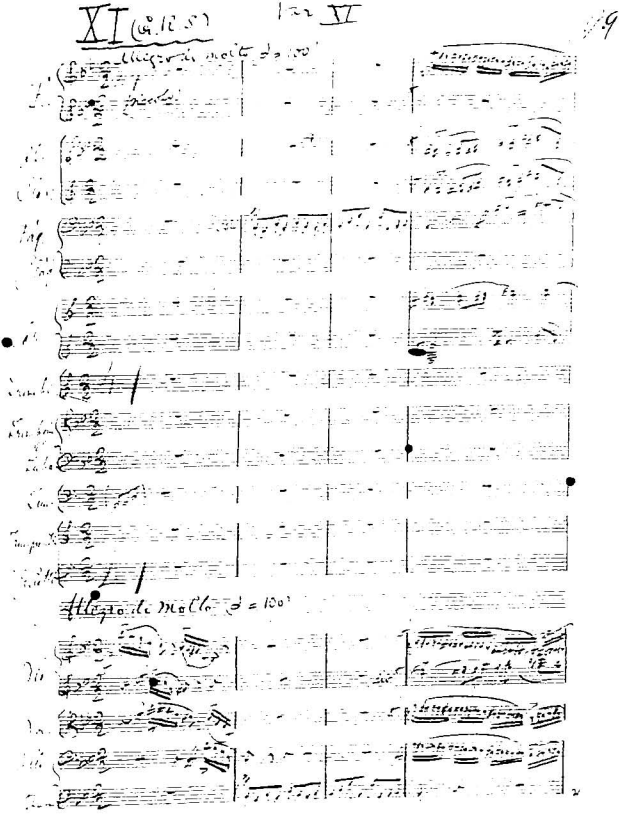
Variations on an Original Theme for Orchestra (Enigma), Op. 36

Great musical works, as is well known, often owe their existence to exterior influences with which the public has no concern. When a composer takes his prospective audience into his confidence to the extent that Elgar has done in the case of his Orchestral Variations he creates, perhaps, an added zest in listening. But when he stops short of telling them the whole story and sets them, in addition, a mysterious problem to solve, as Elgar has also done, he starts tongues wagging and opens the door to all sorts of controversies. These famous Variations were launched in a way which might have endangered their permanent success, had not the music been so fine in itself as to render such information almost unnecessary and irrelevant.

We were told that each variation represented a friend of the composer in terms of music. Each variation was, indeed, headed with the initials, nickname, or some kind of badge of identification, of the particular friend depicted. This set us speculating as to the identity, the character, the personality of every individual honoured by inclusion. We made many guesses, but sometimes we stumbled into error. For instance we knew that G.R.S. were the initials of Dr. Sinclair, then organist of Hereford Cathedral, and, when we found that the variation so labelled was provided with an energetic bass in quavers, we jumped to the conclusion that this represented the musician's skill on the pedal-board of his instrument, only to be corrected by the composer, who declared that it depicted Sinclair's dog swimming in the Wye! And so on, and so on.

But the real "Enigma" of the work we were never able to discover. The Theme upon which it was based was only partially revealed, we were told. There was another and a larger Theme to go with it, which only existed in the composer's mind, and was never actually heard. Further, we were given to understand, it was a very well-known tune. So we tried to solve yet another, and a far more difficult puzzle, to which there was no clue at all. Was it *Home Sweet Home*, *Auld Lang Syne*, or even *Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay*? Each of these had its fervent supporters. But the composer preserved a sphinx-like silence. He told us nothing. He would not enlighten even his closest friends. And so the secret died with him, and, although future venturous solvers may attempt to lift the veil, we shall never know now if they have guessed the riddle correctly!

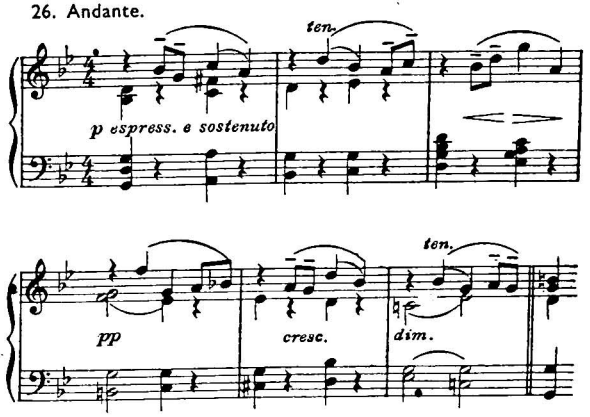
Meanwhile the glorious work remains, and we have ceased to worry about anything except the music which



THE "ENIGMA" VARIATIONS

A page from Elgar's original manuscript

is so clearly enshrined in it, for all to enjoy. The Theme (or as much of it as Elgar allows us to hear) begins thus:



Four bars in G major (starting from the last chord printed above) are followed by a repeat of the melody, more fully scored. The salient features to observe in this theme are, in the first section, the falling thirds and sevenths, and, in the G major section, the falling fourths and fifths. The rising bass, and the harmonies constructed upon it, are, of course, also important. The whole forms an ideal starting-point for a work of this kind. It has beauty and dignity: its outlines are easily remembered: it does not tell us too much.

The variations which follow are fourteen in number. They cover an extraordinarily wide field of musical expression. They are always so characteristic of Elgar that they become not so much delineations of the personalities of the friends depicted as a revelation of Elgar's

own personality as it reacted to their influence. Variation I, for instance, suggests, in its close affinity with the theme, that C.A.E. (Lady Elgar) was an inspiring factor for the whole basis of the work. But a few of the variations are obviously prompted by the recollections of some small incidents rather than by the characters of the friends to whom they are dedicated. Variation II (H.D.S.-P.), for example, with its continuous staccato semiquavers, skims along its course so lightly that, although the theme in the basses (with its falling sevenths) serves to connect the music with the main idea of the work, one is led to believe that some insignificant, or fussy little habit has tickled the composer's fancy in his association with the man. Similarly it seems obvious that the rather prim Variation III (R.B.T.), the rapid and blustering Variation IV (W.M.B.), the ingenuous and wholly feminine Variation VIII (W.N.), and the humorous Variation XI (G.R.S.), already alluded to, are not intended to be actual portraits. They are all admirably planned and placed, however, to give contrast and relief from the sustained moods of the more developed or more intimate sections of the music.

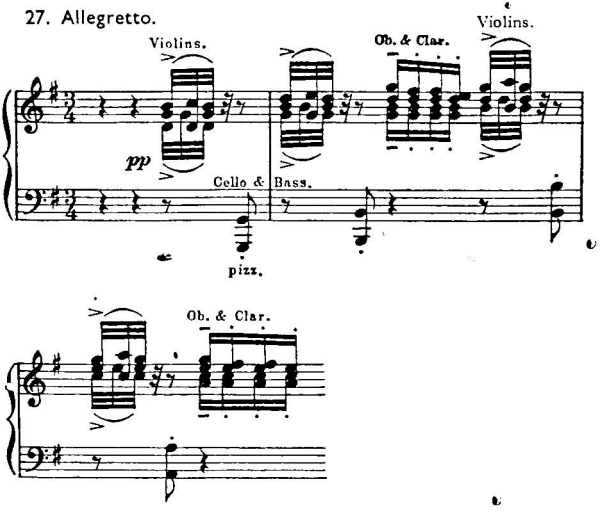
Of these the outstanding examples are Variation V (R.P.A.), which does give us a clear picture of a scholarly-minded personality, relieved by delicate touches which suggest a capacity to appreciate the lighter side of life; Variation VI ("Ysobel"), with its charming viola melody (a real character-study); Variation IX, labelled "Nimrod" (a thinly disguised pseudonym for the devoted Jaeger), which enshrines perhaps the most enobling music that Elgar ever wrote; and Variation XII (B.G.N.), a dignified tribute which is clearly the outcome of strong personal affection.

The four remaining variations stand a little apart

from the others, in that they are either more extended and self-sufficient, or more pictorial. Take Variation VII (" Troyte "), for instance. This is a tremendous outburst—stormy and vividly impressive. It is quite impossible to believe that Elgar really meant what he said when he told an inquirer that " the boisterous mood is mere banter " and that the rhythm of the drums and lower strings was " suggested by maladroit essays to play the pianoforte ". May we not believe that Elgar, like another famous composer, delighted to indulge in " leg-pulling " when people became over-inquisitive? We know how Beethoven hoaxed Schindler by pretending that he had introduced the yellow-hammer's song into his Pastoral Symphony, and pointed to an arpeggio which no yellow-hammer, however accomplished, could have attempted. As likely as not if Schindler had asked him for the meaning of the opening of the Fifth Symphony he would have anticipated the compositor's error and described it as " Kate knocking at the door ". Elgar, at all events, was equally addicted to such joking, and we are not obliged to credit the statement that this very fine Variation was born of so humdrum a circumstance, and was intended to be a clumsy jest. We are aware, moreover, that the subject of it (A. Troyte Griffith) was one of the most serious of Elgar's friends, and one of the most intimate of the companions of his Malvern days.

Variation X (" Dorabella ") also occupies a somewhat isolated position amongst its surroundings. It is a charming digression from the main current of the work —an interlude in which the actual Theme plays little part. The composer's own description of this variation as " a dance of fairy-like lightness " is apt enough. It has the character of ballet music, but it is not in the

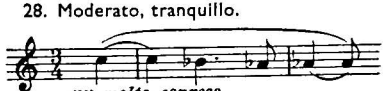
least theatrical, and one would be sorry to see it enacted on the stage. The scoring is delicious, with its fluttering phrases on the muted violins, responded to by tripping semiquavers in the wood-wind:



When, at the tenth bar, a solo viola enters with an exquisite melody, these disjointed phrases are held together by a thread of sustained tone, and the ethereal beings conjured up by the music seem to group themselves into a definite design. The " Trio " section is equally entrancing; the smooth melodic figures become even more shapely and the texture becomes chromatic. The whole variation forms a perfect miniature, unsurpassed in fragile daintiness by any piece of orchestral music one is able to recall. It is the kind of thing one might expect from a sensitive Frenchman, but it is rare indeed to find

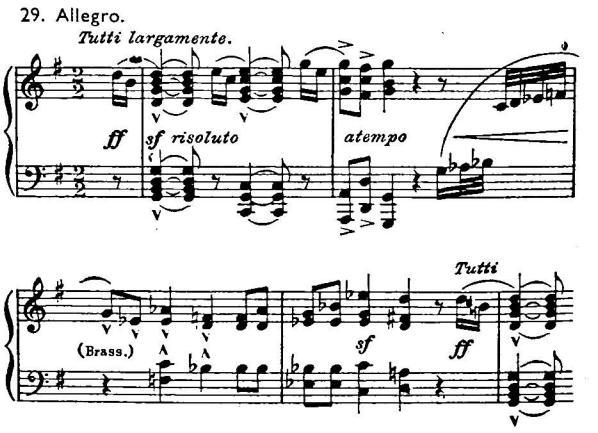
such supreme delicacy in the work of an English composer.

The third of the more extended episodes to which allusion has been made is Variation XIII, which immediately precedes the finale. This is called a "Romanza", and is headed by three asterisks in brackets which, Elgar has told us, mask the identity of a lady who was, at the time of its composition, on a sea voyage. The variation certainly suggests the ocean beneath an untroubled blue sky, and as with "Dorabella" it appears to have but slight connexion with the theme itself. It is, indeed, quite clearly derived from one of Elgar's songs, which appeared at about the same time, in his cycle of *Sea Pictures*. The most remarkable feature of the music here is the middle section in the key of A flat, where the violas (divided) illustrate the gentle movement of waves, and there is a mysterious roll on one of the tympani, directed, in the score, to be made by side-drum sticks, but actually played with two coins held tightly between the finger and thumb of each hand by the drummer. This device was invented by that superb tympanist Charles Henderson, who was in Richter's orchestra at the time, and it is now generally adopted. It is said that the composer here aimed at a tonal representation of the throbbing of the turbines of a liner! Against this subdued background of monotonous colouring a solo clarinet gently quotes a phrase from Mendelssohn's overture, *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*:



The effect is extremely beautiful, and it is resumed at the end of the variation, but this time in the key of E flat, on a low pedal G. The ship seems to be disappearing from view, as the clarinet once more sings its faint farewell. It is a wonderful piece of imaginative tone-painting.

From calm meditations in " the silence of the sea " we are gradually stirred into active life once more by a quiet but insistent tossing rhythm, which gathers impetus and grows in force until we reach what is to be the main subject of Variation XIV, the finale:



This variation is labelled E.D.U. It is chiefly bold and boisterous in style, and, if we accept the composer's own explanation, it points to some rousing influence at a time of discouragement. The extended form in which it is planned is extremely interesting, because, in the course of the development, the music looks back, as it

were, on some of the influences previously represented. We have important references to the C.A.E. and "Nimrod" variations, which, as we know, were dedicated to those who had had the greatest influence upon Elgar's life and work.

Musically the effect of these references is to provide useful contrasts, and to strengthen the listener's attentiveness by appealing to his memory. Every composer knows the psychological value of such an appeal in a work of any magnitude, and in this case the fineness of the ideas contained in these two variations amply justifies the choice. The transformations to which these ideas are subjected at this point give the finale a special dignity and power which save it from becoming (as it might easily have done without them) a sheer exhibition of brilliant exuberance. This applies especially to the "Nimrod" variation which was, at first, almost a theme in itself. The composer now enlarges upon it, and eventually uses it as the starting-point upon which to build up an extremely eloquent peroration. As the pace quickens, the style, paradoxically, broadens. At last the organ enters, adding its massive sonority to the sound-structure, and the work ends in a volley of tone almost overpowering in its intensity.

The *Enigma* Variations have so firmly established themselves in popular favour of the best kind that it would seem hardly necessary to add anything to what has been said already, by way of summing-up. It is, perhaps, enough to say that they have made English music known and valued all over the civilized world, as it had never been known and valued before.

Sybil Thorndike (in her book *Religion and the Stage*) has said that "every event and every other person has an answering chord in our being, and the more highly de-

veloped we are the more do we discover this in ourselves". Elgar seems not merely to have discovered it for himself, and in himself, but to have found the means of translating these personal affinities into a single art-work of lasting value to others. The power of living friendships, and their influence for good upon the creative mind, have never been more convincingly demonstrated than in this paramount and emotionally satisfying example of English musical thought.

Overtures. "Cockaigne" and "In the South" (Op. 40 and Op. 50)

These two overtures (the most important of Elgar's shorter works for full orchestra), although they both belong to the same period of the composer's creative life, represent two distinct sides of his musical nature. They are also quite dissimilar in design. *Cockaigne* ("In London Town") aims at presenting, in the main, a lively picture of a city which does not invariably impress either inhabitants or visitors with its gaiety. As Ernest Newman has said, the work deals with the lighter side of London life—"the happy-go-lucky London of Phil May". Although the music is not without a touch of romance, and even a hint of melancholy here and there, the general impression created is one of bustling energy. The perky phrase with which the piece opens:

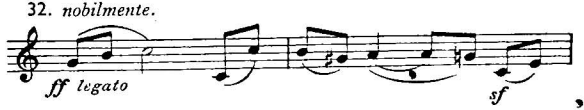
together with the pleasant easy-going swing of its carollary:

31.

display at once a feeling of gay irresponsibility.

Elgar's discussion of these fragments is characteristically energetic and restless, and though there is a momentary relief from the clattering rhythms with the arrival of a pompous phrase, marked (not perhaps very suitably) *nobilmente*,

32. *nobilmente.*



it is not until we reach the second subject that there is any definite change of mood.

There is a note of lyrical tenderness in the music at this point, and it has been suggested that the composer had in his mind a pair of lovers strolling together in the park:

33. *più tranquillo.*

It is a fragrant melody, made all the more engaging by the freedom with which it is treated, and by the unexpected changes of tonality which take place during

its progress. When we return, as we soon do, to more energetic matter, we find that the *nobilmente* theme is seized upon, and given a new aspect. It is transformed to notes of half the value, and tossed about from one instrument to another, and from one key to another, in a merry riot of chromatic sequences.

The middle section of the overture is partly based on a discussion of the foregoing matter, but it contains also some rather blatant passages, said to represent, in turn, a military procession with its accompanying music, and a Salvation Army band. The fun here is, perhaps, a little too crude to blend happily with the main current of the piece—and the clever realism which is given to the latter episode, in particular, partakes too much of the nature of caricature to be altogether acceptable in its context. Before the chief matter of the overture is resumed, however, these noisy scenes are forgotten for a few moments, and we are granted some serene strains, which are believed to represent an escape from the turmoil of the streets into the cool quietude of a city church.

Sounds from the outer world still pursue us, even here, deftly interwoven with the contrapuntal figures which represent, no doubt, the church organist at practice. Finally the principal themes are passed in review once more, and we have a trenchant but rather abrupt and rumbustious finish.

As a whole *Cockaigne* is a brilliant piece of musical virtuosity. It does not profess to be more than a superficial view of London, as seen by a casual visitor. In it Elgar seems to have sought to combine popular appeal with studied musicianship, which is not an easy thing to do. If, in some of its phraseology, the work falls between the two stools, it can be valued for its splendid sense of

comedy and abundant high spirits, and, above all, for its superlative mastery of orchestral technique.

The overture *In the South* (Alassio) is more opulent in its proportions, and more classic in its style, than *Cockaigne*. It appears to have embodied recollections of a brief visit to Italy in the winter of 1903–4. The work bears, as a motto, these words from Tennyson's poem *The Daisy*:

> " . . . What hours were thine and mine,
> In lands of palm and southern pine,
> In lands of palm, of orange blossom,
> Of olive, aloe, and maize and vine."

The MS. of the overture is further inscribed with a quotation from Byron's *Childe Harold*:

> " . . . A land
> Which *was* the mightiest in its old command,
> And *is* the loveliest . . .
> Wherein were cast . . .
> . . . the men of Rome!
> Thou art the garden of the world."

From these indications we may gather that the composer's thoughts were directed towards diverse aspects of Italy. In its sunshine he could find the joy of living: in its balmy climate he could dream in happy repose. But these dreams were not entirely contemplative. They brought him to realize

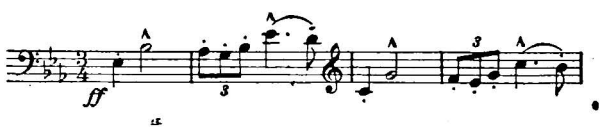
> " What Roman strength Turbia showed
> In ruin, by the mountain road,"

and he felt, as he has told us, " the relentless and domineering onward force of the ancient day ", as well

as the strife and wars, the " drums and tramplings of a later time ". That represents the " programme " of the work, if such it can be called.

There is no mistaking the intention of the opening to express the active joy which sunshine brings. Against a restless background, throbbing and quivering with eager life, a soaring rhythmical figure leaps towards us from the orchestra:

34. Vivace.

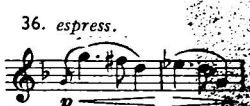


The exuberance which this expresses is long maintained. The scoring is sumptuous and full, but the music has none of the crisp rhythmical variety of *Cockaigne*. The style is less compact, perhaps less pliant, but more spacious. When at last the tension is relaxed we have a calm phrase of a pastoral type, from a solo clarinet:

35.

to which the violins immediately respond with:

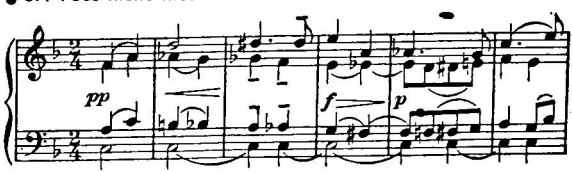
36. *espress.*



We are watching a shepherd with his flock on the hillside, and listening to the music of his pipe. Beautiful

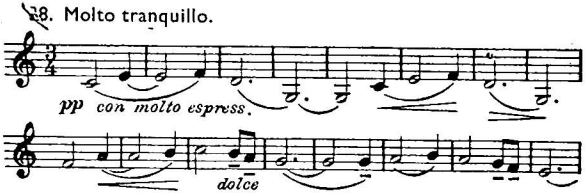
musical thoughts have often strange beginnings. W. H. Reed has told us that the expressive phrase of Ex. 36, quoted above, was suggested by the name of a place in Italy where Elgar and his daughter stayed—Moglio—a name which always sounded ridiculous to him. The repeated rhythm " Moglio, Moglio " tickled the composer's fancy, and he uses it constantly in the course of the work. This pastoral episode has a middle section, " at once contemplative and impassioned ", as Ernest Newman has said, founded on this very chromatically clad theme:

37. Poco meno mosso.



As in *Cockaigne* Elgar introduces important new episodes into what is generally called the " development section ". First he pictures for us the " Roman strength ", in a massively built-up orchestral ensemble. This culminates in a persistent hammering figure above discordant basses, which suggests Beethoven at his strongest, although the harmonies have a harshness which belongs to a later period of musical thought. They sound daringly modern, even in Elgar. The second episode is in marked contrast with this. We are back in the fields again, and we hear a distant voice singing what the composer has called a " canto populare ". It is at first gently chanted by a solo viola, and accompanied (in a most original

and effective way) by divided muted violins, and a harp, playing as softly as possible.



This is not, we are told, an actual folk-tune, although (like the Welsh melody in the "Introduction and Allegro", quoted in a later chapter) it was probably suggested by some tones actually heard, which lingered in Elgar's memory when he wrote the overture. Be that as it may the strain is a very haunting one, and at one time it was often played as a solo, apart from the rest of the work.

After the "canto populare" there is no further material to take note of in this overture. The recapitulation section follows normal methods, but in the Coda, where the full brass is very generously provided for, a strong effect is obtained by using the opening theme (Ex. 34) as a $\frac{6}{4}$ tune, with notes of longer value.

It is difficult to agree with the critics (Newman amongst them) who consider that these two overtures are weak in the matter of development. It is true that their form is not quite conventional, but the departures from normal procedure are all in the direction of strengthening the structural interest. Elgar was seldom disposed to be concise or economic in his composition. But the prodigality of his ideas never blinded him to the importance of clear construction. He not only needed

form for resistance, "as a swimmer needs water"—it served to control his emotions, and he valued it as a means of bringing the numerous themes which his imagination prompted him to devise into closer relationship with each other.

Chapter VII

IN THE FOREFRONT

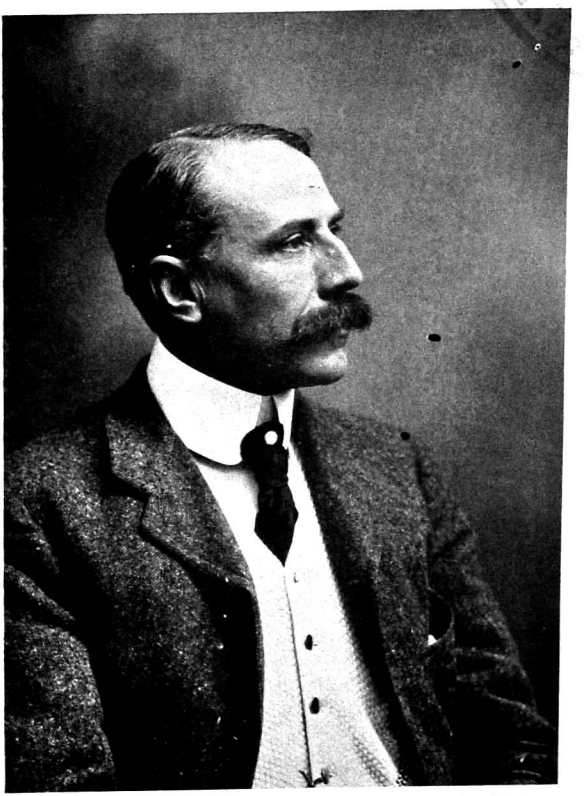
1905–14

Yes, truly, it is a great thing for a Nation that it get an articulate voice: that it produce a man who will speak forth melodiously what the heart of it means.

Thomas Carlyle.

THE year 1905 brought with it some new experiences for Elgar. His fame, spreading westward as well as eastward, had reached the United States of America. In 1903 and 1904 performances of *The Dream of Gerontius*, given at Chicago and Cincinnati, attracted considerable attention to the composer's work. Having heard the music, and found it good, America was anxious to pay some suitable homage to the man who wrote it. The invitation came from Yale, and, with Lady Elgar, the composer crossed the Atlantic in June to receive the honorary degree of Doctor of Music at that university.

The expedition was welcome, too, on other grounds. Elgar had been overworking and his health had suffered in consequence. This was an opportunity to snatch and enjoy a brief and much-needed respite from the nervous strain of creative work. The voyage, at all events, was an enforced rest. Naturally when they arrived in America the Elgars were subjected to the usual press publicity: they were sumptuously entertained and there were many social functions to be encountered.



Photograph, J. Russell & Sons

EDWARD ELGAR

In 1905

Doubtless there were some lucrative compensations for all these embarrassments, which may have reconciled them, in some measure, to the less congenial aspects of the undertaking. The visit, however, was not prolonged, for Elgar was obliged to return to England to enter upon duties of a different character from any which he had ventured to undertake before. To the surprise of most of his admirers he had become a university professor!

It is always difficult to understand why Elgar, with his independent cast of thought, and his unsettled and often contradictory opinions on matters connected with his art, yielded to the ill-directed persuasion of some of his friends to accept a position which called for steady consistency of outlook. Possibly the unsatisfactory condition of his finances had something to do with it, indeed he is believed to have confessed that this was so. It was from the University of Birmingham that the tempting offer came. The professorship of music, it is understood, was actually created in order that Elgar might be induced to become the first occupant of the chair. Even the staunchest of his admirers, however, would hardly venture to assert that Elgar was in his element as a lecturer, or that he was altogether fitted to play an academic rôle. His utterances, as professor, were always interesting, often provocative, and in some cases so inconsistent with his own theories and practice as to arouse a storm of comment. They naturally attracted a good deal of attention, particularly those in which he gave advice to executants, conductors, young composers—and even critics—as to the way in which they should go. Many of his words of counsel were admirable, but some of his comments gave offence to his contemporaries. He asserted, for instance, that our

modern writers were mostly, at heart, formalists, and that British composers were apt to write too much for the brethren of their own craft. They were correct and cold: they succeeded in being merely commonplace when it would have been far better to be vulgar—for vulgarity might show initiative. It was inevitable that free-shooting of this kind should be resented by those who imagined themselves, rightly or wrongly, to be the targets.

Furthermore Elgar, the professor, aroused discussion by his strictures upon works of the Symphonic Poem type, which were at that time especially popular. He pleaded for absolute music—music with no poetic or literary basis—and said that all "programme" should be abjured in writing orchestral works. When, in view of his own practice, he was taken to task for such a pronouncement, he retorted (with an obvious gesture of modesty) that in the decoration of temples the humble might help with their gifts of "little leaden images". When he saw one of his own works beside, say, the Fifth Symphony of Beethoven, he felt "as a tinker might do when he saw the Forth Bridge".

This sort of "back-chat", passing to and fro between the mentor and the outside public, may have been amusing, and even instructive, but it was hardly calculated to preserve the dignity of a professorial office. In his own sphere no one could have been more dignified than Elgar: his presence, his carriage, his demeanour, were dignity itself. But he was not the man either to suffer the restraints which an official position involved, or to deliver words of wisdom from a seat of authority. Elgar's tenure of the Birmingham professorship, however, was short-lived, and when he was succeeded by his friend Granville Bantock probably no one

was better pleased about the matter than he was himself.

Meantime it was natural that the demands of the university should interfere with Elgar's creative work, and, though it was rumoured that he was anxious to settle down in earnest to the composition of a symphony, the plans for this were constantly being set aside. He attended the festival at Worcester in September, 1905, and conducted several of his chief works, including the new " Introduction and Allegro " for string quartet and string orchestra, which is undoubtedly one of the finest of all his instrumental compositions, although it was not generally recognized as such at the time. During the festival week he received the Freedom of the City.[1] No honour which came to Elgar, either before or after, gave him such intense satisfaction, or touched him so deeply as this gesture of recognition from the leading citizens of his beloved Worcester. Like most Englishmen he retained an abiding affection for that corner of his country which he always felt to be his home. Worcester was the city which had nurtured him and given him his first encouragements, and it held the memories that were cherished most.

In 1906 (after a second visit to America) Elgar was busily engaged in completing *The Kingdom*, an oratorio which he had sketched in the previous year, as a continuation of *The Apostles*. This was originally intended to form the second section of a trilogy, but the third work did not materialize. *The Kingdom*, which was as monumental in its proportions and as masterly in its treatment as the first section, was brought to a hearing at the Birmingham Festival of 1906. The oratorio certainly made a strong impression upon those who heard it,

[1] Further references to this event, and to other incidents of the Festival, will be found in the *Epilogue*, pp. 199–202.

and, while it broke little new ground in the matter of style, it served to familiarize the public with Elgar's sustained dignity of utterance.

It would seem that after the production of *The Kingdom* the composer fell into a mood of dissatisfaction, and even despondency, declaring that he did not desire to write any more music. He resorted to all sorts of exterior diversions, such as golfing, kite-flying and chemistry. His duties at Birmingham, no doubt, served to keep his thoughts upon music to a certain extent, but it is evident that such obligations were apt to be regarded somewhat perfunctorily. He amused himself by composing a third march (for the *Pomp and Circumstance* series) and by rewriting and rescoring some little pieces he had composed in his boyhood for a play produced in the family circle. Under the delightful title of *The Wand of Youth*, and labelled Op. 1A, these miniatures were published as a suite. They were first performed at the Queen's Hall in December, 1907, and proved to be as charming as they were ingenuous—orchestrated and made new with all the skilful resourcefulness of maturity. A second suite, based upon similar material and bearing the same title, came to light at the secular concert of the Worcester Festival in 1908. This was equally fanciful and fully as effective as the first. But it could not allay the impatience of those who felt that some work of greater magnitude was due from the composer who had given them the Variations and the big oratorios, and had shown so firm a grasp of the most imposing musical forms.

They had to wait for their reward, however, until the close of 1908. Elgar's first symphony (which had been the subject of rumours for so long that some people even hinted that the whole idea of it was a myth) was

announced for performance at last. The work seems to have taken definite shape during a visit to Rome towards the close of 1907, and the scoring was completed during the following year. Its eventful production took place at a Hallé Concert in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, on 3rd December, 1908. The symphony was dedicated to Hans Richter, "true artist and true friend", and it was Richter who conducted it. Certainly no symphony by a British composer had ever before enjoyed such a tremendous "send-off". Its success was so marked, and so immediate, that conductors tumbled over one another to give it repeated hearings in all parts of the country. The performances during the first year of its existence mounted up to something more than a hundred, all told, so that it quickly became, in this country at least, one of the best-known of all symphonic works. Its sudden popularity, indeed, can only be compared with that achieved by Tschaïkowsky's *Pathetic* Symphony in the naughty 'nineties. Naturally this dominant position could not be retained indefinitely, and the performances of Elgar's work became less frequent during the ensuing years, but it has remained in the regular repertory, and has certainly not lost its prominence as one of the major peaks of modern English music.

The year 1909 saw the production of no new work of importance from Elgar's pen. In May of that year Elgar suffered a severe loss by the death of his faithful friend Jaeger, after a prolonged and painful illness. With Jaeger the composer had enjoyed an unbroken intimacy which had been an inspiring factor in his life that could never be replaced. Their association together had been something more than friendship. It is, indeed, doubtful if Elgar's position as leader in his profession

could have been attained without the unremitting confidence which this genial, perceptive, true-hearted man brought to bear upon their relationship with one another. As an intermediary, not only between the composer and his publishers, but between the composer and his public, Jaeger had rendered services of incalculable value to his friend. He wrote analyses of all Elgar's chief works, which were of such a penetrating and understanding character that when the works themselves appeared listeners were prepared to receive them in the right spirit. His belief in Elgar's greatness was so consistently maintained that it became valuable and stimulating to all those who came in contact with the music itself. He was a good friend to other British composers besides Elgar, and he helped to launch many promising careers, but Elgar had long been his special hero, and it might almost be said that the best years of his life were devoted to an apostleship in which all self-interest was sacrificed to one main issue—the establishment of a supremacy in which his faith was never shaken. The regard in which Jaeger was held by the musical profession as a whole was strikingly registered at a special orchestral concert, given in his memory, at Queen's Hall in January, 1910. Works by Parry, Walford Davies, and Coleridge-Taylor were included in the programme, and Elgar was fittingly represented by three new songs with orchestra (Op. 59) sung by Muriel Foster, and conducted by the composer.

Elgar's next big accomplishment was his Violin Concerto. This attracted almost as much attention as the first symphony had done, two years previously. Like that work it had evidently shaped itself gradually in the composer's mind. We know that a year or two previously Elgar had roughly sketched this concerto,

and even tried it over with Lady Speyer (a distinguished violinist, formerly known as Madame von Stosch) but he had put it aside, being dissatisfied with its effect. A little later he returned to it and sought the advice of his friend W. H. Reed. Reed's enthusiasm evidently had the effect of restoring Elgar's interest and confidence in the project. They laboured at the earlier sketches together, trying out passages, discussing them, rewriting them, and finally welding them into a consistent whole. At last the work was put into its final form and scored, in the summer of 1910. It was performed for the first time, with Fritz Kreisler as soloist, at a concert of the Royal Philharmonic Society at Queen's Hall, on November 10th of that year.

In 1911 Elgar was awarded the Order of Merit, perhaps the highest mark of intellectual distinction it is possible for an Englishman to receive from his sovereign. He was the first musician to be accorded this newly founded honour, a fact which placed him, beyond dispute, in a position of pre-eminence in his profession.

1911, it may be remembered, was the year of the coronation of King George V. For this occasion Elgar composed a stately march, which was played as the royal procession left Westminster Abbey at the conclusion of the service.

The same year saw the production of no less important a work than the second symphony, which Elgar seems to have written far more rapidly and easily than his first. It is not, perhaps, built upon quite such an imposing scale as the previous symphony, but it is fully as characteristic. It was composed partly in Venice and partly in Tintagel, but whether or not the influence of these two romantic localities is responsible for the very pronounced romantic flavour of much of the music

there is no direct evidence. The work, however, appears at first to have disappointed many of the composer's admirers. It is difficult to say why. It has certainly not been heard very frequently since the original production at the London Musical Festival in May, 1911.

At the close of 1911 Elgar left Hereford, and, after spending Christmas with Lord Charles Beresford in Brighton, he moved to London where he lived for several years at Severn House, at the top of Netherhall Gardens, Hampstead.[1] Here he wrote many important works. The first of these was his setting, for chorus and orchestra, of a poem by O'Shaughnessy called *The Music Makers*. While exploring no new ground the music of this was planned on an imposing scale, and it is understood to have been a favourite work of the music-maker who conceived it.

The visit of King George V and Queen Mary to India, in 1912, prompted Elgar to devise yet another patriotic composition for popular consumption. The work took the form of an Imperial masque, of an extremely flamboyant nature, which was called *The Crown of India*. Staged for a brief run at the London Coliseum, this brought Elgar, literally, into the limelight, at the conductor's desk of a music-hall, for he undertook to direct the performances himself.

Having been lured away from the main current of serious composition by the loud trumpet-call of pomp and circumstance (which he never seemed able to resist), Elgar made amends, in 1913, with an orchestral work of real importance, inspired by the character of Falstaff. He called it a Symphonic Study, and it was so rich in detail, and so clearly the result of purely literary sug-

[1] This princely house, once the residence of Edwin Long, R.A., has recently been demolished.

gestion, that the description may be deemed quite appropriate.

Never before had the composer attempted to establish so direct a parallel between poetry and music in purely orchestral writing. He even issued, concurrently with the score, a booklet containing an analysis of the work, showing how each episode and each theme had sprung to his mind as an illustration of Shakespeare's text. The public, however, was but faintly responsive to the appeal of a very fine work, and Elgar must have been disappointed at the half-heartedness of its reception. Nevertheless *Falstaff* has its champions, who may be trusted to persevere in performing it until it finds its true place in the repertory of masterly musical delineations. Amongst the most persistent of these champions hitherto has been Landon Ronald, whose sympathy with Elgar's genius was never more strikingly exhibited than in his glowing interpretation of the varied incidents which make up this complex and imaginative Shakespearian commentary.

Chapter VIII

CHORAL MUSIC

1906–12

All earthly pomp or beauty to express
Is but to carve in snow, on waves to write.
Celestial things, though men conceive them less,
Yet fullest are they in themselves of light.
Thomas Campion.

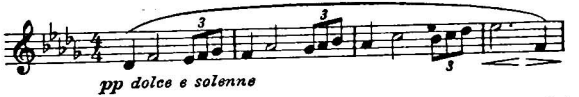
The Kingdom (*Op. 51*)

THERE is in this, the last of Elgar's oratorios, less mysticism and more vigour than in its immediate predecessor. The message is therefore more direct, and the design correspondingly simpler. There are fewer episodes of vocal complexity, and while the orchestration retains its opulence, the work, as a whole, is perhaps less rich in contrasts. We must remember that *The Kingdom* is a sequel to *The Apostles*. Whilst practically all the illustrative musical themes previously employed are called into action once more, the subject of the later work, which deals with the Church in Jerusalem, has, through the removal of the central Figure, become less dramatic and less emotionally moving in its incidents. This was unavoidable. But Elgar, in presenting the Disciples themselves as inspired men of action, constantly depends upon our recollections of what has gone before to convince us of the power which lived in their faith. Again and again he seizes upon the phrases which we know already, and transforms them into something more powerful and more splendid. To appreciate the full

significance of the later work we must, therefore, have some knowledge of *The Apostles*. If we are thus prepared we can scarcely be disappointed. There is, indeed, a sustained consistency in the music of *The Kingdom* to which its predecessor, where the interest is more diffused, cannot lay quite equal claim.

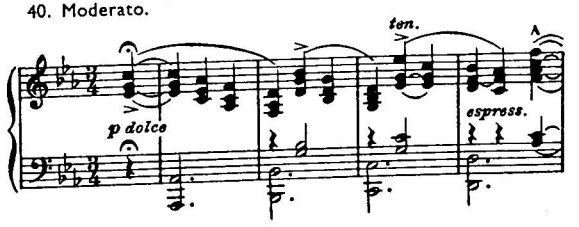
The orchestral prelude, for instance, is a long, important, fully-developed piece of great unity and expressiveness, which is in itself a mature summing-up of everything that has happened before. One particularly striking new theme, however, is introduced into this, and, as it reappears several times later in the work, it should be recognized. According to Jaeger's authoritative analysis it is symbolic of the "all-consoling, all-forgiving love of the New Faith":

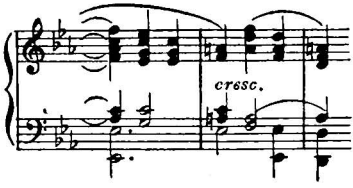
39. Andante.



This melody, in its rhythmic shape and sequential movement, is extremely characteristic of Elgar. So, too, is the prayerful music upon which the final section of the prelude is built up—also new matter, which should be noted here in view of its employment later:

40. Moderato.





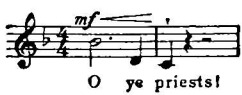
We pass on to the opening section of the oratorio itself without any break in the mood which has been established by this theme. The Disciples are gathered together in the upper room in brotherly intimacy. The tone of the music is fittingly quiet and spiritual. Peter greets his brethren, and a melody based upon a thirteenth-century Antiphon *O Sacrum Convivium* is heard in the orchestra. This theme is used throughout the oratorio to symbolize the Real Presence. It is interesting to note that Elgar makes no attempt to preserve its archaic character or modal flavour, but harmonizes it in his own free style.

There is a touching moment where Mary Magdalene sings "The Dayspring from on high hath visited us to guide our feet into the way of peace", after which John and Peter quietly recall how the Lord had talked with them by the way, and how He had taken bread and blessed it. Then the music broadens into greater warmth of expression, and the Disciples raise their voices in a song of praise for "the Name of the Lord our God".

From this we proceed to a graphic musical illustration of the casting of lots for the choice of a successor to Judas Iscariot. When Matthias is elected a contrapuntal ensemble of some elaboration ensues, leading to the impetuous opening of one of the finest choruses in the work, "O ye priests!" This is an impassioned appeal

to the priests of all time, as messengers of the Lord, " to stand before the congregation ", and " to minister unto them "—" for it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you ". The recurrent three-note phrase, with its drooping sixth, remains in the memory for its spacious eloquence:

41.



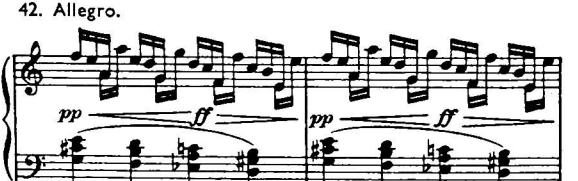
There is a superb climax, where the sopranos and tenors mount to the top B flat of their compass, and the contraltos and basses (divided) emphasize the words " ye are the messengers of the Lord ", strengthened by the full brass of the orchestra. The instrumental commentary, from this point, quietens down and becomes less and less elaborate, until it dies away to silence, leaving the unaccompanied chorus to sing, in an impressive *pianissimo*, " O ye priests! this commandment is for you ".

Thus ends Part I. Part II, " At the Beautiful Gate ", is in the nature of an interlude. It takes the form of a duet for soprano and contralto (Mary and Mary Magdalene) accompanied by a reduced orchestra. The sight of the lame man carried to the gate reminds the singers of the miracles of Jesus and His compassion for those who suffered from infirmities. Quietly and reverently they enter the house of the Lord. The music of this scene is beautiful, gentle and restrained, and greatly dependent for its effect upon the closely woven texture of the orchestral accompaniment, into which many of the themes from *The Apostles* enter, significantly but unobtrusively.

Part III deals with the day of Pentecost. The Disciples,

once more assembled in the upper room, await the coming of the Spirit of Understanding. After a few words from the tenor narrator we embark upon what becomes, perhaps, the most elaborate and imaginative piece of ensemble-writing of the oratorio. The voices are divided into two sections—the female singers represent a "mystic chorus", the male singers the Disciples, and there are separate solo parts for John and Peter. The music moves continuously, but it is planned in alternating sections, accompanied and unaccompanied; in the former the orchestra almost always takes the lead and provides the chief musical interest. The dove-tailing of the different sections of the chorus is, however, very skilfully devised, and the vocal lines, no less than the instrumental lines, show great freedom of movement. As this chorus comes to a tranquil resting-point there is a *tremolando* in the orchestra. With a sharp, dramatic change of key, a contralto voice declaims the words "And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind . . . and there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire." The instrumentation becomes vivid and realistic, and if the main material reminds one of the shape of the fire-music in *Die Walküre* the colouring is different, and a new and striking effect is gained by the changes from *pp* to *ff* in separate bars:

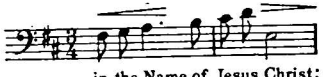
42. Allegro.



Great mastery is shown in the way by which Elgar sustains the tense thrill of the music throughout the continuation of this scene. The words, " He who walketh upon the wings of the wind shall baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire ", are set to a flaming melody, which passes from tenors to basses while the contralto voice continues the narrative. Eventually the music becomes more agitated in rhythm, as the bewildered multitude, summoned by the sound, exclaims in broken phrases " What meaneth this?" and, whilst some conjecture that " these men are full of new wine ", others hear them speak " in our tongues the wonderful works of God!"

The confusion allayed, Peter speaks calmly and impressively of Christ's prayer that the faith of His followers shall not fail, and addresses the men of Judæa, telling them of the Lord's prophecies, whilst the theme of the New Faith (Ex. 39) takes its place, with solemn precision, in the orchestral background. Peter's monologue rises well, as Jaeger says, to the height of a great argument. The music is earnest rather than declamatory until we reach the dramatic section, where the Apostle denounces those who " by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay ". Touched by Peter's words the people confess that they have denied " the Holy and Righteous One ", and " killed the Prince of Life ", and their words are allied to music of quivering emotional quality. Peter thereupon calls upon all to repent and to be baptized:

43. Andante.



in the Name of Jesus Christ;

a haunting phrase of great nobility and beauty, which is taken up by the chorus as the starting-point of the massively conceived ensemble with which this fine section of the work is brought to a close.

The opening of Part IV, "The Sign of Healing", affords the contrast which was highly necessary to relieve the tension. A placid orchestral prelude leads to the resumption of the narrative by a contralto soloist, who describes how the people have been baptized and have continued steadfastly in the Apostles' teaching. Peter and John are appealed to by the lame man at the Beautiful Gate, and Peter "in the name of Jesus Christ" (set once more to the phrase already quoted) performs the miracle of healing. There is a short choral commentary, and the scene closes with the exhortations of Peter and John, who point the moral, and call upon the populace to turn from their iniquities that "there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord".

From this we pass without break to "The Arrest", a contralto *recitative*, and a long aria for the Virgin Mary (soprano) which is one of the most notable vocal solos in all of Elgar's works. The *recitative* tells how the Sadducees came upon the Apostles, who, "because they proclaimed in Jesus a resurrection from the dead", were arrested and "put in ward unto the morrow". Then follows the meditation in which Mary communes with her own heart. The music becomes exultant as she calls upon the Apostles to rejoice as partakers of Christ's sufferings "that when His glory shall be revealed ye may be glad also with exceeding joy"—a superb emotional climax which is one of the strongest highlights of the whole oratorio. The solo ends, however, as it began, in the mood of a calm nocturne.

Part V, "In Fellowship", brings the work to a close.

It is perhaps, as a whole, less striking than what has gone before, at all events in its opening pages, where there is little new musical matter to arrest attention. John and Peter first describe what happened when they were brought before the rulers, after which there is an abrupt interruption from the chorus, the purpose of which is not quite clear:

> " Lord, Thou didst make the heaven, and the earth, and the sea. . . . The rulers gather together against the Lord."

These latter words are set above a curious prancing accompaniment, and the theme is subjected later to a fugal form of treatment which it seems hardly strong enough to survive. Not until the spirit of the music changes, and we come to the more solemn incident of " The Breaking of Bread ", does Elgar's full mastery reassert itself, to compensate for the brief lapse in interest which has been noticeable. The lovely sequential phrase of descending chords against a rising bass (Ex. 40) forms the background for John's words " Give thanks first for the Cup ", and its continuation supports the chorus which follows, as well as Peter's thanks to God " for the Broken Bread ". One of the most notable themes from *The Apostles* then comes appropriately into prominence at the words " So may Thy Church be gathered together from the bounds of the earth into Thy Kingdom ".

From this we pass to a full choral setting of the Lord's Prayer. There will be some who will dissent from the emotional character of the music at this point, as well as from the chromatic nature of the harmony which is allied to such personal and intimate words of appeal. It may be said at once, however, that Elgar's non-ascetic treatment of the prayer is reverent and expressive, and

does no violence to our private thoughts. Only at the words " for Thine is the glory for ever and ever " is there even a hint of anything of a declamatory nature, and this passage, with all its grandeur and fullness of tone, is restrained, and does not represent a conventional climax. When the quiet " Amen " has been sung we hear the theme of the New Faith once more, as John sings " Ye have received the spirit of adoption ". At the words " Abba, Father " the music resumes the serene pattern of Ex. 40, whilst soloists and chorus, in gentle flowing phrases, reaffirm their faith in the Redeemer. " We are Thine, Thou O God art our Father " is the closing sentence, and so this long elaborate work draws to an end on a note of peace and spiritual calm.

Perhaps *The Kingdom* is destined to be the swan-song of English oratorio. If so, its eloquence will remain to testify to the fervency through which Elgar imparted new life to a form which, once so greatly esteemed by his countrymen, had become crusted with conventionalities. It was a brave revival, and it deserved a keener and more sustained following. Only, apparently, at the Festivals of the Three Choirs are Elgar's later oratorios still given pride of place in the programmes. The sacred choral works written by British composers in recent years have mostly been short, and although Elgar's influence is discernible in many of them (especially in the emphasis given to dramatic incidents), no one has attempted to rival him in the writing of full-scale works of this type.

Perhaps even Elgar himself felt that their day was over, since he abandoned the idea of completing what was originally intended to be a trilogy, although it is known that a considerable portion of the third section, dealing with the Church of the Gentiles, was already sketched out.

The Music Makers

After the production of *The Kingdom* the composer seems, indeed, to have lost all desire to compose music of an orthodox sacred character. This was probably due, as W. H. Reed suggests, to an increasing scepticism in the matter of religious belief. The only other work for chorus and orchestra which calls for special comment, prior to the war period, sings the praises of poets and dreamers. This is *The Music Makers*, a short work of the choral ballad type, but planned on a big scale, with occasional solo passages for contralto voice.

The high-sounding poetry of Arthur O'Shaughnessy, of which it is a setting, is not by any means first-rate literature (it is, indeed, suggestive of Swinburne and water) but it has the advantage of being well suited for musical illustration—it has a rhythmic lilt. Elgar has seized upon this quality and set the verses in a fluent style. He has been singularly successful, too, in preserving the right verbal values. Perhaps in no other of his larger works has he been so sure in this particular respect.

The most curious feature of the setting, however, is the extensive use which the composer has made of self-quotation. Self-quotation is, of course, quite a justifiable procedure when the themes quoted are well known to the listener, and when their employment is apt and illuminating. In the first respect nobody could quibble with their use here, but in the second respect it is often difficult to find adequate reasons for invoking the memories which are so frequently brought to consciousness in the course of this ode. Themes from *Gerontius* are constantly heard; long passages from the *Enigma* Variations are drawn upon, and there are even allusions

to the subject-matter of the *Violin Concerto*. In no case is the actual progress of the music held up, but nevertheless the method, carried to such lengths and used so persistently, is disturbing.

One finds oneself wondering, over and over again, if any special point has been missed, and, when some particularly Elgarian turn of phrase appears, it is difficult to avoid searching for some allusion which may not really be there at all.

The work, however, has many beauties. It is chorally resourceful, and much of the music has the vivid intensity that we associate with Elgar at his best. In the matter of technical mastery it is fully equal, if not superior, to the greatest of its predecessors in the same medium. There is a splendid continuity in the writing which compels admiration. In none of Elgar's choral works is there a firmer grasp of harmonic design, or a greater freedom in the use of chromatic texture. Whatever might have been the composer's purpose in recalling his former thoughts for the illustration of new ideas, it is clear that these reminiscences did not spring from any lack of inventiveness on his part: the imaginative faculty had never been more warmly alive, nor the mastery which directed its expression more abundantly evident.

Chapter IX

ORCHESTRAL WORKS

(From the "Introduction and Allegro" to "Falstaff")

Art seems to differ from other manifestations of human energy in welcoming so frankly the evidences of personality. Culture and progress alike deprecate aggressive individual prominence. The cherished ideal of the religious-minded is the effacement of self. The philosophical ideal is the entire and perfect accommodation of impulses and actions to the general well-being. But art not only welcomes the evidences of personal initiative; it demands as one of its first necessities copious and consistent proofs of individuality.

C. H. H. Parry. (Johann Sebastian Bach.)

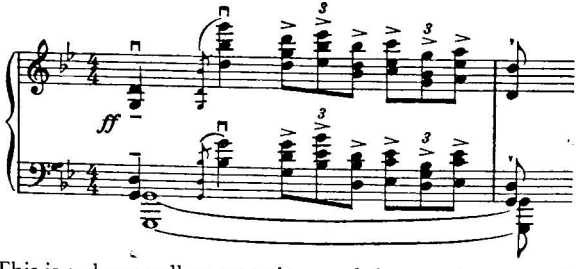
Introduction and Allegro for Strings
(Op. 47)

THIS finely wrought and nervously energetic composition has an interesting origin. It was apparently inspired by a visit to Wales, where Elgar heard some distant singing wafted across the River Wye. One of the phrases of that song lingered in his memory, and was embodied in the work which was already vaguely shaping itself in his mind.

In plan this piece shows some kinship with the concertos of Bach. The composer employs a string quartet in addition to the string orchestra; as with Bach the solo players participate in the scheme without special prominence, and generally double the orchestral parts

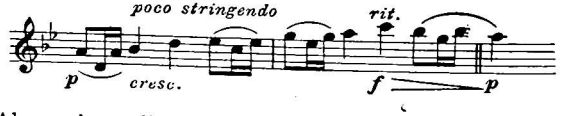
in the tuttis. Elgar, however, as might be expected, presents a far wider range of dynamic variety than his predecessor, and explores very fully the capacity for changes of colour, over which present-day string players have acquired such command. At the outset a forceful and most serviceable subject, for the whole ensemble, leaps into immediate prominence:

44. Moderato.



This is a sharp call to attention, and the quartet responds with one of those soaring rhythmic fragments which are so characteristic of Elgar's style:

45. Allegretto.



Almost immediately we are presented with the Welsh theme, played by the solo viola, and a very beautiful theme it is, with its drooping thirds and simple rocking rhythm:

46. Moderato.

The proper function of an introduction is to introduce, though composers do not always recognize this to the extent that is to be observed here. Elgar, however, presents us straight away with almost all the main points which he is about to illuminate. Having thus announced his three texts, as it were, he pauses for a moment, like a preacher, and then embarks on a developed allegro in G major. First he discusses very fully the phrases of Ex. 44. Next he gives us an episode wholly constructed in repeated staccato semiquavers (quartet and orchestra answering each other in conversational fashion) and, reaching a climax in a glorified presentation of the opening theme, we find crotchet triplets battling against a continuously energetic bass in even quavers. The tension is sustained for a long time in a masterly way, and the music becomes highly dramatic and exciting. A *diminuendo* eventually brings us to a mysterious version of the opening bars of the Welsh tune, played in unison (not octaves) by the quartet, the second violin and 'cello playing *tremolando e ponticello* against the smoothly bowed tones of the first violin and viola. There is another moment of pause and expectancy, and then the second violins of the orchestra announce the prancing subject of what Elgar himself described to Jaeger as " a divvil of a fugue ".

47. Allegro.

A "divvil of a fugue" it certainly is—brusque, freakish and bubbling over with high spirits—yet at the same time so skilfully contrived that however unrestrained its effect may be it is always held in masterful control. This section of the work, structurally, takes the place of formal development, but emotionally it provides a complete scherzo in itself, giving the variety so much needed in a long serious composition in single-movement form.

When it is over there is a repetition of the main allegro (as in an ordinary first movement), and at its climax we are given, by way of a prolonged Coda, the Welsh tune complete, tensely harmonized, and most sonorously scored. So ends an undoubted masterpiece. The consummate skill shown in the string writing, the perfection of balance in form, combined with the vitality of all the subject-matter and the freedom with which it is treated, make this one of the most vivid and bracing works of its kind in the whole repertory of string music. It deserves to be far more widely known than it is.

The Wand of Youth. Suites I and II
(*Op. 1, a and b*)

The two orchestral suites bearing this enchanting title stand a little apart from the rest of Elgar's works. As we have seen they were put together at a period when the composer was disinclined to concentrate upon serious composition. How far they are an actual reproduction of the little pieces he wrote as a boy is not known. It seems probable that he used his early ideas merely as a starting-point. In any case the instrumentation clearly belongs to his maturity, for it exhibits a

mastery in workmanship which no child could possibly have commanded.

The first suite comprises seven movements. It opens with a bright, square little "Overture", which is followed by an engagingly tuneful "Serenade". No. 3 is an old-style "Minuet", which might almost be by Purcell, it is so English and so simple in design. Then comes No. 4, a "Sun Dance" (*presto*), where the wood-wind wakes up and seems to call us to come out to play. This is a more developed movement than those which precede it. It has three separate sections, including a reticent little waltz, which almost apologizes for intruding its shy gracefulness upon us. No. 5 is "Fairy Pipers", a somewhat more elusive piece—why "Pipers" it is not quite clear, at all events there is more suggestion of the fairies than of what they are playing, in spite of the rambling tune in thirds for the two clarinets. No. 6, a "Slumber Scene" (for muted strings with bassoons and horns) has, perhaps, less character than the succeeding "Fairies and Giants" (No. 7) with which the suite closes. Here we have a light *tarantella* rhythm for the Fairies, and, for the Giants, a comic combination of pompous brass and bassoons, in long heavy notes, with a kind of "galumphing" movement, expressed by the unison of all the strings in detached crotchets. Fairies and Giants take it in turns to disport themselves, and finally seem to come together, in some sort of agreement with each other, for the work ends both heavily and brightly.

The second suite contains only six movements. The "March", with which it begins, is most dainty and precise: the rhythm of its short *forte* sections is strangely suggestive of portions of the *Cockaigne* overture. No. 2, "Little Bells", is a dainty scherzo of a staccato character,

with the wood-wind instruments scampering after each other in upward and downward scales, and there is an innocent little Trio section, in a more sustained style, which returns to adorn the Coda, after a repeat of the scherzo. "Moths and Butterflies", which is the third movement, is equally dainty and fanciful and, perhaps, a little in the same mood. No. 4, "Fountain Dance", is more definitely pictorial. The rise and fall of the extended arpeggio-figures in the muted strings suggest the rise and fall of jets of water on some ornamental pond. The orchestral colouring is delightful. No. 5, "The Tame Bear", about as simple as any music could be in melody and harmony, is strangely touching in quality, and, when the melody is combined with a long line of gurgling triplets in the wood-wind, and the clinking of chains in the percussion, the gentle note of pathos is accentuated. We are moved to pity for the poor captive. "The Wild Bears" (No. 6), on the other hand, are quite definitely pantomime bears. There is nothing fearsome about them—just a humorous awkwardness, perhaps, here and there, but in the main they are bears which have forgotten their ferocity and are enjoying a dance of delight.

When these suites were first produced Elgar was taken to task by some superior persons for rummaging about in his nursery toy-cupboard, and inflicting the results upon a public which expected him to treat them more seriously! This was sheer impudent ingratitude. At all events few who listen to this charmingly ingenuous music to-day will be inclined to criticize it in that fashion, or to regret the circumstance that the composer took us into his confidence in such a human manner. There is no doubt that Elgar enjoyed indulging in these reminiscences of his childhood. It is a poor heart that

cannot respond to such a playful appeal: besides, the music itself was far too good to be lost for ever.

The "Wand of Youth" suites are something more than a happy reminder that the child is father to the man—they have their serious value, for we can see in Elgar's revival of his early imaginings some fragments

> "from his dream of human life,
> Shaped by himself with newly learnèd art."

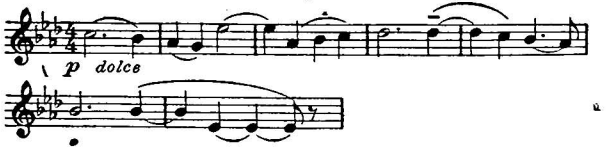
Symphony in A Flat, No. 1 (Op. 55)

Elgar's *Symphony in A flat* occupies a position of special importance, not only in the catalogue of his own works, but also in our native music as a whole. It was, indeed, the first English example that could claim to take its place amongst the big symphonies of the world. Completed as far back as 1908, it can still hold up its head in any company, and dominate the situation in most.

Even a superficial observer cannot fail to note the assurance, skill and freedom of Elgar's presentation of his ideas. These qualities, however, are almost common property with well-trained modern musicians. In themselves they do nothing to establish the claim. We must probe deeper if we are to justify our beliefs. There is nothing realistic or showy in the music of this symphony, but it seems to be inspired by a profound human searching, and to express strong human emotions. It has something in common, too, with Beethoven's Ninth, in the fusion of mysticism and experience, and in the triumph which comes as a final reconciliation of the real and the ideal in conflict. In some ways Elgar achieves his purpose more convincingly than Beethoven, especially in the apotheosis at the end of the struggle.

The first movement presents some unusual technical features, notably in the matter of the balance of keys. It opens with the famous long-drawn Andante theme in A flat, which has been described as the "motto" of the work. The word "motto", however, is a very inappropriate description, and it savours of programme-book jargon. There is nothing pithy or epigrammatic here:

48. Andante, nobilmente e semplice.

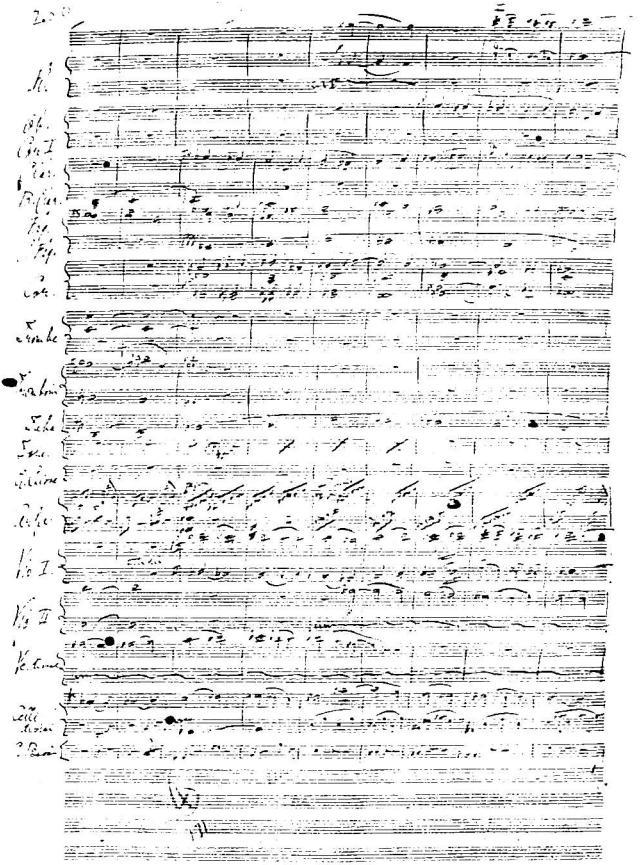


This melody is extended, and forms a sustained prelude in itself, seemingly designed to create a mood in the listener which shall fit him to assimilate what is to come. It is accompanied at first only by a slow-walking bass, in even crotchets. Not until its repetition is it enriched with chords and inner counterpoint. The style is purely diatonic. The steady tread of the basses continues throughout, and the music dies down until there is a pause on the low A flat.

Then, with striking suddenness, we are plunged into the remote key of D minor, for the main subject of the movement.

49. Allegro.

This theme is marked *appassionato* by the composer, but although the *tempo* is allegro and the style restless, there



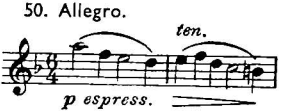
THE FIRST SYMPHONY

A page from the original manuscript

(The names of instruments and the brackets are in the handwriting of Lady Elgar)

is no contradiction of the dignity of the opening, if the music is played as it should be, without recourse to the frenzied manner favoured by some conductors. There is soon a change of mood to tenderness at the phrase:

50. Allegro.



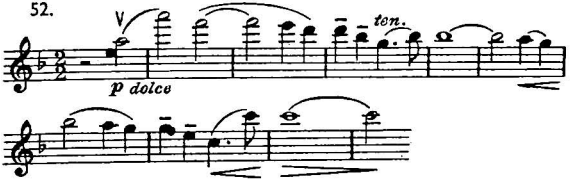
which has an important carollary:

51. Allegro.

This has been called a "phrase of pity", and the description is not inapt.

Out of these two fragments (which become very important later on) the beautiful extended melody in F major, virtually the second subject, moves into the foreground almost unconsciously:

52.



When this has run its course we are roused to action once more by a bold series of mounting fifths:

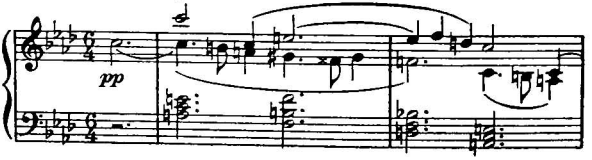
53.

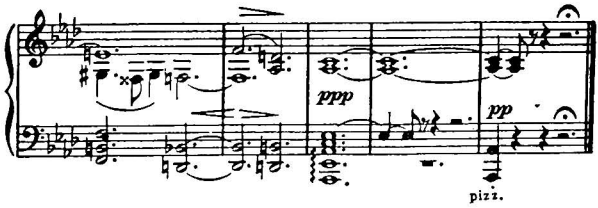
and are carried through a section in which the " phrase of pity " (Ex. 51) becomes far more poignant in expression. There is a brief reference to the A flat melody of the introduction—treated mysteriously in the key of C—after which we embark upon a long and detailed development of the allegro. The most uncommon and original feature of this is the strange appearance of an almost ungainly spectral figure which stalks through the score in all sorts of odd shapes, as if it were undecided where it should go next:

54. Allegro.

The purpose of this apparition is not clear, but it is an enemy to complacency, and we are held in thrall. Ultimately we return to the principal subject of the allegro, and there is a more or less orthodox *reprise* of the first section. Its regularity is broken by the appearance of the A flat melody, which (played by the last desks only of the violins and violas) creeps in almost unnoticed at first, and threads its way fitfully through the music, to be reinforced at last by trumpets and horns. The ending is beautifully done. The last seven bars, after all that has gone before, are so magical in their effect that they should be quoted here complete, in short score:

55. Poco tranquillo.





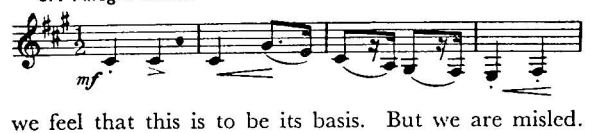
It will be noted that the "phrase of pity" is the last fragment of the multiplicity of thematic material to survive.

The second movement, an *Allegro molto*, is by no means a scherzo. It is busy and animated in *tempo*, but there is a touch of terror in it. The opening, like that of the third movement of Tschaïkowsky's *Pathetic*, seems to suggest the impending appearance of something big:

56. Allegro molto.

There are soon hints, too, of a coming long theme, as in Tschaïkowsky, and when the clarinets and violas play

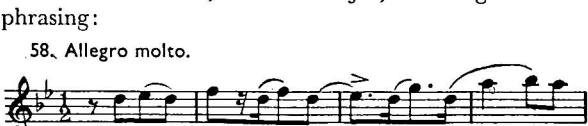
57. Allegro molto.



we feel that this is to be its basis. But we are misled. Elgar's way is not the way of the Russian composer. He has no long conquering melody up his sleeve. Instead he makes fascinating play with his short phrases, giving them a martial aspect, but never prolonging them. The trombones take up the strain at the climax, in

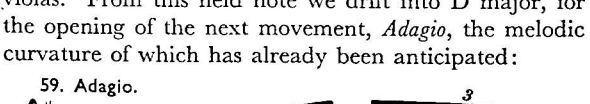
combination with the semiquavers of the opening. Then comes a trio section, in B flat major, much lighter in its phrasing:

58. Allegro molto.



While this seems to aim at a more gracious mood, we do not quite lose the spectral character which dominates the movement. The repetition of the first section brings about certain changes (including a repetition of the theme last quoted, *pianissimo*, for solo violin with wood-wind) after which the music dies away in broken phrases till it reaches a sustained F sharp for violins and violas. From this held note we drift into D major, for the opening of the next movement, *Adagio*, the melodic curvature of which has already been anticipated:

59. Adagio.



Upon this theme Elgar builds a symphonic design which is rich in detail, and richer still in emotional expressiveness. He lingers lovingly over each point as it passes, and here again we can observe some affinity with the slow movement of Beethoven's last symphony, not only in the variety of the material passed in review, but also in the contemplative beauty which is felt in each fragment of the texture.

The most lovely music of all, however, comes at the

end, with the introduction of a new theme which breathes utter and complete contentment:

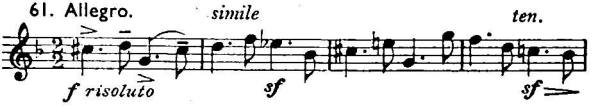
60. Molto espressivo e sostenuto.

Here is a melody of such touching sweetness that it seems to exceed everything of the kind that exists in our memory. Although its shape is new we are curiously unconscious of its newness. It comes before us as an inevitable fulfilment of what we have been prepared to receive. As it fades away in the last seven bars, and the muted horns and trombones play soft detached triplets, we seem to fall into a dreamless sleep, and when the clarinet breathes its last *dolcissimo* cadence it is like a faint touch of some warm loving hand upon the brow.

Mercifully we are not rudely awakened, but slowly roused by the mysterious opening bars of the *Lento* which lead to the finale. In no section of the symphony has Elgar shown his artistry or his imaginative power more fully than here. It is clear that he is groping for something different, but he means to humour us gently into accepting it. The spectral figure of Ex. 54 appears once more, there are *pp* suggestions of some new rhythm (which we are to know more about later), and fragments of the A flat melody play vaguely upon our half-awakened senses.

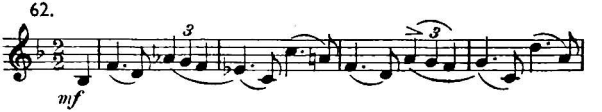
Having at last been brought gently to consciousness, we are perhaps a little disappointed when the *Allegro* arrives, for it brings us a theme which is so much in the accepted pattern of Elgar in his striding energetic manner that it does not strike the ear with the freshness that one might have hoped for:

61. Allegro. *simile* *ten.*



But a subsidiary subject soon appears and makes amends with its stronger melodic significance:

62.



and there is still further growth of interest at the arrival of a splendid march-rhythm, which had been foreshadowed in the *Lento* introduction and now dominates the situation:

63.

This is treated in persistent modulating sequences, but it does not outstay its welcome. The composer concentrates his attention upon these three subjects for some time, until a brief and somewhat halting intrusion of the A flat theme (this time in C flat) prompts him to lengthen the notes of the march-melody (Ex. 63) and so bring it into line with the broader style of the big theme itself. This is an ingenious and highly effective touch, which does a great deal towards strengthening the middle part of the movement.[1] Recapitulation follows and runs its course fairly normally, leading up (as one feels

[1] The passage alluded to here may be studied in detail in the facsimile of a page of the manuscript score, which forms one of the illustrations in this volume.

it must do) to a final presentation, *grandioso*, of the A flat tune.

This is so obviously the right ending for the symphony that no one can question its appropriateness. But it must be pointed out that, for the first time in the course of the work, the composer's machinery fails. If the whole of the lower brass could be doubled at this point, and there were three trumpets to play the theme instead of the third trumpet by itself, as the score directs, the climax might really be achieved. Instinctively the listener craves for something which shall pierce through the elaborations of the string parts, and entirely dominate the situation, at this tremendous moment. It may be said, of course, that it is not the composer's fault that the triumph is incomplete—the instruments are not there by which to achieve it. But, after all, it is every artist's job to adapt his thoughts to the material he has at his disposal, and there can be little doubt that here, for once, a great artist lost his full grip of the situation. The actual ending of the symphony is magnificent, but the climax which precedes it is not quite convincingly realized, in the matter either of sonority or balance.

In recording one's impression of this fine work as a whole, however, it is undesirable to be swayed too much by analytical or even critical considerations. Basil Maine, in his book on Elgar, utters a timely warning in this respect, when he says " the tendency of contemporary criticism is to follow the analytical method to the exclusion of all others " and to be largely " preoccupied with dissection ". This is a perfectly justifiable censure. There can be no worse way of listening than this, because the good composer always tries to hide his artifice, and we pay him a poor compliment if, in giving ear to his music, our minds are busily engaged in

trying to discover how it is all done. The present writer has endeavoured to trace the main course of the music, and he would not wish any personal criticisms, offered in passing, to influence other listeners in forming their judgment. Though the disciples of some of the cerebral music which is so much in fashion to-day may dispute it, the ultimate appeal of every great work to the hearer is its appeal to the emotions.

In this symphony the emotions are undoubtedly stirred to the depths, and the normal listener feels as Wordsworth felt when he beheld a rainbow in the sky —his heart leaps up. He is in the presence of a manifestation of beauty which, like the rainbow, may be explained, but, as a miracle of light and colour, is capable of overwhelming us with its loveliness over and over again.

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra (*Op. 61*)

The creation of a concerto for solo instrument and orchestra demands very special qualities in the composer. To justify its existence it must provide the solo performer with certain opportunities for the display of virtuosity. At the same time any work on a scale as big as this must have main themes of symphonic importance, and these themes must be capable of effective presentation by the instrument chosen to predominate. If a concerto is a symphony with an *obbligato* solo part the listener is apt to resent the presence of the soloist, and to regard him as an unnecessary intrusion. If, on the other hand, the orchestra is kept too far in the background, there arises at once a feeling that it is unnecessary for it to be there at all. The problem is, indeed, so

extremely difficult to solve that there is little cause for wonder at the paucity of really satisfactory violin concertos in existence.

Reviewing, in perspective, the four or five great works of the kind which have been created, one curious and well-nigh inexplicable circumstance calls for comment. The best piano music has always been written by pianists, indeed it may almost be said that no composer who could not play the piano ever wrote well for the instrument, and this applies especially to concertos. But, oddly enough, it does not apply in the case of the violin. The best violin concertos, excepting Mozart's, but including those of Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms, and Max Bruch, are the work of composers whose acquaintance with the special technique of the instrument was either non-existent or very limited. Perhaps there is more than chance in this. A violinist is liable to succumb to a temptation to exhibit the utmost that his instrument can do, and to delight in things which are violinistic rather than interesting as music. With few exceptions, violinist-composers have shown themselves deficient in constructive power, as well as less inventive and less enterprising in the matter of harmonic design than pianist-composers.

Elgar, however, was in the latter respect one of the most notable exceptions. He was a violinist, and so proud of the circumstance that he was always inclined to be a little scornful of composers nurtured at the keyboard. Nobody could possibly contend that his music lacked any of the qualities which have just been enumerated. He was too fine a musician, also, to view the concerto form merely with the eyes of a virtuoso. Therefore hopes ran high when it was known that he had completed a big work for violin with orchestra.

Elgar's concerto is regarded by many as one of his chief successes, and it is undoubtedly a work of great distinction and some considerable power. The score is prefaced by an unfinished sentence in Spanish:

"Aqui està encerrada el alma de . . .",

which, being interpreted, signifies "Here is enshrined the soul of . . ." [1] Another "Enigma", but nobody has been known to bother much about this one. What is enshrined in the work for us is the soul of some of the most characteristically personal music Elgar ever put upon paper. The thematic material is almost bewilderingly rich and varied. It is developed at such length that many must regret that the composer gave so little heed to that very valuable art—the art of compression. In the first movement alone we have many moods, ranging from breezy, almost stormy restlessness to lyric romanticism; from strenuous rhythmic insistence to remote mystic contemplation. The *Andante*, which opens with a beautiful theme, promising definite contrast, is all too soon caught up, once more, in a whirl of conflicting agitation. The finale, again, remarkable as it is for forceful inventiveness (culminating in a most original and wonderfully devised accompanied *cadenza*) strains the nerves of the listener still further, so that when the work is over he is very nearly reduced to a state of mental exhaustion in which it is difficult to register any definite emotional impression.

The fault of Elgar's concerto is, indeed, its excessive diversity of style. It attempts too extensive a range of moods in the course of a single composition. There is enough material here, and good material too, to supply

[1] This cryptic sentence is a quotation from an address to the reader prefixed to Lesage's *Gil Blas*.

two concertos instead of one, and the composer's elaborations (both in the solo part and in the orchestra) are so profuse as to give one an almost oppressive feeling of " over-crowding " in music. It makes great physical demands upon the soloist, also, and requires so big a tone in places than an average player is liable, as one critic has observed, to give an impression of " linked coarseness long-drawn-out ". But, after all, much the same might be said of the Brahms concerto, which is likewise not fit to be tackled by any but the most tonally powerful violinists.

Whether the work will take its place amongst the greatest violin concertos of all time remains to be seen. It is impossible to anticipate the verdict of posterity. Certainly it contains a multitude of significant beauties. Equally certainly it is typical of its time, as well as of its composer, in that it represents a sincere effort to translate the intricacies of a strenuous and complex age from life into art. If this concerto is not played by violinists in the future it will not be on account of its difficulty —for *virtuosi* are inclined to welcome rather than to shirk technical problems—and certainly not through any lack of opportunity for display in the solo part. It will depend upon whether the public is ready to grant the sustained attention required to unravel such a surfeit of complexities as the score presents, and whether the pleasure experienced is commensurate with the effort demanded.

In the long run it is listeners who determine the verdict of posterity—not performers.

It only remains to be said that Elgar's concerto has, so far, been exceptionally fortunate in its interpreters. Sponsored in the first instance by Kreisler, the finest violinist of his generation, it became the major work in

the repertory of Albert Sammons. With such commanding advantages it has had every chance to reveal its full expressiveness.

Symphony in E Flat, No. 2 (Op. 63)

Elgar's second symphony, published and first performed in 1911, is inscribed " to the Memory of His Late Majesty King Edward VII ". Most of it was certainly written before King Edward's death, for the title-page tells us that the work was designed " early in 1910 " to be a " loyal tribute ". The second movement, however, has such a grave solemnity of mood, and partakes so much of the character of a funeral elegy, that in all probability it was added to the scheme after King George V ascended to the throne.

The symphony, in other respects, is not elegiac in mood. In addition to the memorial dedication it bears the further inscription:

> " Rarely, rarely, comest thou
> Spirit of Delight!"

which are the opening words of the well-known " Song " by Shelley. Elgar's admirers are by no means agreed as to the correct interpretation that should be put upon the music in reference to this quotation. Is the stress to be laid on the Spirit of Delight itself, or upon the rarity of its visitation? The composer himself did not tell us, but we are given to understand that he described his composition as being " on a totally different psychological plane from that of the first symphony ", and as representing " a more serene mood ". This is helpful, but it does not solve the problem. The serenity of mood which Elgar may have felt in composing the music is certainly

not the dominant mood which the symphony engenders in the minds of most listeners.

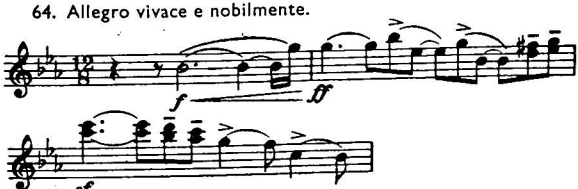
Ernest Newman, oddly enough, uses the word "jocundity" in connexion with the work. Jocundity is a quality often evident in Elgar's lighter pieces, such as the *Cockaigne* overture, but few listeners, however hard they searched, would be able to discover any traces of the genial good humour suggested by that word in the pages of the second symphony! The opening lines of Shelley's fourth stanza:

> "Let me set my mournful ditty
> To a merry measure;
> Thou wilt never come for pity,
> Thou wilt come for pleasure,"

might have given Elgar the cue for such an interpretation, but he has been far more concerned with the "sighs of grief" which reproved the spirit, and with the weary nights and days spent in search of it. The few passages of serenity in Elgar's score are short-lived, and restlessly dismissed. The merry measures may be sought, but they are never found. It is impatient music for all its adventurousness, and the composer's impetuosity is so insistent and long continued (especially in the first movement) that it becomes, at times, almost laborious.

The symphony leaps immediately into activity with its opening bars:

64. Allegro vivace e nobilmente.

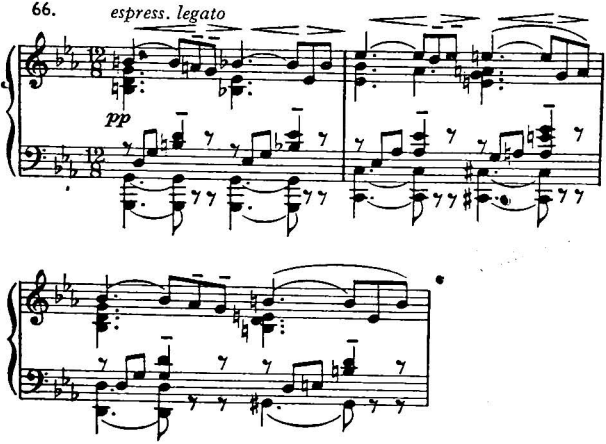


The fine swinging impulse here is supported by full-blooded orchestration, and the $\frac{12}{8}$ rhythm, with its constant syncopations, seems continually to be climbing upwards, as if it were endeavouring to grasp something beyond its reach:

65.

The rhythmic tension is not relaxed in the smallest degree for forty-three bars, after which there is a brief moment of tenderness, on the arrival of a beautiful second theme. Despite its strange indecision of key, the basic tonality is still that of E flat major:

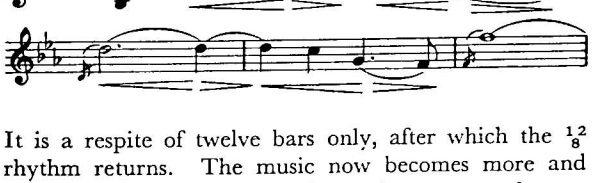
66. *espress. legato*



We are caught up once again, however, in the swirl of the predominant rhythms. At last there is a change in

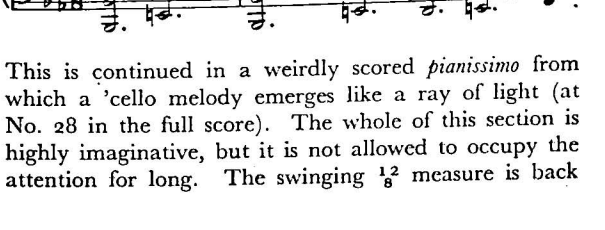
the pulsation, as well as in the tonality, when the 'cellos announce a new subject, the lighter scoring of which affords a great relief to the ear:

67. *dolce e delicato*



It is a respite of twelve bars only, after which the $\frac{12}{8}$ rhythm returns. The music now becomes more and more strenuous, and the orchestration more and more venturesome, with clamorous broken phrases on the brass. Ex. 67 is heard fully scored, and accompanied by a triumphant fanfare rhythm on the trumpets. When eventually the tumult subsides, a strange effect emerges from muted strings and muted horns, like the dim revelation of some ghostly figure enveloped in a mist:

68. Poco meno mosso.



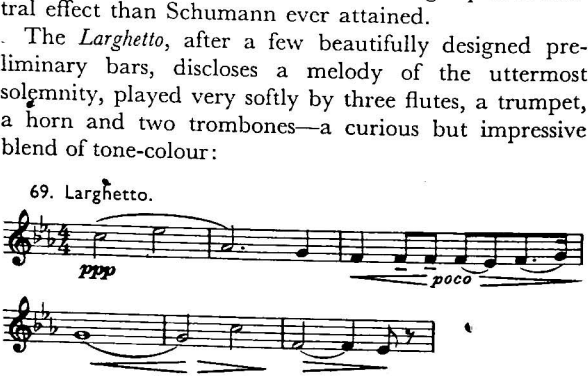
This is continued in a weirdly scored *pianissimo* from which a 'cello melody emerges like a ray of light (at No. 28 in the full score). The whole of this section is highly imaginative, but it is not allowed to occupy the attention for long. The swinging $\frac{12}{8}$ measure is back

again, and carries us along until we resume the main material of the first section of the movement, which follows closely the normal procedure of symphonic recapitulation. The Coda, only four bars long, and all on the key-chord, shoots up like a dart of flame, and puts an end suddenly to the long-continued stress of the music.

Despite short spells of quietude and mystical intrusions, this is a feverish movement, crowded with notes. It reminds one forcibly of Schumann's symphonic music in this respect, but it exhibits a far surer grasp of orchestral effect than Schumann ever attained.

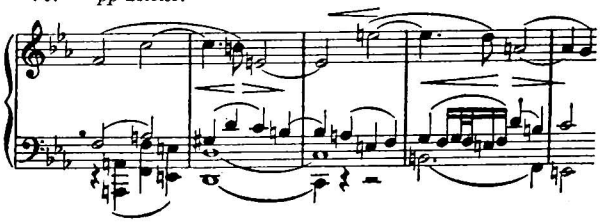
The *Larghetto*, after a few beautifully designed preliminary bars, discloses a melody of the uttermost solemnity, played very softly by three flutes, a trumpet, a horn and two trombones—a curious but impressive blend of tone-colour:

69. Larghetto.



The music proceeds with a march-like tread, expressed by the use of soft accompanying chords on the weak beats of the bars. This is not long continued. The somewhat gloomy atmosphere soon gives way to music of a more aspiring nature, which leads to the second main theme, restless in tonality but searching in mood. At first it is given a simple three-part setting for strings alone:

70. *pp dolciss.*



but elaborate developments ensue, where the brass is used melodically against a most intricate network of string tone. Presently we reach a more important subject, of tragic significance, which tugs at the heart-strings and thrills us with its emotional intensity:

71.

Upon this rich and deeply-felt material the composer builds up his impressive structure. There are some marvellous passages of pure colour-design in the movement. One of these, which occurs just before the return of Ex. 69, should be retained in the memory, for it is heard again at the end of the movement. It is based on a quite simple figure in thirds, first for oboes, then for clarinets. In the context its effect is magical.

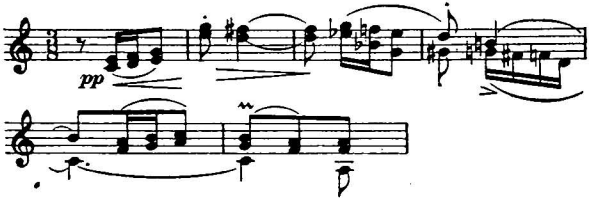
72. (*Oboes*)

After this the chief themes pass again in procession before us, and there is a subtly imagined Coda, which starts with an impassioned outburst and sinks down to phrases

which seem to express the very shudders of unspeakable grief.

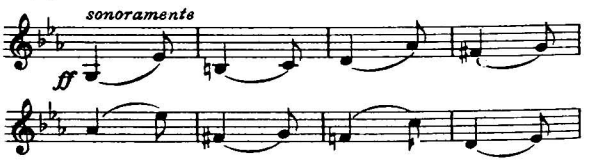
This remarkable piece of tone-painting is succeeded by a *Presto*, which is rightly called by the composer a Rondo. It is so serious, and, in spite of its great speed, so eerie in its mood, that it is not in any sense a scherzo. If the rhythm at first suggests playfulness,

73. Presto.



we soon discover that no happiness is destined to grow out of it, and, when we reach the second theme, the music, as Basil Maine aptly suggests, "seems to be struggling to beat down some hidden unformed fear".

74.



There is one extremely puzzling episode, where the mood suddenly changes. Over a long pedal-point the whole orchestra throbs with excitement, all the drums beat in continuous triplets, and there is a big *crescendo* culminating in a frenzied outburst resembling some barbaric dance of a savage tribe. What does it mean, and what is it doing here? These are questions very diffi-

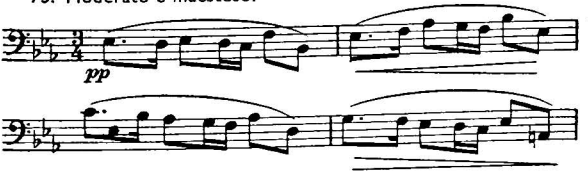
cult to answer. It is said that Elgar had in his mind the lines of Tennyson's *Maud*:

> " The hoofs of the horses beat,
> Beat into my scalp and my brain."

If this is so it accounts for the delirious character of the music, but not for its barbarity, or for the odd distortion of one of the most spiritual themes of the first movement (Ex. 68), which seems to be fighting to be heard throughout the turmoil. Elgar has, indeed, presented us with yet another Enigma here, which no one has succeeded in solving.

The finale is considerably less complicated in construction than the earlier movements of the symphony. It opens, softly and impressively, with a bass theme in which the rhythm of the first bar is maintained throughout each succeeding bar:

75. Moderato e maestoso.



The *contour* of the music reminds us, once more, of Schumann, who was so fond of rhythmic repetitions in his themes. W. H. Reed tells us that he found this melody noted in Elgar's sketch-book with the word " Tuba " written against it. Although it has undoubtedly a character which suggests that instrument, it never appears in the symphony as a tuba tune. It is first presented in the grey tones of clarinets, bassoons, horns and 'cellos, and it is interesting to observe that it is only occasionally

used in the upper parts. Incidentally it is very difficult for the horns to play.

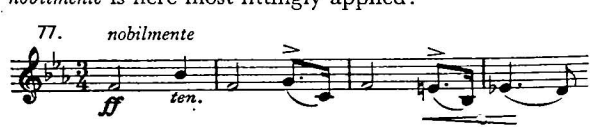
The treatment of this subject, after what has gone before, sounds frank and straightforward: it is allowed to pursue its course unencumbered by elaborations, for an unusually long time.

The same may be said of the second theme, which has a very fine aspiring swing in it:

76. *ff ma dolce*

It moves in dignified strides, with almost continuous crotchet basses marking a rhythmic pulsation of the most elemental kind. Immediately after the point of climax our attention is claimed for an even broader melody, to which the composer's favourite direction *nobilmente* is here most fittingly applied:

77. *nobilmente*



This is massive music. There is no blare or showy magnificence, but a deep and overpowering solemnity, before which one bows the head. The development deals chiefly with the first and second themes, the former being combined with many repetitions of an elegiac phrase, clearly based on Ex. 77:

78.

which occurs again in the Coda. There is an allusion, towards the end of the symphony, to a section of the initial subject of the first movement. This is so cunningly veiled that it passes unnoticed in performance except by the most careful listener. The composer's subtle use of it, however, brings about a reversion to the peculiar mood of unrest which the opening of the symphony aroused in our minds.

The " Spirit of Delight " has at no point been allowed to take hold of us. Even this finale, for all its nobility, has a strong undercurrent of melancholy. As it reaches its quiet, but not untroubled close, we are left mourning the absence of a happiness which, from first to last, has actually eluded us.

It is difficult to describe the feelings which a good performance of this powerful work must engender. The comparisons with Schumann which have been made in this estimate must not be taken to refer to the quality of the music so much as to the methods of presentation. Yet there is, even in the music itself, a marked kinship with the sorrow-laden romanticism which Schumann's symphonic movements so frequently expressed. We know how devoutly Elgar admired Schumann's symphonies. It is undeniable that in this work the direct influence of the master he revered can clearly be traced.

A comparison between the first and second symphonies of Elgar is specially interesting because, although both are strongly characteristic of the composer in method and harmonic design, there are fundamental differences which widely separate one from the other. The first symphony inspires us to exultation: it deals with many conflicting emotions, but it leaves us satisfied, refreshed, and, above all, hopeful. The second symphony, on the other hand, is mentally disturbing, although we

recognize that it has equal musical power, equal mastery and control, and certainly equal intensity. Neither of the works is easy to listen to, but the effort demanded by the composer from his audience receives a more definable reward in the case of the first symphony.

One would willingly go through the experience of hearing No. 1 at any time: No. 2 is not merely less inviting—there are days when it would be impossible to endure it at all. This, in a sense, is a tribute to the emotional power of the composer. Like the Piano Quintet of César Franck, with its engulfing gloom, or the shattering realisms of Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*, this is not the music one can approach without being steeled for a "mental fight". Its impressiveness is no less evident than its oppressiveness, and it is only a very cold-blooded individual who could fail to succumb to either.

Falstaff (*Op. 68*)

Before attempting to estimate the value of a work as complex in its structure as this we must have a clear idea in our minds as to the category to which it belongs. It is not enough merely to call it "programme music", and leave it at that. We must try to realize how and why programme music came into being. What may almost be called a revolt against the regularities of the classical forms of the great instrumental composers, from Haydn to Brahms, was engineered by many of the more advanced composers of the nineteenth century. The revolt took two alternative courses—programmism and impressionism. The more solid, the more intellectual writers, from Berlioz to Richard Strauss, chose the former; the more temperamental writers, such as

Debussy and Delius, chose the latter. The object in both cases was, presumably, the same—to appeal more directly to the imagination of the hearers. The programmists sought to do this by making their audience correlate music with literary ideas, or ideas outside music; the impressionists called upon their listeners to dream rather than to think.

Elgar was by no means an impressionist composer, and it was natural that he should be influenced by those who belonged to the opposite camp—the thinkers rather than the dreamers. We have seen already how strong a part outward suggestion had played in the conception of his music. The *Enigma* variations were inspired by the characters and peculiarities of his friends, *Cockaigne* and *In the South* were inspired by localities, the second symphony by a poem of Shelley, and so on. But now, in *Falstaff*, his thoughts were entirely dominated by the actions, motives and surroundings of one of the most baffling and incongruous of personages in the whole of literature. The music also attempted a far more definite illustration of incidents than formerly. Elgar was not content to study the character of Falstaff directly from the plays of Shakespeare—he also delved into the pages of the most learned commentators, and evolved a Falstaff which was a compound of the interpretations of Dowden, Deighton, Morgann, Brandes, Hazlitt, and a few more besides.

It is necessary to realize this, because it is no use pretending that we can get all we should get out of Elgar's *Symphonic Study* without a great deal of preliminary preparation. We can enjoy it to a certain extent, no doubt, as we can enjoy an opera of Wagner sung in its original tongue if we do not understand a word of German. But we cannot presume to be

acquainted even with the main purpose of the work, unless we are prepared to spend some time studying Elgar's score side by side with each incident of the story which it illustrates. The composer himself was aware of this, for he published an interesting analytical essay concurrently with the music, which certainly helps us to follow his lines of thought if we try to do so.

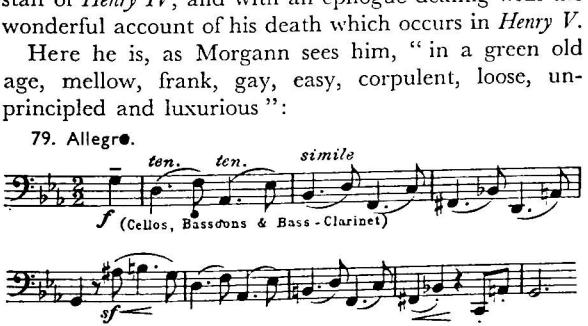
The general public at present finds it difficult to take Elgar's *Falstaff* to its heart, simply because it refuses to be troubled with such matters as these. This is a great pity, for the work is an undoubted masterpiece. Musically there is scarcely a flaw in it—scarcely a bar that is not Elgar at his ripest. Every idea is fresh and spontaneous, every planned effect strikes home with absolute certainty.

Any quarrel which we may have with the work is concerned only with the question as to how far an audience can be expected to be primed in the task of listening. But if Richard Strauss won his way with *Till Eulenspiegel* and *Don Quixote* why should not Elgar do the same with *Falstaff*, which is at least worthy to rank with Strauss at his best from the musical point of view? The trouble, however, goes rather deeper than that. With Strauss external influences dictate a theatrical mode of expression: he deals in stark realism. Elgar, on the other hand, was an introspective musician, and his musical illustrations in *Falstaff* are by no means recognizable in the same clear way. For this reason it is certainly not easy for a listener to grasp the composer's programme straight away, as it is in the case of, say, *Till Eulenspiegel*. One is led to wish that all thoughts of the story could be cast aside, and that one could listen to the music as one listens to a symphony. It is obvious, however, that Elgar did not mean us to do this. If he had done so he would not have taken such pains to

explain the derivation of each phase of his musical thought, point by point.

The difficulties are not insuperable. Every enthusiast who will possess himself of the score, the composer's analysis, and the admirable gramophone records of the work issued by His Master's Voice, will not only learn a great deal about the character of Falstaff that he probably did not know before, but convince himself of the astonishing quality of Elgar's art. First of all we must set aside the Falstaff of the *Merry Wives* altogether, which we now know was not the real Falstaff at all, but a new and inferior character, created through the whim of Queen Elizabeth, who was anxious to see the fat knight in love. Elgar does not deal at any point with the farcical incidents of the later play, which had already been successfully exploited for musical purposes by Nicolai and Verdi. We are presented with the Falstaff of *Henry IV*, and with an epilogue dealing with the wonderful account of his death which occurs in *Henry V*.

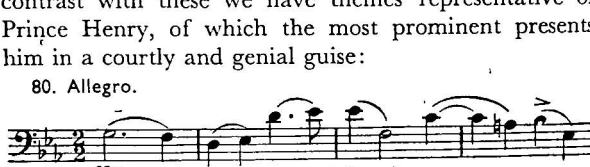
Here he is, as Morgann sees him, "in a green old age, mellow, frank, gay, easy, corpulent, loose, unprincipled and luxurious":



This is the main theme, which, as Elgar points out, "appears in varied *tempi* throughout the work, and knits together the whole musical fabric". There are other Falstaff themes besides, which deal, severally, with the

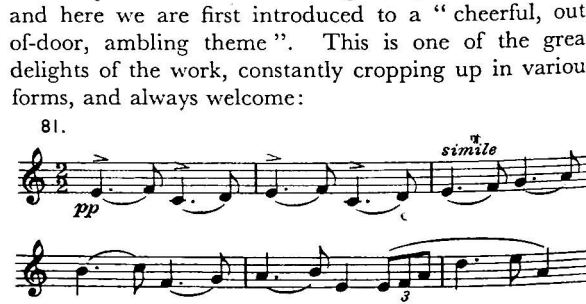
rogue in his "cajoling and persuasive mood" and exhibit his "boastfulness and colossal mendacity". In contrast with these we have themes representative of Prince Henry, of which the most prominent presents him in a courtly and genial guise:

80. Allegro.



At first the music is pleasantly conversational: the various melodies are most ingeniously played with and interwoven. Then we are transported to Eastcheap and invited to enter the tavern "where Falstaff is monarch", and we witness, in our mind's ear, a bustling scene amongst "the ostlers and carriers and drawers and merchants and pilgrims", and the loud, lively women. The next scene is that of the midnight exploit at Gadshill, and here we are first introduced to a "cheerful, out-of-door, ambling theme". This is one of the great delights of the work, constantly cropping up in various forms, and always welcome:

81.



It will be seen that it is a melody of a type very familiar in Elgar—a continuous repetitive rhythm of long-note followed by short-note—but it is perhaps the freshest and most genial example in all his works of this melodic device.

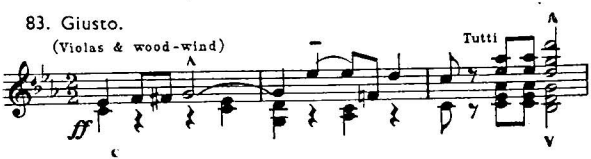
There is a great deal of picturesque scoring in this episode; there are mysteriously expectant semiquaver passages, punctuated by muffled horn-calls " through the wood ". With a rush of scampering triplets, against a hammering rhythm on the wind, the Prince appears, and the short struggle for the " twice stolen booty " takes place. One of the most ponderous of the Falstaff themes is now quickened and twisted to make a roguish *fugato*, which depicts the discomfiture of the robbers. Eventually the characters are back again at the Boar's Head, and great play is made with a crisp, merry phrase, already associated with the chattering of the " honest gentlewomen ", the Hostess and Doll Tearsheet, but here extended with much capricious humour:

The music resembles, at this point, a fully developed scherzo, with an almost uproarious climax. When calm is at last restored we come to what is, perhaps, the only piece of sheer Straussian realism in the score. Falstaff is depicted sinking down into a heavy sleep, with snores on the tuba and double-bassoon.

The story is now interrupted for a brief interlude of absolute music—a " dream picture " the composer calls it—which is laid-out for small orchestra. It is a vision of quiet loveliness, which we may interpret as we will, though Elgar connects it with Falstaff's dreams of his early youth, when he was a slim and nimble page to the Duke of Norfolk.

Next we have Falstaff gathering together his scarecrow army—Wart, Mouldy, and the rest—and a repre-

sentation of their uncouth martial gait. After that comes the visit to Shallow's orchard, where we once more come to rest for a second interlude, not quite so attractive as the first, but containing some sedate, sadly-merry pipe and tabor music. This interlude ended we have the hurried entry of Pistol with his announcement "Thy tender lambkin now is King—Harry the Fifth's the man!" The march themes are resumed, and we are in London again for an illustration of the famous scene at Westminster, where Falstaff and his company await the coming of the new monarch. The royal procession is heard on its way:



Into the continuation of this the Falstaff themes are "expectantly thrown", and when the King arrives, "glittering in golden coat . . . and gorgeous as the sun at midsummer", we have a powerful climax with a fully-scored version of the Prince theme (Ex. 80). As Falstaff confronts his sovereign there is a dramatic statement of Ex. 79, against a rush of quavers. The ensuing parley is not very easy to follow. The recitative-like passages seem to be striving to express more than music without words can clearly convey, but, with a rude and brutal fanfare, it is apparent that Falstaff is swept aside:

> "How ill white hairs become a fool and jester:
> I banish thee on pain of death."

By what may be termed, perhaps, "musician's licence"

rather than "dramatic licence", we pass straight on to Falstaff's death, which certainly did not take place in the streets of Westminster, but in his bed. The composer is here a little less successful, though his orchestral resource never fails him. The broken man weakens—"he is so shaked that it is most lamentable to behold". We have cunning allusions to the incidents which have preceded the death scene, but the note of pathos is not very marked, except, perhaps, when we hear the Prince theme for the last time. The few bars which follow the sustained chord of C major on muted brass (which illustrates Falstaff's final collapse) are, however, very striking. We hear a distant muffled drum, a phrase of the march theme which represented the King's coming (Ex. 83), another roll on the drum, fading into *pianissimo*; then, with an abrupt single *pizzicato* chord, the work is over. "The man of stern reality has triumphed", he has "cast off his followers"; and only in their memory "shall a pattern or a measure live".

In reviewing Elgar's *Symphonic Study*, as a whole, we may feel that the composer has attempted to cover too wide and diverse a field in the course of a single symphonic movement. The work deals with incident as well as with character, and music can quite legitimately be made to express either. But the only musical medium that can satisfactorily present us with both together is opera. What an opera the complete Falstaff of *Henry IV* would make! One can only regret that Elgar did not enlarge the scope of his conception, and give it the full expression that a stage performance alone could supply.

Nevertheless it is only just to admit that, having chosen his medium, the composer keeps within the boundaries imposed with remarkable skill. Only now and again,

in some passages of recitative, for bassoon or 'cello, do we feel the need of words to amplify or clarify the message. At such times we may ask ourselves " What does this mean?"—and directly we do this the music must necessarily become inadequate in itself. In the main Elgar confines himself to the boisterous humours of the situations, and the broad outlines of the characterization. While it is not desirable for the listener to set aside all reference to the characters or the story, it is well to remember that these are merely the source of the composer's inspiration, and that the best compliment we can pay him is to allow the music to delight us without trying too hard to make it fit in with our own conception of the scenes and personages of Shakespeare's plays. For therein lies the danger of missing much of the refreshment which this wonderfully amusing, vivid, eloquent, and resourceful composition is capable of providing.

CHAPTER X

THE GREAT WAR AND AFTER

1914-34

The artist, if he is a true artist, has, in his production, conveyed to other people the feeling which he lived through.

Tolstoy.

DURING the early months of 1914 Elgar does not appear to have been very active in composition. He had doubtless many social engagements, and perhaps residence in London tended, at this time, to divert his attention to some extent from the main purpose of his life. He accepted many invitations to conduct his works in different parts of the country. One of the most notable of these performances took place in June, at Canterbury Cathedral, where the Leeds Philharmonic Choir and the London Symphony Orchestra assembled to combine in a magnificent presentation of *The Apostles*, under ideal conditions.

When the Great War began, however, Elgar's emotions were aroused in various ways. For a time he served as a special constable in the Hampstead Division and in the Volunteer Reserve. It is more important to record here, however, that his creative instincts seemed to receive a new impetus. He was stirred to produce a series of remarkable works, of which the first, performed at the Queen's Hall on 7th December, was perhaps the most remarkable of all. This was an orchestral setting

to accompany the recitation of a poem by the Belgian writer Emile Cammaerts, called *Carillon*. Nobody who heard that piece at that time can possibly forget the thrill which it produced. Recitations with music are seldom successful, but this one is triumphantly so. The music in itself is simple, being chiefly built upon a four-note bell phrase, which is used throughout as a kind of *ostinato*. But it is charged with an emotional conviction which is not to be found in so intensified a form in any other of Elgar's compositions. The poem (which is, of course, written in French, and loses much of its force in translation) is an almost frenzied appeal to Belgians to rejoice in their cause, to sing of the pride of their defeats, and to push on wildly until at last they shall enter the enemy's capital as conquerors. The dramatic power of the musical outburst released at the words

" Et de leur entrée triomphale, là-bas,
A Berlin!"

is terrific. The work was first declaimed by Tita Brand (Madame Cammaerts) but, a little later on, it was taken up by the great French actress, Rejâne, whose consummate artistry and white-heat of enthusiasm swept the audience off its feet, and created a sensation in the concert-hall the like of which London can never have witnessed either before or since. It is a pity that some of the most glowing music Elgar ever conceived was, by its very nature, so bound up with the excitement of the period at which it was written that revival seems unlikely. It could not possibly be performed adequately apart from the poem which it illustrates, and any attempt to make that poem live to-day would be doomed to failure. *Carillon* can, therefore, only survive in the memories of

those who heard it, as a poignant and unforgettable experience.

Incidentally the performances of this composition brought in large sums for Belgian charities, and Elgar was persuaded to write a work on Polish themes in order to benefit the funds then being raised for another stricken ally. This took the form of a symphonic prelude called *Polonia*, which was performed in London in July, 1915. Structurally it was a far more important work than the *Carillon*, and it was brilliantly scored, but, quite naturally, it did not move the English public to the same extent. Nor did two further essays of the same kind, *Le Drapeau Belge* and *Une Voix dans le Désert* (again based on poems by Cammaerts), create more than a passing interest.

Of slighter texture, but of far more musical importance, were the delicate entr'actes and songs which Elgar wrote for Algernon Blackwood's fantastic children's play, *The Starlight Express*, which was produced at the Kingsway Theatre in 1916. The play was, unhappily, not very successful, but the music which accompanied it does not deserve to be forgotten. It is of an altogether finer quality than that of the ephemeral songs called *Fringes of the Fleet*, settings of verses by Kipling, which were staged and sung at the Coliseum in 1917, under the composer's direction at every performance during their short run. Elgar seems to have enjoyed experiences of this kind, and to have been gratified by the friendly greetings which he received from the music-hall audiences.

Of greater moment than any of these things, excepting perhaps *Carillon*, were the three cantatas which he wrote at this time, under the collective title of *The Spirit of England*. All three were settings of striking poems by Laurence Binyon—*The Fourth of August*, *To Women*, and

For the Fallen. In them Elgar to some extent reverted to the choral style of *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom.* The exigencies of the theatre were no longer in his mind, and the music was conceived upon a spacious and dignified scale in harmony with the text. The first performance of this three-fold musical poem in its entirety took place at the Albert Hall in November, 1917. *For the Fallen,* however, is the only portion of the work which has survived, partly because the verses of this are, alone, still suitable for performance, but mainly because the music is more effective, and more inspired as a whole than that contained in its companion sections.

The strain of the War at about this time began to tell very heavily upon Elgar's nervous system. He longed for the quietude of some country retreat, where he could live peacefully and without disturbance. With this in view he rented a cottage called Brinkwells, at Fittleworth in Sussex, and there he and Lady Elgar took up their residence in 1918. Brinkwells was charmingly situated amongst woods and chestnut plantations, and there was a studio in the garden which formed a pleasant music-room. At first Elgar set aside all his usual activities, including music, and became engrossed in woodcraft. W. H. Reed tells us that he not only felled the chestnut poles, but stripped and split them, making hoops for barrels, stakes for fences, and so on.

Before long, however, Elgar's thoughts were turning again in the direction of music. The physical exercise was stimulating, and the surroundings were inspiring to the creative mind, so that he was soon busily engaged in composition. It was composition of a different kind from any upon which he had embarked since his early youth. He was writing chamber music. The year 1918 saw the completion of no less than three full-length

works in this category—a sonata for piano and violin, a string quartet, and a quintet for piano and strings. The sonata was first played in public in March, 1919, by those two firm friends of the composer's later years, Landon Ronald and W. H. Reed, and the quartet and quintet were included in the programme of a chamber concert given in London in May of the same year, by Albert Sammons, W. H. Reed, Raymond Jeremy, and Felix Salmond, with William Murdoch as pianist.

The appearance of these works naturally excited intense interest in the musical world. For some years past an earnest band of English musicians, younger and less famous than Elgar, had been actively engaged in the composition of chamber music. A few of these writers had, indeed, asserted their claims to recognition almost entirely through their special accomplishment in this field, and had built up solid reputations on the strength of it. Amongst these were such prominent figures as J. B. McEwen, John Ireland, Frank Bridge, and Arnold Bax. There was much speculation, therefore, as to how far Elgar's first essays in the medium (written when he was sixty-one years of age) would stand comparison with the fine chamber music which had brought the more advanced phases of British music to the fore. How, indeed, would Elgar's chamber works fare even when placed beside the earlier examples by his elder contemporary, Stanford, who had given much time and thought to this intimate type of music during his ripest creative years? Many no doubt felt that Elgar's genius was so great that, whilst marching in step with Stanford and the younger writers, he would be able to tower above them and establish a new supremacy in yet another department of his art. It was, in any case, a daring adventure at his age, and deserved recognition

as such. As to the measure in which he succeeded, this must be left for consideration in a later chapter. Perhaps the hopes of the optimistic were too rosy, and some disappointment was inevitable.

Meantime Elgar was embarking upon the composition of what proved to be the last really important work of his life—the concerto for violoncello and orchestra, which was first played by Felix Salmond at the Queen's Hall in October, 1919, with the composer directing. Here Elgar was on his own ground again, and he produced a distinctive masterpiece which, like *The Dream of Gerontius*, survived the temporary setback of a curiously unsatisfactory and insufficiently rehearsed first-performance, and established itself, in due course, as a definite success.

Within a few months of the production of this concerto a dark shadow fell upon the composer, from the envelopment of which he never wholly emerged. Early in 1920, at Severn House, Hampstead, Lady Elgar died. She had been ailing since the end of 1919, and W. H. Reed, who was a constant visitor to the house at this time, has told us how the vitality and energy that had been so characteristic of her seemed gradually to be ebbing away. The blow came on 7th April. It was " the greatest tragedy of Sir Edward's life ", and he was overwhelmed with grief. The funeral took place on 10th April, at the Catholic church of St. Wulstan, Little Malvern. The rites were simple. A string quartet of professional friends attended, and at the conclusion of the service they played, at her daughter Carice's request, the beautiful *Andante* from Elgar's recently composed quartet, a movement for which she had felt a special affection.

The influence of Lady Elgar upon her husband's

Photograph, Claude Harris

LADY ELGAR

career has already been spoken of in an earlier chapter. Only those who knew the Elgars in their family life are competent to estimate the value or extent of that influence. But even the most casual observer was able to perceive with what rare and gentle unselfishness she fulfilled her own lofty conception of wifely devotion. She was a woman with creative gifts of her own, but, when she married, those gifts were laid aside, except where they could be of service to her husband. She made no claims to critical knowledge of music, but she had the highest ideals. Her generous capacity for discerning the fine quality of what she heard was balanced by a natural instinct for perceiving any weaknesses which might endanger the artistic completeness of a work at any particular point. Elgar knew in an instant if any such reservations existed in her mind, although they were not expressed in words, and he has left it on record that he sometimes rewrote whole passages of his music in deference to a silent glance or gesture that made him aware of some inappropriate or inadequate turn of thought. When he was engaged on some big orchestral or choral work she would quietly and neatly prepare his scoring paper, inserting clefs and brackets, key-signatures and bar-lines, so that he might start afresh each day without that preliminary drudgery which most composers are unable to avoid. He came to be so dependent upon her practical help and sympathy that he felt utterly desolate when she was taken from him.

Fortunately Elgar had numerous engagements to occupy his mind during the rest of the year. He conducted his works in different parts of the country, and when September came he was needed at the Worcester Festival, and would not disappoint his devotees. He had not the heart to write any music, although, when this

festival was over, he spoke tentatively of the possibility of completing the third part of the trilogy he had planned when he wrote *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*. Nothing came of it, however, either at this time or later. In 1921 he disposed of his Hampstead house, and took a flat in St. James's Place, where he made a brave effort to live a sociable life. Here he was within walking distance of the many clubs to which he belonged, and he endeavoured to add to the circle of his professional friends by entertaining some of the younger generation of composers and conductors. But London life proved either too distracting or too distasteful. He decided, before the year was out, to return to his native haunts. He took a house at Kempsey, near Worcester, retaining his London flat as a *pied à terre*. At Kempsey he started to write again, but not to compose in a full sense. He made his masterly orchestral transcriptions of Bach's Fantasia and Fugue in C minor, and Handel's D minor Overture, at this time. These were performed, successively, at Gloucester in 1922 and at Worcester in 1923. But the public still awaited original work from Elgar's pen. He was busy in other ways, travelling to many places (including Paris and Dieppe) to conduct his works, and though his friends tried hard, by all sorts of wiles, to incite him to resume serious composition, such efforts were unavailing.

Elgar loved his home at Kempsey; he was sorrowful and distressed when he was unable to renew the lease of the house, and was obliged to search for a new dwelling-place. For a time he lived in temporary quarters at Stratford-on-Avon, where he found pleasure in boating and fishing, and after that he took a furnished house in Worcester. He was restless and unsettled. A voyage to South America, where he sailed for a thousand miles

up the Amazon, provided some interesting experiences, and he returned to England refreshed, but still homeless. Eventually he settled down at Rainbow Hill, within easy distance of both Worcester and Malvern, where he found what was destined to be his last permanent home in a charming house called Marl Bank.

It was clear that Elgar was by no means inclined to retire from public life, nor were his works neglected by concert-givers. He was still, also, the leading personality at the Three Choirs Festivals each year. Further honours were heaped upon him. He was appointed "Master of the King's Musick" in succession to Sir Walter Parratt in 1924; he received the K.C.V.O. in 1928, and a baronetcy in 1931. There was, therefore, no sign of any abatement, either in official or public circles, of the warm appreciation which he had earned and enjoyed for so long. On the contrary he became, more than ever, a revered figure in English musical life. He held his honours with great dignity, combined with a modesty and simplicity which compelled affectionate admiration.

It was only too evident, however, that although Elgar's zest for composition had not altogether evaporated, he had lost to some extent either the capacity or the physical strength for carrying through the bigger schemes that he planned. During the last twelve years of his life he actually completed very little music, and nothing of comparable importance with that which had established his reputation. But we know that he was by no means idle, and that his brain was still active. He expressed his intention of composing a concerto for piano and orchestra, but this never materialized. He also discussed with Barry Jackson and Bernard Shaw the possibility of writing an opera on a grand scale.

Encouraged in the project by his friends he made copious sketches for this, having decided (despite Barry Jackson's dissuasion) to adapt a little-known play by Ben Jonson, *The Devil is an Ass*, for his purpose. Here again his powers of concentration seemed insufficient to sustain the fervour he showed in planning the scheme in the first instance. Many scattered fragments exist, as evidence of the ideas which were formulating in his mind—including six or seven unfinished dances, and some incomplete vocal numbers—but they were never gathered together into an intelligent whole.

Not until 1930 did Elgar come prominently before the public again as the composer of a new work—the *Severn Suite*, written for a brass band contest at the Crystal Palace. This was followed by a *Nursery Suite* for orchestra, and a fifth *Pomp and Circumstance* march. The former, which was dedicated to "Their Royal Highnesses the Duchess of York and the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret Rose", was first performed early in 1931, at the Kingsway Hall, for the purpose of gramophone recording, and afterwards given in public at one of the Promenade Concerts in August of that year. While by no means an outstanding work, it contains some fanciful and delightful movements, somewhat in the manner of the *Wand of Youth* suites. It was later to become more widely known in the form of a short Ballet Divertissement, which proved a great attraction in the repertory of the Sadler's Wells company.

Apart from the *Nursery Suite* the year 1931 was an unproductive one, although the composer was by no means inactive in other ways. In August he organized a garden party at Marl Bank to entertain the members of the Union of Graduates in Music, who were visiting Worcester. He conducted his works, as usual, at

Gloucester in September, and in November he honoured the gramophone company (in whose activities he was always interested) by opening their new recording studios in St. John's Wood.

In the early part of 1932 he wrote a few slight pieces (for piano and for violin), orchestrated Chopin's *Funeral March*, and conducted a new setting of a short ode by Masefield at the unveiling of the memorial to Queen Alexandra at Marlborough House, on 9th June. When September came there was the Worcester Festival, for which Elgar had prepared a special arrangement for orchestra of his *Severn Suite* for brass band. In October he paid a first visit to Ireland, to conduct his works, and in November he directed the performance of his Violin Concerto by Yehudi Menuhin at the Albert Hall. The end of the year brought with it a tribute which must have been a source of special gratification to its recipient. The B.B.C. organized a series of three concerts in honour of Elgar's seventy-fifth birthday. This was an unique act of homage. The concerts, which took place on 7th, 14th, and 21st December, were devoted, of course, entirely to Elgar's compositions. They not only formed a fitting recognition of his long services to musical art, but focused general attention upon many fine works which had suffered neglect in the past.

The immense interest taken by the public in this event no doubt led the B.B.C. to approach the composer with a tempting offer. This was no less than a handsome and generous commission for a third symphony, to be delivered and produced, if possible, in 1934. Elgar was greatly excited. It was an incentive to immediate activity. When the communication arrived he was still toying with the idea of an opera, but this was at once put on one side and forgotten. His thoughts were

suddenly switched over from the stage to the concert hall, and he began to work enthusiastically, as was his wont, upon separate bits and pieces of the different movements, scribbling on odd sheets of music paper. He was, however, far from well. Ever since the Hereford Festival of 1930, where he struggled through his conducting duties whilst suffering from acute lumbago, Elgar had been failing in health. His mental activity was scarcely impaired, but his physical condition was not what it had been. Not that he became wholly inactive. Indeed at times he seemed ready for all sorts of energetic enterprises and new experiences, which probably taxed his strength. In May, 1933, for instance, he travelled by air to Paris to conduct his Violin Concerto for Menuhin, and to visit Delius (then gravely ill, crippled, and almost blind) at Grez-sur-Loing. The meeting of the two veteran composers was a pleasurable experience for both of them. Although there was little kinship in the artistic outlook of Elgar and Delius as composers, they seemed to enjoy discussing music together, and evidently found many happy and congenial points of contact.

In June, 1933, Elgar's name appeared again in the Honours List, when he received the G.C.V.O., and September found him once more in the conductor's seat at the Hereford Festival. These were, however, destined to be his final honour and his final public engagement. Soon after the festival Elgar was taken painfully ill. At first he was thought to be suffering from sciatica in an acute form, but it was more serious than that; there was some malignant growth which was pressing on the sciatic nerve, and he was advised to undergo an operation. The operation scarcely afforded even temporary relief. Throughout his illness his thoughts were con-

stantly on the symphony, and his mind was working out many details of the instrumentation of the different movements.

His intimate friend W. H. Reed, who visited him at the nursing home in Worcester during the critical days which followed the operation, has given a touching account of how the composer gradually recovered consciousness, and spoke, in broken phrases, of the work which he feared he might not live to complete. He was filled with apprehension lest anybody else should attempt to piece together the fragments, and he made his friend promise that "no one shall ever tinker with it". When that promise had been given he grew calmer, and never again spoke of the symphony. He rallied in a remarkable way, and, early in the New Year, 1934, his condition had sufficiently improved to allow him to be removed to his home at Marl Bank.

A few weeks before he died Elgar made an astonishing, almost a miraculous effort. It had been arranged, some time before, that the composer should direct the recording by the gramophone company of some extracts from *Caractacus*. This was to take place on 22nd January. It was obvious that Elgar would be unable to travel to London for the purpose. The company therefore undertook to fit up a loud-speaker in his room, in order that he might hear the music while it was being played at the studio, and also to fix a microphone above his bed, so that he could give instructions to headquarters, and to some extent control the performance. This was all prepared, and a special music-stand was devised and erected across the bed, at a convenient angle for the patient to read the score whilst remaining in a recumbent position.

When the day arrived it seemed as if there was little

hope of the experiment being carried through, for Elgar was, during the morning, only half conscious. But as the hours passed he recovered his mental lucidity, and by four o'clock, when the recording was to begin, he braced himself for the task, and made a little speech to the players in London through the microphone. Then he listened to the music as it was tried over, criticized the rehearsal in some detail, and was able, after the recording was completed, to hear the discs played through on a gramophone, and to express his approval of the results.

At 7.45 on the morning of Friday, 23rd February, 1934, Edward Elgar breathed his last. His only child, Carice (Mrs. Blake), was with him when the end came.

It had been his earnest desire that no elaborate ceremonial should be allowed to accompany the scenes of his burial. His wishes were respected, and carried out to the letter. The funeral took place on the Monday after his death, 26th February, at St. Wulstan's Catholic Church, Little Malvern, on the eastern slopes of the hills he had known since his childhood and always loved so well. His grave was beside that of his wife, who had been laid to rest nearly fourteen years previously. Only a few relatives and intimate friends attended the simple service, and stood by the graveside. There was no mourning.

A larger congregation, however, gathered in his native city of Worcester. Simultaneously with the burial a Low Mass of Requiem was offered in the Church of St. George, where Elgar, and his father before him, had held the post of organist. After all personal injunctions had been obeyed it was generally felt, however, that the passing of so great an artist and so prominent an Englishman demanded a more national form of recognition.

To this end, a few days afterwards, on 2nd March, a commemoration service was held in Worcester Cathedral. Here were gathered together not only the citizens of his home town, but the leaders of his own profession from far and wide, the Festival Choir and the London Symphony Orchestra. The music was fittingly directed by Elgar's devoted friend Sir Ivor Atkins, organist of the cathedral, and the service was most impressively carried through. It was also largely owing to the enthusiastic initiative of Sir Ivor Atkins that a visible memorial to Elgar was later to find its place in the same building. It took the form of a window designed by A. K. Nicholson, which was unveiled in September, 1935. Appropriately enough this beautiful window commemorates not only the composer but one of his greatest musical conceptions, for its subject is *The Dream of Gerontius*.

Chapter XI

CHAMBER MUSIC AND THE CONCERTO FOR VIOLONCELLO

I think that the only conclusions worth coming to are one's own conclusions. If they march with the verdict of the connoisseurs, so much the better for the connoisseurs; if they do not so march, so much the better for oneself. Everyone cannot admire and love everything; but let a man look at things fairly and without prejudice, and make his own selection, holding to it firmly, but not endeavouring to impose his taste upon others; defending, if needs be, his preferences, but making no claim to authority.

Arthur Christopher Benson. (From a College Window.)

SOMERSET MAUGHAM, in a recent autobiographical study, has expressed the view that success does not spoil people by making them "vain, egotistic and self-complacent". He asserts, on the contrary, that "it makes them, for the most part, humble, tolerant and kind". But he goes on to say that, although the character of a man is improved by the recognition he has received, the character of his work may be impaired. "It may well deprive him," he says, "of that force which has brought him success."

Everybody who knew Elgar well in his later years was conscious of the mellowness of his judgments, and of a charm, both of manner and character, that was not so evident in the days when he was fighting his way to the front. But few could contend that his work retained all the freshness of style, the exuberant inventiveness, or

the fiery impulse of his middle period, when the Variations, *Gerontius*, the oratorios and the "Introduction and Allegro" were produced. This is not to say that his later works were unworthy of his powers or less lofty in tone. The two symphonies are magnificent examples of craftsmanship and confident mastery. So is the Violin Concerto. So, in an even more striking measure, is *Falstaff*. But after that there seems to come into his music the consciousness of a settled method, and we know what to look for. There are fewer surprises in store for us, and the zest of adventurousness has given way to conviction. No doubt his physical health was impaired through long years of hard work and struggle, and, in the circumstances, it is remarkable that the climax of fine accomplishment was sustained for so long.

It must be remembered, too, that when an eminent composer reaches a fairly advanced age he must perforce become his own most formidable competitor. He has to face the fact that his latest work will be compared with his entire output in the past. This is a severe test that few elderly writers can survive, and before which most of them must quail.

Elgar's three contributions to the repertory of chamber music, written in his sixty-second year, were inevitably subjected to this kind of comparison, and undoubtedly they suffered from it. Despite a full appreciation of the many valuable qualities in the music, and its patent sincerity, the general feeling amongst Elgar's admirers was one of friendly sympathy rather than enthusiasm. There could not but be some disappointment that Elgar had taken upon himself a manner which was, for him, excessively restrained, without perhaps supplying the intellectual interest which might have given some com-

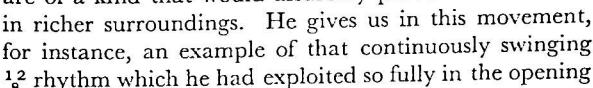
pensation. All three works were, to put it bluntly, rather more old-fashioned and less enterprising in tone (especially in a harmonic sense) than the composer's previous music had led one to expect. This would not have mattered—indeed many would have welcomed the simplicity—had the thematic material possessed more freshness and urgency.

The Sonata (Op. 82)—which, it should be noted, is described as for "violin and piano", not for "piano and violin" which is the customary order—certainly gives pride of place to the string player throughout. This is not to say that the piano part is badly written. It is quite playable, and generally careful and shapely, but it is a very dull piano part from the musical point of view. The deficiency would have been less noticeable had the violin had more that is thematically arresting to play. Despite its violinistic phraseology the first movement is frankly dry in subject-matter, and, strangely enough, almost academic in style. Not until we reach the Coda does it come to life and show the vigorous-mindedness that we expect from Elgar. The second movement (Romance) is a great deal better. It is more rhapsodical in treatment than one expects in a sonata, perhaps, but the freer style certainly gives the music more vitality. The beginning and end of this Romance are far better than the middle part, where the composer reverts to the somewhat academic methods of the first movement. There is a climax, but this is rather conventionally approached, and not very convincing or striking when it arrives. The last movement seems to cry out for an orchestral setting. It has some brilliance to recommend it to both players, and it can be made quite effective in performance. But, alas—apart from a pleasantly shaped sequential melody which forms the

second subject—there is little that can arouse our interest thematically.

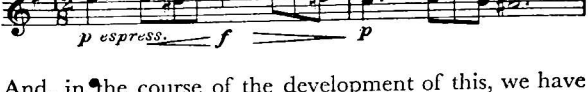
The String Quartet (Op. 83) is definitely the best constructed, as well as the most satisfying of the three works. The first movement is in every respect typical Elgar, so much so, indeed, that one almost longs for the warmer texture in which he would have clad his ideas had he been writing for orchestra. Not that the writing is in itself orchestral (he was far too great an artist not to differentiate between the two styles), but the themes are of a kind that would assuredly prove more effective in richer surroundings. He gives us in this movement, for instance, an example of that continuously swinging $\frac{12}{8}$ rhythm which he had exploited so fully in the opening of his second symphony. One of the main phrases, admirably shapely in itself, becomes a little tiresome by its constant repetition in different keys:

84.



And, in the course of the development of this, we have a great deal of play with pulsation of a kind which, by this time, must be recognized as an Elgar formula:

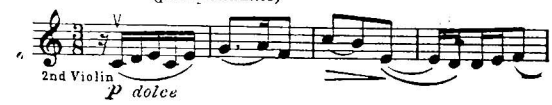
85.



The mood is restless throughout. There is dynamic variety in plenty, but little relief from the agitation which is in the nature of this species of rhythmic design. The string-writing, however, is most effective, and gives

ample scope for each individual player in the ensemble. This is equally true of the second movement (*Piacevole, poco andante*), which is the gem of the work. A little long for an andante, perhaps, and very fully developed, it has a beauty and a melodic charm which is somewhat akin to that of the early Serenade for string orchestra. It seems strange that, even here, we do not quite get away from that "crotchet-quaver" swing which was, by now, almost an obsession with the composer—a kind of King Charles's head, which cropped up in almost everything he wrote. And so this very lovely opening melody,

86. Piacevole (*poco Andante*)



has to be content with a companionship which may be represented by such phrases as this:

87.

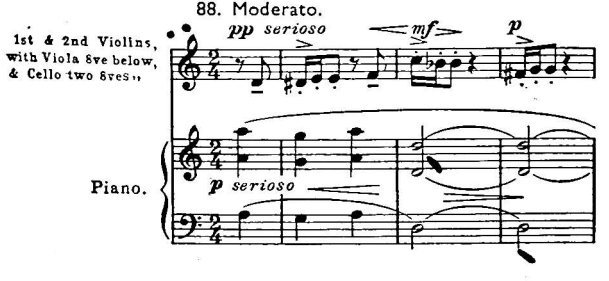
Nevertheless it is all most beautifully wrought, and it is pure chamber music—music which is not only companionable and conversational, but intellectually intimate.

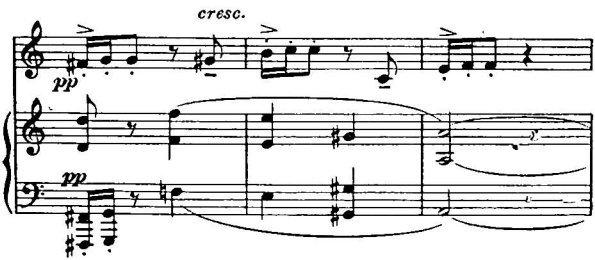
The finale is vigorous and effective, if not specially striking. Like the first movement it is restless, and repetitive in phrasing, but there is plenty of variety here, and the work ends with boldness and brilliance.

The Quintet for piano and strings (Op. 84) has been

so highly praised in many quarters, and so frequently performed, that one is reluctant to express opinions which some may consider too severely critical. The composer who writes for this combination, however, courts comparison with some of the greatest musical creations of all time. The standard set by Schumann, Brahms, Dvořák, César Franck, Dohnányi (in his second quintet) and others, is so high that a work must be fine indeed that can hold up its head in such company. Truth to tell, Elgar's example suffers from an inadequate pianoforte part. He never thought very easily or naturally in terms of the keyboard. In this quintet he seems to have had the quite laudable idea of treating the piano as one of five instruments, rather than as one equal to the other four in combination—which had been the plan adopted for all piano quintets since Schumann set the pattern in the first work of classic proportions in that form. It is conceivable that such an idea might yield satisfactory results from a composer who had a subtle feeling for pianistic values. But the sensitiveness of a Mozart would be needed to achieve success by this means.

The opening of the first movement is, in itself, a clear example of quite earnest ineffectiveness:





The sustained theme is, in its presentation here, by no means sustained in effect. The broken phrases given to the strings could have been played adequately on the piano, whilst the strings might have "sung" the piano melody with true expressiveness. Later in the movement this plan is adopted successfully, but a work is bound to suffer if the opening is ineffective. Quite apart from the questionable treatment of the keyed-instrument, which is apparent so frequently, Elgar's themes do not pulsate with life as they do in his orchestral works, and the style is somewhat angular and lacking in warmth.

The best effects are to be found in the slow movement, where the composer's sympathy with the viola as a soloist is clearly evident. This section of the work has, indeed, been so highly praised by W. H. Reed in *Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music* that one may well hesitate to be critical in the face of such enthusiasm from an undoubted expert. "With its warmth of expression and inspired moments," he says, "it appears to have grown like some work of nature, without the help of human hands." Furthermore it "expresses all the higher emotions of which humanity is capable . . . it seems to be a message from another world". Alongside such an estimate anything said here must seem

meagre and unreceptive. It may, perhaps, be better merely to record that, in the present writer's view, such a judgment savours of undue, if lovable, extravagance in discipleship.

The finale, like the rest of the quintet, is wonderfully skilful in its workmanship. It contains some new developments of ideas already heard in the first movement, as well as a carefully designed first-subject of its own. But the themes themselves must strike most hearers as thoughtful rather than urgent, and the work as a whole cannot, honestly, be compared with the classic examples in the same form, nor even with the best compositions for piano and strings which other British writers have provided during the last thirty years or so.

As the product of the greatest English composer of modern times these three compositions are, frankly, a disappointment. They have not achieved the popularity amongst players and the public which all musicians must have hoped for them. They are scarcely destined to take a permanent place in the chamber music repertory, nor is Elgar's position as a composer of such music likely to be recognized outside the circle of his immediate friendly admirers. The existence of these works, however, is at least a proof of his versatility, and of his sympathy with a type of music in which so many English composers of recent years have excelled.

Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra (*Op. 85*)

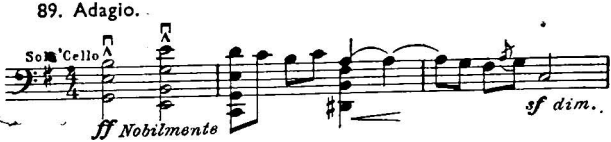
The production of a Concerto for violoncello and orchestra by any composer of eminence is an important musical event. There are very few fine concertos for this instrument, and fewer still that 'cellists show any

inclination to include in their regular repertory. Of all instrumentalists 'cellists have, until recently, been regarded as the most conservative, the most unready to accept the untried and the experimental. In a colloquial phrase "they know what they like", and it has not been easy to induce them to like anything else. They have been content to go on playing their Boccherini, their Haydn, and their Dvořák, and only the more adventurous have cared to give the public an occasional hearing of the concertos by Schumann, Lalo, d'Albert, Sullivan and Tovey—to name a very varied assortment of masters who have provided them with material worth considering. But when Elgar, at the summit of his fame, entered the field, there was some eagerness on the part of prominent soloists to study the new composition. It is true that his concerto, like that of his contemporary Delius, has made its way rather slowly. Nevertheless it is gratifying to record that these two works have received more adequate attention than that given to previous essays of like kind by prominent modern composers.

The Elgar concerto is, indeed, a very characteristic, and in many ways an extremely notable, work. Written just after the composer had produced his three examples of chamber music, it exhibits some evidence that the restraint which he had put upon himself in composing these works had still a lingering influence upon his style. The orchestration, for instance, is less elaborate than is usual with him: not only that, the temperature of the music is cooler and the outlook more intellectual. This is especially noticeable in the first movement, which displays a kind of classic sobriety, and is apt to cause some disappointment to the expectant listener who associates Elgar's name with music of stronger emotional urge.

The introductory *Adagio*, however, arrests attention with its forceful and effective solo-entry:

89. Adagio.



Nevertheless we are bound to lose interest a little when we find that this leads to a *Moderato* movement, in which the main subject proves to be yet another of those repetitive crotchet-quaver themes which have so often done duty in Elgar's previous works:

90. Moderato.

This samely swaying rhythm continues its course uninterrupted for nearly twenty bars. It is lightly scored, and the solo part stands out well, but the music lacks arresting qualitites, though the mood is thoughtful. Fortunately the interest increases as the music continues, and the 'cello writing is enterprising enough to maintain the listener's attention most of the time. One feels, too, that the soloist is a personality, and an entirely sympathetic one, for all his reticence. Throughout the developments which ensue one is sensible of a certain power held in reserve, and not allowed to intrude upon what seems to be a somewhat melancholy soliloquy, eloquent in its kind, but without a trace of rhetoric.

At the end of the movement (an end of which we are hardly conscious) the soloist announces some new matter

of a more free and energetic kind, and we realize that we have already entered upon the *Allegro molto*. The new movement, we find, is a kind of scherzo, swift in its action, and brilliant in its treatment. For a time it proceeds after the manner of a *moto perpetuo*, and then one striking (and very Elgarian) phrase of two bars suddenly emerges from the busy context and becomes, hereafter, a prominent feature of the movement:

This is repeated and embellished in several different keys. From this point the music becomes thoroughly and emotionally alive.

There is a short reflective slow movement, lightly scored for strings, clarinets, bassoons and horns only. This *Adagio* eschews all restlessness, and forms a beautiful interlude before we embark upon the more adventurous elaborations of a very lively and effective finale. The introduction to this is a real introduction, for it introduces the main theme—a lilting subject in chromatic sequence, which fixes itself easily in the listener's memory. It is, however, a somewhat tentative opening, and the fact that it is presented in the remote key of B flat minor emphasizes the unsettled feeling which it provokes. After a few bars, the music is interrupted by some forceful recitatives, of an improvisational character, from the soloist, which continue until a sharp chord from the whole orchestra calls us to attention for the theme in full—a definitely rhythmical tune, which has a continuously melodious shape:

92. Allegro ma non troppo.

There is certainly nothing of a tentative character here, and the orchestra emphasizes the frank directness of the message after the 'cello has had its say. The developments of this admirable text show Elgar at his best once again. The movement as a whole is, indeed, more successful than anything in his violin concerto, in its lay-out, in its clarity, and in the fanciful ingenuities which distinguish its unfolding. Above all it is entirely free from that rhythmic monotony which spoils so many of Elgar's extended movements in symphonic form. The 'cello part is splendidly contrived—never merely showy, but always strongly effective. Towards the end we find some allusions to the themes of the slow movement, and of the introduction to the first movement, but there is no grandiose peroration.

Estimating this concerto as a whole it may be said that, apart from a certain lack of distinction in the thematic material of the earlier pages, the work holds its own amongst the best of its species. It has the advantage of growing in interest as it progresses. The second movement improves upon the first; the deeply-felt *Adagio* is better still; whilst in the finale we have a vivacity and youthful freshness which is surprising in the work of a man of sixty-two.

CHAPTER XII

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

That critics should be honest we have a right to demand, and critical dishonesty we are bound to expose. If the writer will tell us what he thinks, though his thoughts be absolutely vague and useless, we can forgive him; but when he tells us what he does not think, actuated either by friendship or by animosity, then there should be no pardon for him.

Anthony Trollope. (*An Autobiography.*)

THIS book has so far been concerned mainly with the larger works of Elgar, and for a good reason. His real successes, unlike those of most British composers, were gained in music conceived and carried out on an expansive scale. Only occasionally was he happy in the rôle of miniaturist. To some composers limitations are an incentive: to Elgar they were obviously cramping. His best small works are those planned for large forces of performers. Many of his unaccompanied mixed-voice part-songs, for instance, are supremely fine, but it is significant that the most notable of them demand the services of a big choir to give them their true effect. Perhaps the best-known are the least enterprising. Such things as *My Love dwelt in a Northern land*, *Weary wind of the West*, and the beautifully written *Evening Scene* (all familiar as test-pieces at competitive festivals) are more or less in the established tradition, and so well within the scope of average choral organizations. But, for the time at

which they were written, the part-songs *Death on the Hills*, *Deep in my Soul* and *Owls*, were daringly experimental. The first of these, a setting of some grim verses by the Russian poet Maikov (translated by Rosa Newmarch) shows the composer in dramatic mood. There is much insistence on sequential passages, which bring about some rapid changes of tonality. *Deep in my Soul* and *Owls*, in which the voices ejaculate in disjointed phrases, and mutter comments in fragmentary fashion, give one the impression, perhaps, that the words are unsuitable for music, or that too strong a stress has been laid upon the merely articulate side as opposed to the musically expressive.

In another category altogether (and a more imposing one) is *Go, Song of Mine*, a massive structure, where the voices pile their phrases one upon the other in growing energy, until an enormous climax is reached. The methods remind one of Parry, though the style of the music is unmistakably Elgar. Still more striking, and certainly less conventional, is the setting of *There is Sweet Music* (from Tennyson's *Lotos-Eaters*) in which the composer has experimented in mixed tonalities. It is in eight parts: the female voices are written in the key of A flat, whilst the male voices sing in the key of G. This promises to be more alarming than it turns out to be. The voices are, to a certain extent, treated antiphonally, and of course there are changes of key in both groups, which at certain points bring them into closer tonal relationship with each other. At the same time the most striking effects are achieved when the two keys are clearly defined, notably at the conclusion, where the alternating key-chords are very beautifully and sensitively presented. The whole work (which is an anticipation in method of much that was written later by

Holst and others on the same lines) is most poetically devised.

At the height of his powers, Elgar also wrote some very notable part-songs for unaccompanied male voices. Of the set of five songs in this category, published as Op. 45, perhaps the most distinctive are *It's Oh to be a wild wind* and *After many a dusty mile*. The former is in a dainty, half-humorous vein, unusual with Elgar. The latter has some melodic and rhythmic figuration which is strikingly effective. The phrase of descending fourths, so often repeated by the second basses, is typically Elgarian, and stamps the little work, slight as it is, with a mark of individuality. Of a different type altogether is the elaborately pictorial setting for men's voices of Bret Harte's *Reveille*—full of colour and abounding in vivid contrasts. It is a famous " war-horse " of the big choirs of the North, where male-voice singing has reached the highest pitch of dramatic virtuosity.

Elgar's weakest productions are undoubtedly his solo songs. Most of those with piano accompaniment are indeed definitely poor, and some are scarcely distinguishable from the " pot-boilers " which so many lesser English composers were wont to turn out in the days of ballad concerts. It is almost unbelievable that a composer of such power and distinction should have been willing to attach his name to productions like *After*, *The Pipes of Pan*, *Come Gentle Night* or *Pleading*. Even the better of their kind, such as *In the Dawn*, *Speak*, *Music* or *The Shepherd's Song*, are far below the level of the less significant songs of Parry, Stanford, Roger Quilter, John Ireland or Armstrong Gibbs.

Only once did Elgar rise high above the standard which he normally set himself in song-writing. This was in the beautiful set of *Sea Pictures* (Op. 37), with orchestral

accompaniment. Here the thought of a colourful background undoubtedly fired his imagination. The songs are unequal in merit (both in verse and in music) but they are vital and stimulating. The *Sea Slumber Song*, where the "foam glimmers faintly white upon the shelly sand", and where "sea-sound, like violins, to slumber woos and wins", presents an unforgettable orchestral picture of calm loveliness, which perfectly matches the charming poem by Roden Noel. *In Haven* (to Lady Elgar's words) and *Where Corals Lie* (Richard Garnett) are musical pastels of the utmost delicacy. *Sabbath Morning at Sea* (Mrs. Browning) is less original, though it has its moving as well as its conventional moments. But few could remain unresponsive to the fervent masculinity of *The Swimmer*, the final song of the series, where the music rises high above the verbal tricks and jangling rhymes of the text, by the Australian writer Lindsay Gordon.

The *Sea Pictures* belong to the same year as the *Enigma* Variations. The idioms are, indeed, similar, and the songs, as a whole, are not unworthy to be in the company of that famous masterpiece.

Setting aside songs and part-songs, Elgar's output of small works was inconsiderable. For the piano alone he wrote very little, and nothing of any consequence. His attitude towards the instrument was, indeed, frankly unsympathetic. For the organ he wrote two sonatas, the second of which was based upon his *Severn Suite* for brass band. The first sonata, written in 1898, is a serious composition which has found its way into the repertory of most recitalists: the later work is almost unknown. Elgar's pieces for violin, with the exception of the concerto and the sonata, are in the nature of salon music, and mostly date from his early years.

It is interesting to note how, even in the smallest of his compositions, Elgar was at pains to mark directions for performance in the fullest detail. He felt the effect of his music whole in his mind, and left nothing to chance. Every mark has its significance. Even in the rough sketches for the third symphony he supplied expression marks, showing that such marks were not only important, but part of the musical thought itself as it came fresh from his brain.

Elgar's constant use of the word *nobilmente* as a direction for performance has provoked criticism in certain quarters. It is difficult to understand why. The term is, after all, only a guide to the performers, and does not imply that the music itself is noble in quality. Indeed the expression is not used at all consistently. In the *Cockaigne* overture, for instance, it is applied to music which most composers would have labelled *grandioso*; in the opening of the Violoncello Concerto it does duty for a thoughtful theme to which Schumann would almost certainly have attached his favourite word *innig*.

Elgar disliked any rigidity in performance. When directing his own music he was always insistent on a proper observance of every small *crescendo*, *diminuendo*, *rallentando*, *sforzando*, or pause, yet, at the same time, he allowed ample freedom to his players. Whilst he made no claim to virtuosity as a conductor, Elgar knew exactly what his own music required, and orchestras always gave of their best under his inspired and inspiring guidance. Few composers have been better served by instrumentalists than Elgar, and it is to be hoped that the authoritative traditions of interpretation which he established will never be allowed to die, for no music suffers more than his from the distortion or wilful vulgarization in which showmen-conductors are prone to indulge.

Elgar is an easy composer to criticize because, unlike many latter-day writers, he never wrote music which is obscure in its purpose. We may like it or dislike it, but if we are possessed of average intelligence we cannot fail to understand it. This does not mean that he had nothing new to say: on the contrary his most characteristic musical speech was almost entirely unlike that of any other composer. But it does mean that he took pains to speak clearly, and resolutely shunned what was merely impressionistic. To many modern creative musicians the cultivation of colour effects for their own sake is a welcome resource, for their use tends to screen an insufficiency of constructive power, and there is no easier way of attracting attention in music than by bewildering the listeners. One can recall no passage in Elgar's works where "drawing" is sacrificed to mere splashes of tonal effect, although he had, perhaps, the strongest feeling for orchestral colour of all modern British composers. Mannerisms he had in plenty. As is usual with an artist, these mannerisms became more marked as he grew older, so that at certain points in his later music one came to expect him to do certain things in a familiar way. He positively gloried in frankness of utterance. The dread of being obvious, as Parry has told us, "is not a trait of those who really have something to say, but rather of those who appear to have something to say and are afraid that if they speak plainly the world will find out they have nothing". Elgar, one fancies, would heartily have endorsed that opinion. It always seemed easy for him to estimate the capacity of the average listener, and he liked to feel that he was able to provide music which ordinary people could enjoy.

If little has been said in these pages about the works

of a popular type which came so frequently from Elgar's pen, it is merely because there was little that needed saying. It must not be inferred that they represent a negligible part of his output, or that they were insincere. Often we may feel that in this style of music he lapses into sheer vulgarity. He has even been accused of allowing that vulgarity to invade his more important works. The border-line between frank obviousness and vulgarity is not an easy one to draw. We can only *feel* the difference, and listeners do not feel alike.

Popular music in this country always enjoys a good start, and it may be left to take care of itself. Serious music is heavily handicapped, and if it does not make its way fairly quickly, it may be thrust aside in favour of something more novel in fashion before it becomes at all widely known. It says much for Elgar, as a serious composer, that he was able to establish his claims to recognition in an age when the art was changing its manner of speech so rapidly that most composers came to be regarded as back-numbers before they had obtained any real currency as representatives of their time. And not only did Elgar establish his claims but he maintained his supremacy, and was acknowledged as a leader by all of his younger contemporaries.

Whilst it is safe, therefore, to proclaim the importance of Elgar's contributions to the English musical thought of to-day, it would be hazardous to attempt any kind of comparative valuation of his work, or to predict its ultimate survival as world music. Considered internationally Elgar's productions coincide with the end of a great epoch in European musical art. They were in line with the general trend of the time abroad, and not in advance of it. For us, however, they may seem to mark the beginning of a new era. Elgar's choral music

was, it is true, grounded in our own traditions. But he was undoubtedly the first English composer to show genuine freedom and unhesitating mastery in modern methods of orchestration. Indeed in this respect he was fully the equal of his great model, Richard Strauss. Perhaps the only British composers who have come into prominence since Elgar reached the height of his powers to exhibit skill at all comparable with his, in orchestral technique, are Holst, Bax and William Walton. The individualistic impressionism of Delius (masterly as it was in its own way) can hardly be considered in this connexion, or compared with the more normal methods of Elgar. Elgar adopted the natural musical language of his country, but he enlarged its scope and so far extended its vocabulary that ultimately, as Henry Hadow has said, his music became "a transition between the old order in which he was brought up and the new to which it gave place".

What the verdict of future disciples of the new order will be upon the work discussed in these pages cannot be conjectured, still less can it be anticipated. Even to-day those who attempt to assess the current value of Elgar's music are sharply divided. It is not to be thought, therefore, that the opinions herein expressed will escape criticism. It is, indeed, undesirable that they should do so. The author has reached a time of life when he can no longer plead the infallibility of youth. Nor can he ask for the indulgence due to extreme old age. Some of his comments will cause displeasure to out-and-out devotees, for Elgar was a king amongst composers, and there are still people who hold to the doctrine that a king can do no wrong. On the other hand there are many who will feel that praise has sometimes been too lavishly bestowed—that it is undesirable

even to use the word " masterpiece " in connexion with music which cannot, as yet, be viewed from a sufficient distance. To both types the plea must be the same: one can only judge from one's own standards, and strive to be honest in one's self-imposed judicial capacity.

In matters of art there is no such thing as absolute right and absolute wrong. Tastes differ, and for the critic of such an elusive and intangible subject as music, taste (in itself a wayward and ever-changing factor) is the only possible criterion. To be over-cautious in criticism is to be dull: to be recklessly enthusiastic is to be unreliable, and perhaps even more dull. Such are the troubles of one who ventures to publish an estimate of the merits of a prominent creative artist of his own time!

An Epilogue

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL AND PERSONAL

Plus on approche les grands hommes, plus on trouve qu'ils sont hommes.

La Bruyère.

HAVING striven in the foregoing pages to present a plainly written chronicle of Sir Edward Elgar's rise to fame, together with an appreciative yet critical commentary upon his achievements, I am anxious to acknowledge with gratitude some of the sources of my information, as well as to draw attention to several works on the same subject which should by no means be neglected by those interested in this great composer. Furthermore I have been urged to round off this little volume with a few paragraphs of a personal nature.

Almost all the important books upon Elgar hitherto published have been written by his close personal friends, who were well qualified to tell us about the habits, the humours, the width of vision and the steadfast loyalties which made him the great and fascinating personality that he undoubtedly was to those who knew him well.

The two volumes by Basil Maine,[1] which deal with Elgar's Life (1) and Works (2) are exhaustive, if perhaps a little exhausting. The first volume is a mine of infor-

[1] G. Bell & Sons, 1933.

mation, and even if it is encumbered by a multitude of unimportant details (often resembling molehills magnified into mountains) no student of English music can afford to neglect it, and it has obviously been immensely valuable to me in the preparation of this book. The second volume is, I think, less admirable and less convincing, since the author's judgments are too uniformly eulogistic, and the perspective is therefore a little distorted. Moreover, in the fervour of his championship of the hero of his pages, Mr. Maine has been singularly and unnecessarily unjust to some of that hero's most distinguished contemporaries. He has also thought fit to stigmatize those who have ventured to point out defects in any of Elgar's works as Beckmessers, maliciously busy with pieces of chalk! These features are regrettable, and detract from the value of what is, in essentials, a thorough and painstaking if at times somewhat laborious compilation.

There is charm, as well as authority, in R. J. Buckley's genial little book *Sir Edward Elgar*,[1] published as long ago as 1904. The record is necessarily incomplete, and there is no attempt at detailed criticism, but it gives an admirably concise and pleasant portrait of the composer at the height of his powers.

Other permanent and accessible records, eminently worthy of perusal, are that of A. J. Sheldon (Musical Opinion Office) and the little *Musical Pilgrim* book by F. H. Shera, devoted exclusively to Elgar's instrumental works (Oxford University Press). Both of these are able, thoughtful expositions. Daniel Gregory Mason's essay on Elgar, in his *Contemporary Composers* (New York, The Macmillan Company) is particularly significant and remarkably well written; it is also interesting from the

[1] The Bodley Head, 1904.

fact that it is the estimate of the most accomplished music critic which America has produced.

As an antidote to these well-balanced tributes some may be tempted to read the strangely vitriolic chapter on Elgar in Cecil Gray's *Survey of Contemporary Music* (Oxford University Press). This would seem to have been written with a view to pleasing those turbulent modernists who only know what they dislike in music, and are ashamed to like anything that the majority of their fellow-men consider good. It strives to be breezy, but only succeeds in being blustering. As a serious estimate of Elgar's music it is negligible, since it is too obviously petulant to be convincing, and too slashing to achieve the hits aimed at with any directness. Many readers may find it smart, however, and amusingly provocative.

So, too, from another angle altogether, is Bernard Shaw's short article in *Music and Letters* (January, 1920), but, as has already been said in other quarters, it is more notable for its revelation of Shaw than of Elgar. Nevertheless Shaw is a writer who is almost always most entertaining when he is most sincere—and he loved Elgar.

I have purposely left the best to the last, and there can be no doubt at all as to which two books are the most informative.

Far and away the most notable and understanding tribute to Elgar's work as a composer is that of Ernest Newman in his little study called *Elgar and his Music* (The Bodley Head), which admirers and detractors alike should not fail to study. Although Newman was a close personal friend of many years' standing he does not allow that circumstance to intrude itself at any point, or to affect his judgments in the smallest degree. He

writes solely upon the music. His power of independent criticism is always evident: sometimes his verdicts err on the side of severity, it is true, but he shows an almost uncanny gift of penetrating to the heart of the composer's thought. He never shirks the task of pointing out weaknesses in Elgar's equipment, but, at the same time, he realizes the significance and consistency of his message as a whole. Here, certainly, we have critical acumen of an uncommon nature that is hardly likely to be surpassed in our time. Unfortunately the book was written several years ago, and stops short at *The Apostles*.[1]

As a fitting companion to this we have W. H. Reed's *Elgar as I knew him*,[2] surely one of the most beautiful and touching records of a fruitful friendship ever written. This deals almost entirely with personal relationships, and it contains the only full account we have of the closing scenes of Elgar's life. The intimate associations of nearly thirty years have enabled the author to present a living picture of his friend, which will perpetuate the memory of a great man. We are brought face to face with the full dignity of Elgar's character and demeanour in public life; we see him in the sanctuary of his home, sharing his thoughts with those who loved him best. We learn a great deal, too, about his methods of working, and are given a vivid impression of a sensitive personality, charged with that restless nervous energy which overflowed into his music and was the source of so much that is characteristic and familiar in everything that he wrote. The whole book is intensely illuminating, and the simplicity of its style is the more eloquent since it eschews

[1] Ernest Newman's little book is now out of print. It is to be hoped that he will extend his criticisms to the later works, and that the publishers will re-issue it in complete form.

[2] Gollancz, 1936.

all literary pretensions, and goes directly to the heart of things, with no kind of hesitancy or reticence.

The contents of these two volumes, taken together, give us the clearest impression we are ever likely to have of (1) the works, and (2) the man himself.

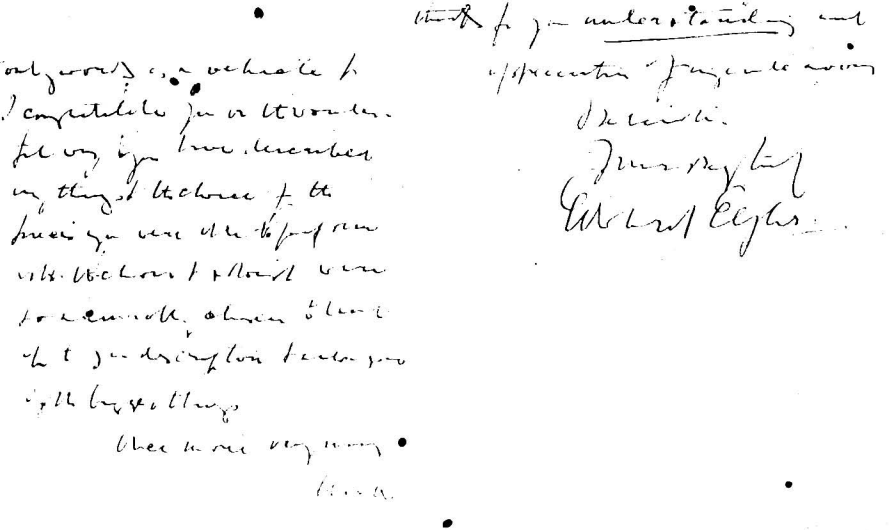
I must now embark upon the final paragraphs of my epilogue. I have been urged to include these reminiscences; but I am reluctant to do so, firstly, because it may be thought that I am intruding small private affairs into an otherwise impersonal estimate of a great man's life and work, and, secondly, because my contact with Elgar was so brief and so unimportant to anybody else. There is, indeed, only one circumstance that can justify these final words. If I can add anything to our knowledge of Elgar's friendly attitude towards the work of other musicians of his time, this should not be withheld. It is in the hope that I may be able to do this, in some small measure, that I have ventured to write what follows.

I met Sir Edward Elgar for the first time at the Worcester Festival of 1905, where a short work of mine for voice and orchestra was produced at the secular concert in the Shire Hall. Previous to this I had had some correspondence with him in regard to a lecture I gave upon his work at Windsor. I had been anxious to make the musical illustrations for this lecture as representative as possible, and sought his advice. I had at my disposal a small choir of mixed voices, some solo vocalists (one of whom was Phyllis Lett, who was later on to become so closely identified with the part of the Angel in *Gerontius*) and a few instrumentalists. Elgar's long letter from Hereford in response to my request was so immediately helpful, and so permanently informative, that it has remained amongst my treasures to this day.

He suggested the inclusion in my programme of the little "Alleluia" chorus from *The Apostles* (At the Sepulchre) as an example of "simplicity contrasted with the realism of the brutal human side", as exemplified at the end of the Judas music. This suggestion I was able to adopt. "I hope," he goes on to say, "you have Whateley's lectures on the characters of our Lord's Apostles. Do read the Judas. De Quincey can be neglected, but Whateley sums the matter up almost adequately. Judas was the clever man-of-the-world type. I have made him, as he was understood to be until the Dark Ages, a man with brains; notice his first speech in 'By the Wayside'; the simple people say, 'He setteth the poor on high', &c. Judas can see just a little farther—the certain result of such a change, 'He poureth contempt upon princes'. You will see how the character is developed from this."

Naturally I turned to the good Archbishop Whateley, and found much that gave added pathos to the character of Judas as depicted in Elgar's score. The bribe to betray is accepted because Judas believes that a betrayal will bring about more quickly the consummation of the desires of the Apostles. By putting his Maker into the hands of His enemies he must, in Whateley's own words, "force Him to make such a display of power as would at once lead to His being triumphantly seated on the throne of David as a great and powerful Prince". And Judas probably expected "that he himself would be both pardoned and nobly rewarded for having thus been the means, though in an unauthorized way, of raising his Master to that earthly splendour and dominion which is, to worldly men, the greatest object of desire".

At the Worcester concert Elgar had just conducted a



FACSIMILE OF ELGAR'S HANDWRITING

From a letter to the Author, 1905

performance of his "Introduction and Allegro" for strings, and when, after several recalls, he returned to the artists' room, I was introduced to him by Sir Ivor Atkins. He looked me up and down, nervously twitching his eyelids as was his habit. "You?" he said, "you? In Worcester and you've not been to see me yet? When will you come?—come to-morrow—come to-morrow morning to breakfast." And come to breakfast I did.

He was staying, with Lady Elgar and their daughter, in some school-house which he had taken for the period of the festival. A long table occupied the whole length of the large dining-hall. Elgar sat at the head of this, and a place was reserved for me immediately on his right. "Remember," he said with emphasis, "this is your place *every morning* you are here." To a young musician, only just free from the shackles of student life, this was a thrilling privilege for which I was quite unprepared, for Elgar was then at the summit of his career and was entertaining a large house-party of close friends and ardent admirers. I saw enough of him during that week to gain a clear impression of his personality. "He was one of those rare souls," as Sir Richard Terry has said, "whose heart opened into friendship from the very beginning." You did not get to know him—you knew him. He was adored in Worcester and was the centre of every company in which he appeared. Yet never for a moment was there any suggestion of domination. I had many talks with him, but he never mentioned his own works. His appreciation of my poor effort was the most encouraging thing that ever came to me. I may not have deserved it. I probably did not. Indeed I am often forced to the rather sad conclusion, when I look back through the

years, that I have not sufficiently striven to be worthy of such generous encouragement:

> " For of all sad words of tongue or pen,
> The saddest are these: ' It might have been.' "

One day during my visit Elgar brought forth a huge autograph book (with ruled staves on the pages) in which I was asked to write some bars of my score. What has become of this book I do not know, but since it contained important passages in the handwriting of every modern composer of distinction in the world, which must have taken many years to collect, it should be valuable. He was furious, I remember, because a number of well-known vocalists had put their names in it, without being asked to do so. " Those damned singers," he said, " they've spoilt the book!"

There is one incident which occurred during the 1905 festival that I should like to place on record, because it touched me very much, and I have not seen it mentioned in any other account of the composer's life. On 12th September Elgar received the Freedom of the City of Worcester, and he walked through the streets in the procession from the Guildhall with the civic dignitaries, looking splendid in his robes. As he passed the little music shop, in which he had worked as a young man, he bared his head and looked up at his old father, who was watching the pageantry from an upper window.

Except for a brief encounter, in 1918, at Parry's funeral, in St. Paul's Cathedral (where the crowd was so great that, in my capacity of steward, I had considerable difficulty in finding places for him and for Lady Elgar), I did not meet the composer again until 1922. This time it was at Gloucester, where I was present to conduct the first performance of a new

orchestral work in the cathedral. Although this was played at the Sunday afternoon service, before the actual beginning of the festival, Elgar came to Gloucester early on purpose to be there. He had heard the rehearsal in London during the previous week, and he said to Sir Hugh Allen, who expressed surprise at seeing him at Gloucester so soon, that he wasn't going to miss the performance on any account. It is unnecessary, and it would ill become me, to repeat the rest of his remarks.

I mention these things for no other reason than that they serve to contradict the oft-repeated assertion that Elgar was so wrapped up in his own affairs that he was indifferent to the music of the younger composers of this country. I have often heard it said, too, that they were, as likely as not, liable to be snubbed if they approached him. It was, I am quite sure, a most unjust imputation. I remember that he told me, in 1922, how greatly he admired the new choral work of Eugène Goossens (*Silence*), and although probably Arthur Bliss's *Colour Symphony*, which also received its first performance at the same festival, was outside the range of what he was prepared to accept with any real affection, he showed the keenest interest in it, and did not join in the disapproval with which it was greeted by most of the older musicians of the time. It is no secret that these two composers were invited to contribute to the festival at Elgar's instigation, and that had it not been for his insistence on the invitation, two very striking modern works might never have been composed at all.

Elgar's appreciation of the music of the older British composers of his time was, perhaps, less frequently expressed, but it is known that he admired the masterly choral writing of Parry, and that Mackenzie and Cowen were amongst those to whom he was, personally, greatly

attached in his later life. I think, however, that his firm favourite amongst British composers was Edward German. I remember how, on one occasion, when German had expressed his admiration for some work of his, Elgar turned to him and said, very simply, " however much you like my music you cannot possibly like it as much as I love yours ".

After 1922 I saw Elgar but rarely. There were some occasions when, in various capacities, I had to correspond with him. He was always fully responsive, particularly if he was asked to give his name to projects designed to benefit his colleagues in the profession. The recollections of him that are ever vividly present (the " impressions that remain ", in Ethel Smyth's phrase) are, however, those which recreate in my mind's eye a tall, spare, nervously alert figure, erect in carriage but slightly angular in movement, courteous but shy in manner, animated but not copious in speech—the Elgar of thirty-three years ago. As Sydney Smith once said of Macaulay, " he had occasional flashes of silence that made his conversation perfectly delightful ". The well-ordered energy which lives in his music was reflected in his personality, plus a simplicity and geniality which gave him the outward charm which we associate with the character of an English gentleman of the finest type.

INDEX