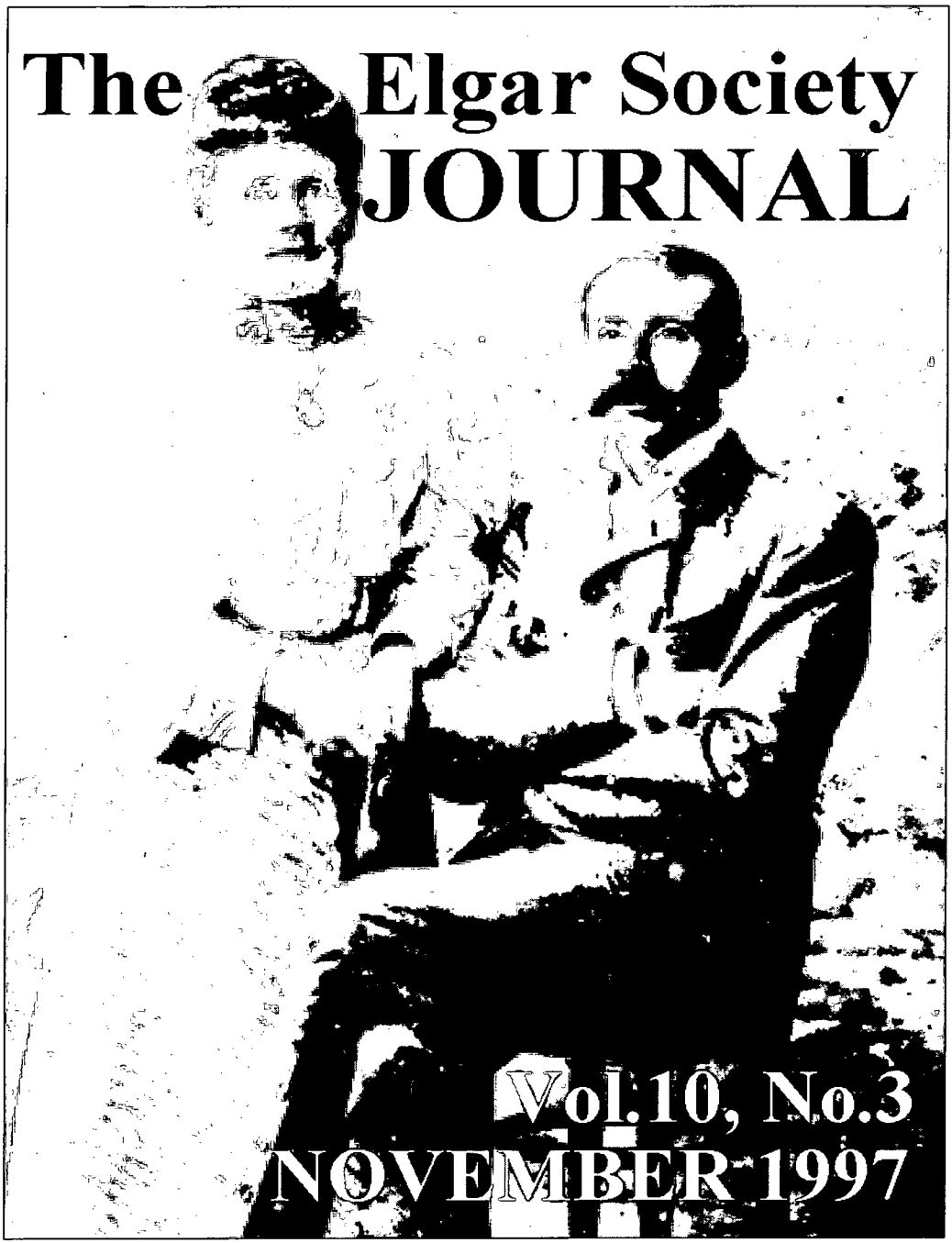
The Elgar Society JOURNAL



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NEW LIGHT ON ELGAR'S ENIGMA

J M Rollett

On 19 June 1899, the first performance took place of what has become one of Edward Elgar's best-loved orchestral works, the *Variations on an Original Theme*, Op 36, known as the 'Enigma Variations'. And for over 90 years the 'Enigma' has puzzled and intrigued generations of music lovers. Many solutions have been proposed, but none has won general acceptance, and speculation is as intense today as at any time in the past.

The name 'Enigma' derives from the word written at the top of the first page of the manuscript score, not by Elgar himself, but in pencil by A J Jaeger, acting on Elgar's instructions, after the score had already reached the publishers, Novello & Co.[1] This tardy decision might be regarded as the first of a whole series of minor mysteries surrounding the main 'Enigma', if not perhaps a matter of particular significance. Nevertheless, one is left wondering why it was only at a very late stage that Elgar decided to draw attention to the fact that there was some kind of puzzle associated with the piece.

The work was dedicated "*To my friends pictured within*," and their identities are indicated by initials or names placed over each Variation - with one exception, number XIII, which is headed "(* * *) / Romanza". At the first performance the listeners were very curious about the identities of the friends, but these are no longer in doubt, apart from that of the lady concealed behind the three asterisks - a mystery outside the scope of this article.[2] The chief conundrum was that posed by Elgar in reply to a request from the writer of the programme note for the first performance, from which the following is extracted[3]:

> 'On being asked for some elucidation of "the composer's intentions," Mr Elgar replied: "It *is* true that I have sketched, for their amusement and mine, the idiosyncrasies of fourteen of my friends, not necessarily musicians; but this is a personal matter, and need not have been mentioned publicly. The Variations should stand simply as a 'piece' of music. The Enigma I will not explain - its 'dark saying' must be left unguessed, and I warn you that the apparent connection between the Variations and the Theme is often of the slightest texture; further, through and over the whole set another and larger theme 'goes,' but is not played . . . . So the principal Theme never appears, even as in some late dramas - *e.g.*, Maeterlinck's 'L'Intruse' and 'Les sept Princesses' - the chief character is never on the stage." '

As Rosa Burley wrote, 'Exactly what this meant no one has ever known,' and Elgar

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[1]Robert Anderson : *Elgar* (Dent, 1993) p 41

[2]Gordon Lee : `Another Piece in the Jigsaw', *Elgar Society Journal*, vol 8 no 6, September 1994, pp 252-265

[3]A copy of the programme is preserved at the Elgar Birthplace, Broadheath. I am indebted to Mr Christopher Bennett for checking this transcription; two misspellings have been amended. Elgar's letter does not have appeared to have survived.

never explained it or amplified it[4]. It may be that the four dots indicate that some of his words were omitted by the writer of the programme note (C A Barry), and if so, they might perhaps have clarified his remarks (or perhaps not). As it stands, it would appear that the "Enigma" (which "I will not explain") is really made up of two (or maybe more) 'enigmas', the enigma of the "original theme" (the nature of which will be ex explored below), and the enigma of the "larger theme" (which "goes", "through and over the whole set . . . but is not played"). And what of the "principal Theme" which "never appears" - is it the "larger theme", or the theme believed to be associated with the "original theme", or something else again?[5]

* * *

To help us to elucidate the enigma of the original theme, we have it on the authority of Mrs Richard Powell, the 'Dorabella' of Variation X, that 'the Enigma was concerned with a tune,' and in the second edition of her book describing her friendship with Elgar (published in 1947) she quotes Winifred Norbury (of Variation VIII), Troyte Griffith (of Variation VII) and Elgar's daughter Carice as all referring to a (hidden) tune[6]. She also quotes from a biography published in 1905 by R J Buckley[7], a writer who visited Elgar several times in the course of preparing his book. In the introduction he says, 'Whatever this book states as fact may be accepted as such. The sayings of Elgar are recorded in the actual words addressed directly to the writer, and upon these I rely to give to the book an interest it would not otherwise possess.' And in discussing the *Variations* he says:

> 'What the solution of the "Enigma" may be, nobody but the composer knows. The theme is a counterpoint on some well-known melody which is never heard.'

Mrs Powell describes early in her reminiscences (p 23) how she 'asked about the 'Enigma' and what *was* the tune that "goes and is not played"?' Elgar replied "Oh, I shan't tell you that, you must find it out for yourself." (At this time Mrs Powell had not appreciated that there were two enigmas, and that she was quoting Elgar's remark about the mystery of the "larger theme" as if it had been made about that of the "original theme". She clarifies her thoughts later in the book, in a chapter written specially for the second edition (see fn.6). She went on to say: 'But I've thought and racked my brains over and over again.' Elgar: "Well, I'm surprised. I thought that you, of all people, would guess it." 'Why "me of all people"?' "That's

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[4]Rosa Burley & Frank C Carruthers : *Edward Elgar : the Record of a Friendship* (Barrie & Jenkins, 1972) p 119

[5]The "chief character...never on the stage" is `Death', in both of the "late dramas" (see fn.33, 23 April)

[6]Mrs Richard Powell (Dora Penny) : *Edward Elgar : Memories of a Variation* (2nd edn, OUP, 1947) pp 119-121

[7]Robert J Buckley : *Sir Edward Elgar* (John Lane : The Bodley Head, 1905) pp xi and 54-55

asking questions!"
Over the years various friends and others suggested possible solutions, to no avail. Winifred Norbury wrote to Mrs Powell, 'I always consider that I know the hidden tune in the Enigma, but he said I was wrong when I told him'. What her suggestion was we do not know. And Mrs Powell also reported that in 1923 Troyte Griffith asked Elgar if it was 'God save the King,' to which he replied, "No, of course not; but it is so well known that it is extraordinary that no one has spotted it."
The first solution to be put forward for general consideration appeared in 1934, proposed by Richard Powell, husband of 'Dorabella'[8]. His article had been written in the early 1920s, but its publication had been delayed until after Elgar's death, as he was known to have become very sensitive on the topic. He looked for a traditional, 'well-known' tune, which had 'peculiar associations with the idea of friendship,' and found it in *Auld Lang Syne*. It has to be admitted that this tune (with some sections turned into the minor) does not fit too well with the "original theme", but it can be made to fit if the occasional harmonic clash is discounted. This suggestion might be supposed to have received its *coup de grace* when in 1935 A H Fox Strangways, editor of *Music and Letters*, revealed that 'a friend, a Mr Hussey, wrote in 1929 to ask Elgar if A L S *was* the implicit tune. A postcard came back which he allows me to quote: "No, Auld Lang Syne won't do, E.E.".'[9] The same reply was given to Mrs Powell not long before Elgar's death (according to Roger Fiske)[10]. Notwithstanding Elgar's statement, many Elgarians continued to believe that A L S was indeed the missing tune, including Roger Fiske and Derek Hudson[11], for reasons which will be discussed later. For them, Elgar's statement was to be regarded as an evasion of a topic which had become distressing to him, rather than a categorical denial.
Quite recently, a pair of articles was published in the *Elgar Society Journal* for May 1992, both by biographers of Elgar. The American Elgar expert Dr Jerrold Northrop Moore admits that until May 1991 he had 'regularly dismissed as idle any and all such speculation about a hidden tune as came my way'[12]. But then he

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[8]Richard C Powell : `Elgar's Enigma', *Music and Letters*, vol xv, no 3, July 1934, pp 203-6, and editorial postscript [A H Fox Strangways], pp 207-8. For comments, see `Elgar's Enigma' *The Times*, 14 July 1934, p 10; and `An Unsolved Enigma' etc, *The Musical Times*, vol lxxv, nos 1098-1100, August (p 735), September (pp 835-6), and October (pp 934-5), 1934.

[9]A H Fox Strangways : `Elgar's Enigma', *Music and Letters*, vol xvi, no 1, January 1935, pp 37-9(*)

[10]Roger Fiske : `The Enigma : a Solution', *The Musical Times*, vol cx, no 1521, November 1969, pp 1124-6(*)

[11]Derek Hudson : `Elgar's Enigma : the trail of evidence', *The Musical Times*, vol cxxv, no 1701, November 1984, pp 636-9

[12]Jerrold Northrop Moore : `The Hidden Theme in Elgar's Enigma', *Elgar Society Journal*, vol 7, no 5, May 1992, pp 4-8 : see also `An Approach to Elgar's Enigma', *The Music Review*, vol xx, no 1, February 1959, pp 38-44

met Joseph Cooper, and learnt from him of the suggestion that the music hidden behind the Enigma theme might be a passage in the slow movement of Mozart's *'Prague' Symphony*. This passage, in G major, resembles the first six notes of the original theme (an idea previously put forward by J M Nosworthy[13], and its continuation resembles the first four notes of the G major middle section of the theme. Thus the theme could be regarded (on this view) as a greatly expanded version of the passage from Mozart, alternating between G minor and G major. The notion of the original theme as a counterpoint to the unknown theme has been jettisoned to arrive at this proposed solution.[14]

Professor Ian Parrott's article[15] reiterates his conviction (first published in 1968 [16]) that the Enigma is verbal, not musical, and was suggested to Elgar by the Epistle for Quinquagesima Sunday. In 1899 this fell on 12 February, when he was immersed in orchestrating the *Variations*, and it is recorded in his wife's diary that he did go to Mass that day. The words of the Vulgate version of I Corinthians 13, v. 12, are *'Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate,'* or 'Now we see through a glass darkly' - hence Elgar's remark: "The Enigma I will not explain - its 'dark saying' must be left unguessed." Here even the idea of a hidden tune is abandoned.

It is apparent that there is no kind of consensus among would-be Enigma solvers, and with the march of time the solutions offered span a wider and wider field. And yet, if we leave for a moment the enigma of the "larger theme", and review the earliest statements about the enigma of the "original theme", certain matters come into focus.

* * *

In 1900, F G Edwards wrote a long and discursive article about Elgar and his music for *The Musical Times*, of which he was then editor[17]. In it he said:

> 'In connection with these much discussed Variations, Mr. Elgar tells us that the heading 'Enigma' is justified by the fact that it is possible to add another phrase, which is quite

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[13]J M Nosworthy, letter to *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 March 1977, quoted in fn. 15

[14]The same is true of T van Houten's theory that *Rule Britannia* is the hidden tune and is hinted at in many of the Variations. Theodore van Houten, `The Enigma : a Solution from Holland', *Elgar Society Newsletter*, January 1976, and `"You of all people" : Elgar's Enigma', *The Music Review*, vol xxxvii, no 2, May 1976, pp 130-42; correspondence, ibid, no 4, November 1976, pp 317-9.

[15]Ian Parrott, `The Enigma Again', *Elgar Society Journal*, vol 7, no 5, May 1992, pp 9-11

[16]Ian Parrott : `The Enigma : A New Slant' (Elgar Society, 1968); cited in fn. 32, pp 46-9 (not seen)

[17]F G Edwards : `Edward Elgar', *The Musical Times*, vol 41, no 692, October 1900, pp 641-8 (*)

> familiar, above the original theme that he has written. What that theme is no one knows except the composer. Thereby hangs the 'Enigma'.'

This statement, made by someone who was on very good terms with Elgar, is about as specific as one could wish (even if the word 'phrase' rather than 'theme' in the middle sentence might have been preferable in the interests of perfect clarity). It is particularly interesting to learn, therefore, that the galley proofs of the article were sent to Elgar, and were subject to careful scrutiny by both Elgar and his wife[18]. And in 1905 (as already cited) one of his first biographers, R J Buckley - who made a point of using Elgar's 'actual words addressed directly to the writer' - recorded that 'the theme is a counterpoint on some well-known melody which is never heard'. The proofs of his book were also seen by Elgar[19].

Thus it would seem that both remarks were sanctioned either directly or implicitly by Elgar, and there can be no doubt at all that there really was a 'hidden tune' (or rather 'missing tune'), just as Dorabella and others always maintained. Elgar would hardly have allowed his friends to go on guessing unless such a tune did exist. The search must therefore continue. What kind of 'tune', 'melody' or 'phrase', then, should we look for?

The original theme has an unusual structure. It consists of six bars in G minor (call them 'A'), followed by four in G major ('B'), and then a repeat of the first six, A, ending on a chord of G major - a "*tierce de picardy*," as Elgar writes 'triumphantly' on the earliest surviving sketch[20]. The sketch also shows that he allowed eight bars for the middle section in the major, and then found that four sufficed[21]. This fact indicates that only section **A** had crystallised at this stage, and suggests that it is the **A** section which provides the counterpoint to the unknown phrase or melody, assuming that it was already in Elgar's conscious mind[22]. Thus there is little point in looking for a tune which matches the pattern six bars minor, four major, six minor, and as Rosa Burley implies, a tune with such an unusual pattern would hardly have escaped detection for so long.

If section A of the original theme is a counterpoint to the melody we seek, then it might perhaps seem logical that it should also have to fit the harmony of that melody, rather than that the melody should fit the harmony of the original theme; after all, a counterpoint does not normally come complete with its own harmony.

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[18]Jerrold Northrop Moore : *Edward Elgar : A Creative Life* (OUP, 1984; pb.repr, 1990) pp 326-7

[19]Ibid, p 438

[20]See Percy M Young : *Elgar OM : A Study of a Musician* (Collins, 1955) facing p 113. (I have been unable to locate the source of this comment on Elgar's annotation).

[21]Young, ibid, p 279, takes this as evidence that there was *no* `counter-theme' (although in fn.47, p 99, he refers to `the eternally elusive counter-theme')

[22]It seems quite possible that Elgar only noticed that his original theme was a counterpoint to another theme some time after it had been written.

So when Donald Tovey dismissed Richard Powell's suggestion of *Auld Lang Syne*, on the grounds that it does not fit the bass of the original theme (as recorded by Rosa Burley), it would have been more appropriate to have asked whether the theme fits the bass of *Auld Lang Syne*. However, the passage from F G Edwards' article quoted above talks of adding "another phrase . . . above the original theme," which leaves the matter open.

It seems then that, on balance, we should perhaps be looking for a melody or phrase of six bars (or maybe four, as the structure of **A** is four bars - the heart of the theme - plus two as a codetta), with its own bass and harmony, to which the theme of **A** can be added as a counterpoint. Although **A** is in the minor, it occurs in major versions in several of the variations, and so the melody we seek may possibly be in the major. This would seem to be about as far as we can go in background preparation.

* * *

As the reader will already have realised, I have my own candidate for the 'missing tune'. It came about in the following way. In mid-January, 1992, I turned on the radio and heard a few bars of a gently descending chromatic figure which dissolved into a breath-takingly beautiful adagio tune. I felt at once that I had known this music all my life, but was certain I had never heard the tune before (for who could ever forget such a heavenly melody?). I noted down the title of the piece, and ordered the only available recording straight away. A week or so later I collected it in the middle of the day, and played the piece (some five minutes long) three or four times.

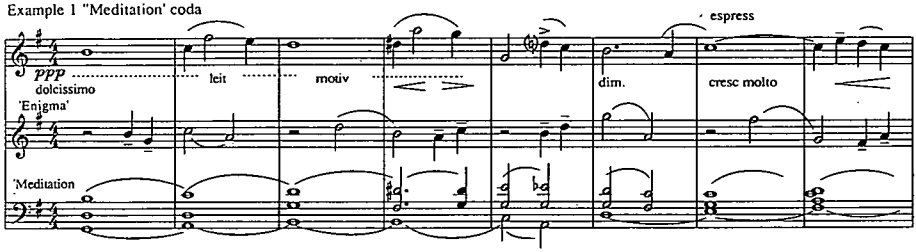
Late that same evening, thinking about nothing in particular, it suddenly dawned on me why the music was so familiar: the melody must surely be the 'missing tune' of the Enigma, to which the first four bars of the "original theme", turned into the major, were a counterpoint. I found some music paper, wrote out the melody with its harmony, and superimposed the four bars in the major. Remarkably, it fitted, and moreover it was a real counterpoint, with anticipations and suspensions, as might be expected if R J Buckley was accurately reporting Elgar's own words.

The melody comes from the coda of the 'Meditation', the instrumental introduction to *The Light of Life*, Op 29; (originally entitled *Lux Christi*), the oratorio written by Elgar in 1896 on the subject of the blind man whose sight is restored by Jesus. It was perhaps the first work of his to become popular with amateur choirs (and is now undeservedly neglected). The eight-bar 4/4 melody in G major, *ppp dolcissimo*, is described by Jerrold Northrop Moore as 'a superb invention to evoke Light itself'[23], and in the rest of this article I shall explore the possibility that this tune provides the solution to the enigma of the original theme.

These eight bars and their harmony are given in Example 1, with the first four bars of the original theme in the major on a third stave. The way the rhythms of the two melodies complement each other in the early bars makes excellent counterpoint - as one is static, the other moves forward. Later on, in bar five they move together, in bar six one anticipates the note the other moves to, and in bar

[23]Moore, op cit, p 208

Example 1 "Meditation' coda



eight the Enigma theme anticipates the tonic note in a way which has its roots in the seventeenth century or earlier.

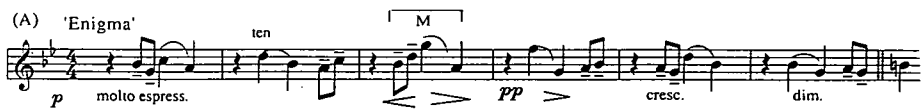
Some additional supporting evidence that the 'Meditation' theme is the missing tune is provided by the best-known variation (number IX), 'Nimrod', in E-flat major. Here the sixth note of the theme is F, rather than the expected G, corresponding (in G major) to A rather than B (see examples 7 and 1). It is (I think) especially significant that the 'Nimrod' version of the theme is just as good a counterpoint to the 'Meditation' theme as the Enigma theme (in the major). This comes about because the harmony in the fourth bar of the 'Meditation' theme is a dominant seventh chord on B, and can therefore accommodate *either* of the notes A or B at this point (F or G in E-flat).

Here it is necessary to face a difficulty with our proposal. While the first two bars of the original theme (in the major) go perfectly with the first four bars of the 'Light' theme, it must be admitted that the counterpoint from bar 5 onwards is somewhat bold (eg the second half of bar 5 itself). In view of this, one might suppose that when Elgar was quoted in 1900 as saying that "it is possible to add another *phrase* . . . above the original theme," he had in mind just bars 1 to 4 of example 1[24]. And in fact bars 5 to 8 of the 'Light' theme occur nowhere else in the Oratorio, and only serve to complete the melodic line at that particular point in the 'Meditation'. It is bars 1 to 4 that are employed as a leitmotiv throughout the Oratorio, whenever the healing of the blind man is referred to.

* * *

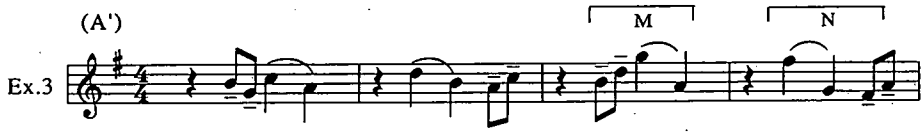
Elgar crafted the "original theme" with great skill. The kernel of the theme consists of the first four bars, which display an almost perfect symmetry. To complete the symmetry, the last two notes of the fourth bar should be F#, A - they depart from the ideal in order to link with the next two bars which act as a codetta. The first six bars, A in G minor, are shown in example 2.

Ex.2

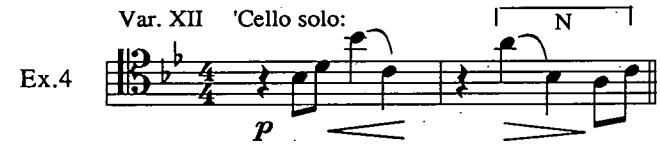


[24]While a tune or melody may be short or long, a phrase is by definition short. Shorn of harmony, the two tunes `go' together perfectly. Bar 3 of the Enigma theme, `M' of example 2, can be added as a counterpoint four times in the last eleven bars of the `Meditation', and `N' of examples 3 and 4 in the final bars.

The ideal form of the first four bars (A', say) is shown in the major in example 3.

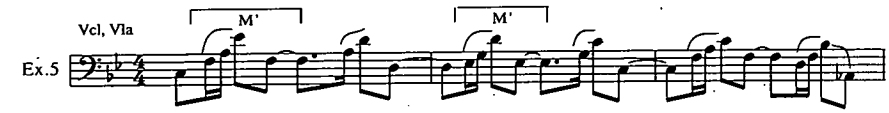


It is not until Variation XII that the solo cello plays what might be called the ideal fourth bar, in the second of the two bars which introduce and also close the Variation (example 4).



Thus it would seem that Elgar delayed revealing the fourth bar of A' until almost the last possible moment. Not once is the ideal form of the theme A', ever played. (Here, perhaps, is "the principal Theme" that "never appears, even as . . . the chief character is never on the stage," unless this "Theme" is to be identified with the "larger theme".)

Earlier in the 'Meditation' there are ghostly foreshadowings of the 'Enigma' theme. Thus in bars 8 to 10 after letter A, in the viola and cello parts (example 5), the rhythm of the first and third bars of the original theme occurs four times, and in bars 9 and 10 a phrase similar to the third bar with the falling seventh occurs twice.



It may be that a subconscious recollection of this rhythmic pattern suggested the first bar of the theme, which matches the rhythm of his name, "Edward El - gar"; this in turn might perhaps have called back the phrase with the falling seventh, thereby prompting bars three and four of the theme, to complete the rhythmic and thematic pattern.

There is a theory that the original theme was generated at the moment when Elgar's wife heard him improvising at the piano, in October 1898. She is recorded as asking him what was the tune he had just played, and Elgar replied "Nothing - but something might be made of it"[25]. It is also possible that the theme had been running in his mind beforehand - "picked out of the air," as he once described the process of inspiration[26], and as likely as not picked out of his subconscious

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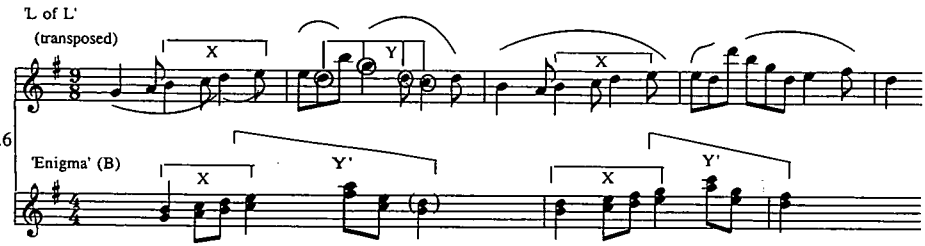
[25]Basil Maine : *Elgar : his Life and Works* (Bell, 1933; repr. Chivers, 1973), vol ii, p 101. See also J A Forsyth : `Edward Elgar : True Artist and True Friend', *The Music Student*, vol xii, no 12, December 1932, pp 243-4; and Moore, op cit, pp 247-9

[26]An early reference to this idea is given by Buckley, op cit, p 32

recollection of the inner part of an earlier composition. Whether he had already noticed that the theme (either in the minor or the major) was a counterpoint to another tune we cannot know.

If the first four bars of the original theme subconsciously echo aspects of these bars from the 'Meditation', it would perhaps not be too fanciful to look in the 'Meditation' for a possible origin of the four-bar middle section of the theme (**B**). At letter E there is a theme which (in the Oratorio) denotes 'Jesus as the Light of the World.' Transposed into G major it is shown in example 6, and underneath is shown the middle section, **B**. It can be seen that they share several similar features, and it might not be going too far to describe **B** as a shortened paraphrase of this theme from the 'Meditation'[27].

Ex.6



Thus, in summary, the case so far put forward rests on the observation that the heart of the original theme is a "counterpoint" to the "phrase" used as a leitmotiv throughout the Oratorio to refer to the restoring of sight to the blind man (and may perhaps make subconscious use of motifs from other bars of the 'Meditation'). Can we now essay a guess as to the "larger theme", which " 'goes,' but is not played," and are we any nearer to discovering the "dark saying" of the Enigma itself?

* * *

Elgar occasionally seems to have attached some particular significance to certain of his themes. We happen to know what the 'Enigma' theme meant to him, since he made use of it at several places in *The Music Makers*, and in writing to Ernest Newman about the work in 1912 he said[28]:

> "I have used the opening bars of the theme (Enigma) of the Variations because it expressed when written (in 1898) my sense of the loneliness of the artist as described in the first six lines of the Ode, and to me, it still embodies that sense; at the end of the score of the Variations I wrote 'Bramo assai, poco spero, nulla chieggio' (Tasso) [I essay much, I hope little, I ask nothing]: - this was true in 1898, and might be written with equal truth at the end of this work in 1912."

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[27]Another link between the *Variations* and the `Meditation' is the climax of `Nimrod', two bars before fig 37, which echoes the early climax in the `Meditation', three bars after letter D.

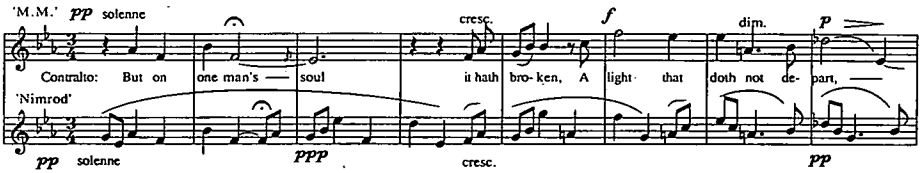
[28]Letter to Newman, 14 August 1912, quoted in Moore, ed : *Edward Elgar: Letters of a Lifetime* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990) p 249

The 'Enigma' theme is employed (on page 7 of the vocal score) to accompany the words 'sitting by desolate streams,' and a page later for the words 'for ever, it seems' - as though the loneliness of the artist would always persist. Then, the 'Nimrod' Variation is quoted to accompany the words sung by the contralto solo (page 42):

'But on one man's soul it hath broken,
A *light* that doth not depart'

This deeply-felt passage (example 7)[29] clearly links the 'Enigma' theme with the key word of *The Light of Life*.

Ex.7



As indicated later in his letter to Ernest Newman, Elgar is here acknowledging the encouragement which August Jaeger, 'Nimrod', gave to him when he was despondent and talking of giving up composition[30]. Jaeger cited the example of Beethoven, and is quoted by Elgar as saying that in slow movements, 'no one could approach Beethoven at his best'[31]. Elgar goes on to say that the opening bars of the 'Nimrod' variation "are made to suggest the slow movement of the Eighth sonata (Pathetique)," and Ian Parrott has demonstrated the relationship in his biography of Elgar[32]. The intensity of feeling in the 'Nimrod' variation marks the depth of Elgar's gratitude to his friend. Elgar was himself the lonely artist, the blind man, seeking support and reassurance, and the steadfastness of one man's friendship was what helped to encourage him to continue and to fulfil his destiny. As if to confirm this view, the last use of the 'Enigma' theme occurs at the words (page 65):

'Of the glorious futures we *see*'

* * *

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[29]I find myself in total disagreement with Frank Howes' negative remarks about this passage, in `The Two Elgars', *Music and Letters*, vol xvi, no 1, January 1935, p 28. See also Anderson, op cit, pp 198-9.

[30]Mrs Richard Powell, op cit, pp 110-1. There is some doubt about when this incident occurred : see Michael Kennedy : *Portrait of Elgar* (2nd edn, OUP, 1982) p 93

[31]Edward Elgar : *My Friends Pictured Within*, (Novello, 1929; 2nd edn, 1946)

[32]Ian Parrott : *Elgar* (Dent, 1971) p 42

If we have correctly identified the 'hidden tune' associated with the original theme, then it may perhaps lead us on towards the solution of the enigma of the "larger theme", which " 'goes' ", "through and over the whole set [of Variations] . . . but is not played." Earlier proposals have included 'friendship', put forward by Ernest Newman[33]; 'Bach', put forward by Ian Parrott[34], from the prominence in the original theme of the notes B-flat, A, C, B-natural (bars 1, 7, 8, 17: B-flat and B-natural are B and H in continental notation); and 'the composer himself,' put forward by Michael Hurd[35], since the rhythm of his name is so prevalent throughout.

The 'Light' theme from the 'Meditation' (first four bars) is used by Elgar in the Oratorio in various forms as a leitmotiv whenever the soloists or chorus sing of the vision of light experienced by the blind man as soon as he is healed[36]. Thus it suggests 'regeneration' - the new life that lies in front of the blind man as a result of the miracle. Shortly before the *Variations* came to be written Elgar had been very depressed. The growing confidence and exhilaration with which he planned and realised the *Variations* must indeed have seemed like a regeneration. How strangely symbolic it would have appeared to him when (or more properly if) he noticed that the original theme was a counterpoint to the 'Light' theme, with its connotations of a miraculous renewal[37]. Could it be then that the "larger theme", which " 'goes' ", "through and over the whole set," had for Elgar a religious significance - 'Light' as spiritual illumination, '*Lux aeterna luceat eis*,' 'Heaven's eternal day,' the love of God for man (which brings about the miracle)? This last

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[33]Ernest Newman : `Elgar and his Variations : What Was the Enigma?' *The Sunday Times*, 16 April 1939 (p 5), 23rd (p 5), 30th (p 5), 7 May (p 7)

[34]Ian Parrott : `Elgar's Two-Fold Enigma : A Religious Sequel', *Music and Letters*, vol liv, no 1, January 1973, pp 57-60

[35]Michael Hurd : *Elgar* (Faber & Faber, 1969) p 61

[36]Seven years later Elgar quoted this theme near the beginning of *The Apostles*, at the words "recov'ring of sight to the blind". A J Jaeger refers to a "welcome quotation from the composer's `Light of Life',...well known as the subject of the *Coda* in the...Meditation"; in *The Apostles : Analytical Notes* (Novello, 1903) p 6

[37]Between April and June of 1899 Elgar was looking over the score of the `Meditation' and making minor revisions to the solo parts of *The Light of Life*, so that the `Light' theme and the "original theme" would have been running together in his mind throughout this period (see Percy M Young, ed : *Letters to Nimrod* (Dobson, 1965) p 47ff). If the "original theme" was composed independently of the `Light' theme, then noticing the strange and evocative coincidence that they `went' together may have prompted Elgar to search for a word that would express this strangeness. Webster's *International Dictionary* (1890) gives `enigma :...a dark...saying;...a statement, the hidden meaning of which is to be discovered or guessed'. An inventory made in 1913 lists `Webster's Dictionary' as one of Elgar's books.

the O E D gives as one of the meanings of 'charity' or '*caritas*', which (as Ian Parrott points out) is the theme of the reading from I Corinthians which Elgar heard on 12th February, 1899. On the sense of '*caritas*' in this passage, the O E D quotes George Eliot - 'the highest form of love and fellowship.' A theme can (as we have seen) be either a tune or an idea, and similarly a leitmotiv is by definition both a tune and what it signifies. Thus it would be reasonable to suppose that the solution to the mystery of the "larger theme" of the Enigma is given by everything associated with the leitmotiv from *The Light of Life*, the melody and all it implies, suffusing the pictures of his friends with a musical and mystical radiance[38].

On the other hand, so opaque is Elgar's wording, perhaps "*over*" merely refers to the phrase which "it is possible to add . . . *above* the original theme." The "larger theme" is then to be identified with the 'hidden tune', pure and simple, which is indeed "not played."[39]

* * *

There are several matters which require further discussion. For example, how could Elgar describe the 'Light' theme from the 'Meditation' as "well known"? It is certainly not well-known today. However, Elgar's first reported remark about the 'hidden tune' (recorded in 1900 by F G Edwards) was that it was no more than "quite familiar." It was five years later, in 1905, that R J Buckley reported him as calling it "well-known", employing the very same words that A J Jaeger had already used in 1903 to describe the 'Light' theme when it was quoted in *The Apostles*. By this time the 'Meditation' had indeed become well-known. Buckley tells us (p 49) that although 'the cantata [*sic*] did not become so popular as was predicted, the introductory "Meditation", played everywhere, kept the name of Elgar in the programmes.' And Basil Maine says in 1933[40] that 'the popularity of . . . the "Meditation" ' was such that it became 'a stock-piece for orchestral societies everywhere.' So we may interpret Elgar's words as meaning 'well-known to the

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[38]If pressed to encapsulate this view, one could say that the `hidden theme' is the theme (tune) from the Coda of the `Meditation', and the `larger theme' is the theme (*logos*) of *The Light of Life*.

[39]In this case, the first part of the Enigma is the "dark saying", discussed later in this article, and the "larger theme" is the `Light' theme. The fact that Elgar apparently allowed Dora Penny (op cit, p 23) to assume that the "larger theme" was the `hidden tune' would support this interpretation. Elgar may have called it "larger" because a theme associated with a miracle might be regarded as carrying a greater significance than a theme associated with a lonely artist. Or, as J A Westrup astutely observed, "If the hidden theme is "larger", it is almost certainly in minims or even semibreves - a slow and dignified *canto fermo*". He goes on to say : "Where the theme is to be found still remains a problem. It may be by Elgar himself..." (`Notes of the Day' (Elgar's Enigma), *Monthly Musical Record*, vol lxiv, no 759, September 1934, pp 149-51).

[40]Maine, op cit, vol I, pp 72-3

kind of people who are interested in my music,' rather than well-known to the public in general.

Another matter which requires explanation is Elgar's remark to Dora Penny : "I thought that you, of all people, would guess it." It so happened that at the Worcester Festival on 13 September, 1899, Elgar conducted *The Light of Life* in the afternoon, and in the evening came the first performance of the *Variations* with the new coda to the last variation. This was the first time that Dorabella had heard the music in its orchestral form, and she was greatly moved [41]. She had travelled over with her parents in the morning, and heard the 'Meditation' in the afternoon, as recorded in her diary[42]:

> 'September 13 Wednesday. Started 9.20. Worcester 12.50. Lunch. Went to 'Lux' in the afternoon. Saw Elgars. Had tea at the Hydes. Mrs: E. dined with us. Great larks in the evening. Mr. Baker and I sat together. The Variations were lovely - 'specially me!'

It might well have been this coincidence which caused Elgar to say, about two months later, that "you, of all people" ought to have been able to guess the 'hidden tune.'

A few years after this Dora Penny 'tackled' Jaeger about the Enigma[43], and he replied that Elgar had made him promise that he would not tell her the secret. But on another occasion, according to W H Reed[44], Jaeger told an enquirer that it was 'a bit of Elgar's humour.' It is hard to find any element of humour in the solution propounded here, and in an attempt to account for Jaeger's curious remark, one might wonder whether it may have had an origin in Elgar's fondness for teasing his old friend, and a somewhat frivolous suggestion (in line with Elgar's well-known love of word games) is tentatively offered in the decent obscurity of a footnote[45].

Another of Elgar's Variation friends was at one time placed in a uniquely favourable position to identify the tune. Wulstan Atkins (Elgar's godson) records that in 1930 or 1931 Elgar told him the following story[46]:

> "One day, when I knew Troyte was coming, I marked with sticky paper certain keys on the piano, and on each piece of paper I put a number showing the sequence in which they were

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[41]Mrs Richard Powell, op cit, pp 20-1

[42]Powell, op cit, (4th edn, revised and edited by Claud Powell; Scolar, 1994) p 9. My thanks are due to Mr Powell for permission to quote this extract.

[43]Mrs Richard Powell (1947) p 28

[44]W H Reed : *Elgar* (Dent, 1939, repr 1946) p 53

[45]Whatever Elgar's reason for referring to a "larger theme", as quoted in the original programme note, is it perhaps possible that some time later he remarked to Jaeger (who had already been told the Enigma secret), as a leg-pull, that the "larger theme" was, of course (dropping a duplicate `r'), an `Elgar theme'?

[46]E Wulstan Atkins : *The Elgar-Atkins Friendship* (David & Charles, 1984) p 428

to be played. When Troyte came in I asked him to play these in the sequence in which they were marked, and he did so. I then removed the sticky paper and told him, 'Troyte, you now know the "Enigma"!' I knew I was safe because I knew he wouldn't remember which notes he had played."

If Elgar really did say "I put *a* number on each piece of paper," it would indicate that each note was required only once[47]. This is true for the first half of the 'Light' theme (the nine notes of the leitmotiv), but not true for A L S (or for some of the other suggestions that have been made from time to time).

* * *

Derek Hudson throws out a challenge in an article in *The Musical Times* of 1984 in which he adheres to *Auld Lang Syne* as the solution, pointing out that it fits the G major section of the theme (B) quite well; there is no need then to turn parts of A L S into the minor. He goes on to say that if the hidden tune was not A L S,

> 'someone must explain why it is that from the upbeat to the fourth bar of fig 79 through to the final flourish at fig 81 - at exactly the place in the entire work one might expect to find it - the whole of *Auld lang syne* quite clearly goes with Elgar's added music.'[48]

However, this passage is part of the extra hundred bars which Jaeger exhorted him to add in order to give the last variation greater weight[49], and can hardly have any bearing on the Enigma as originally conceived.
Adrian Brown has recently suggested to me that Elgar might perhaps have composed this passage as a blind - deliberately making it fit *Auld Lang Syne* in order to confuse the issue. It cannot be denied that this is just the sort of thing that Elgar might have done - and Derek Hudson now has his explanation! If A L S had been suggested as the solution by someone shortly after the first performance, Elgar might well have seized on the idea for one of his 'japes' when composing the extra bars - it would be no wonder then that Dorabella reported him roaring with laughter as he played the new ending to her, 'thoroughly enjoying what he had written'[50].
If Elgar did compose the additional bars to go with A L S[51], it could account for

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[47]Percy Young quotes an account of what may or may not be the same incident, taken from papers of Troyte Griffith's in his possession, indicating that some notes were to be played more than once (Percy M Young : `Friends Pictured Within' in Raymond Monk, ed : *Elgar Studies* (Scolar Press, 1990) p 102). If these two accounts both describe the same episode, one might be inclined to prefer Elgar's version, as apparently Troyte Griffith was not particularly gifted musically.

[48]Not everyone would agree with this statement.

[49]Cecil Barber : `Enigma Variations : an earlier ending', *Music and Letters*, vol xvi, no 2, April 1935, pp 137-8

[50]Mrs Richard Powell (1947) pp 125-6

[51]The only surviving sketch for this passage (BL Add MS 49973B, fo 19) gives no hint of a secret agenda.

his embarrassment when, towards the end of his life, Mrs Powell asked him if *Auld Lang Syne* were the tune, and he again denied it (an episode recounted by Roger Fiske). It would have been too much for him at this late stage to embark on a lengthy explanation that, although A L S did play a role in the last variation, it was not the tune associated with the enigma of the original theme[52].

* * *

It is time to try to determine how Elgar came to use the word 'Enigma' to describe the piece and the puzzles associated with it. The first occasion on which Elgar used it in his correspondence appears to be in a letter to Jaeger, dated 28 May, 1899[53]. In it he refers to "Another 'Enigma'" - without explaining it (although, confusingly, it seems to have something to do with royalties), suggesting that the word already had a settled implication known to both of them. Then in a letter dated 30 June, he writes to Jaeger about his reluctance to lengthen the last variation, and goes on to say "the [1st theme *deleted*] principal motive (Enigma) comes in grandioso . . . and it *won't do* to bring it in again . . . " Thus the "principal motive" at the Grandioso section is what Elgar calls the "Enigma" theme, and this is just the first four bars (modified) of the complete theme in the major, quoted from the 'Nimrod' variation (bars 1 to 4 of example 7). It would appear then that for Elgar the musical Enigma was associated with what we have called the heart of the theme, the first four bars, whose ideal form in the major is A' of example 3, as suggested earlier (and this disposes of Derek Hudson's theory).
But we have still not penetrated the heart of the mystery. Elgar was quoted in the programme note for the first performance as saying "The Enigma I will not explain - its 'dark saying' must be left unguessed, . . . ". It seems clear that a "dark saying" can only be a form of words, and even assuming that the musical solution to the 'hidden tune' is correct, there is still a verbal or literary reference to be found.
In 1904 Elgar was interviewed for *The Strand Magazine*[54], and in referring to his early attempts to learn about music and musical form he described himself in a telling phrase as "groping in the dark after light." It is true that a blind man is in the dark, so it may perhaps be the Oratorio that is obliquely glanced at here. Indeed, the first time the chorus sing to the music of the 'Light' theme (vocal score page 22), their words are:

'Light, light, light out of darkness Thou hast brought!'

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[52]An alternative explanation for Elgar's reaction could be inferred from the observation by A H Fox Strangways (see fn.8) that bars 5-8 after fig 68 in the Finale (repeated later at fig 74) have the same metre as A L S. Perhaps Elgar had been aware of this when writing the passage (or became aware of it later), but felt that to say so might be open to misinterpretation.

[53]Young : *Nimrod Letters*, p 51

[54]Rudolph de Cordova : `Dr Edward Elgar', Illustrated Interviews no LXXXI, *The Strand Magazine*, vol xxvii, no 161, May 1904, pp 537-44(*)

The transition from darkness to light is the essence of the Oratorio, just as the transition from loneliness to confident assertiveness is the essence of the *Variations*. The progression is from the theme, with its repetitions of the rhythm of his name, to the final "bold and vigorous" variation, 'E.D.U.', the composer himself ('Edu' being his wife's nickname for him, short for 'Eduard', the German form of his name). The finale was, according to Elgar[55], "Written at a time when friends were dubious and generally discouraging as to the composer's musical future" and "merely to show what E.D.U. . . . intended to do."
We may now be somewhat closer to Elgar's meaning, and we have partly anticipated the suggestion made by Michael Hurd in his brief book on Elgar. He refers to Michael Kennedy's *Portrait of Elgar*, where it is pointed out that Elgar actually signed himself in a letter to Dorabella by the first four notes of the Enigma theme[56]. Hurd then adds:

> 'And so, perhaps, it is Elgar's own name that 'goes' throughout the work and is the unheard theme. . . .
> Thinking therefore along these lines, it would seem possible to regard the entire work as a portrait of the composer. Elgar the lonely artist as the theme itself . . . , and Elgar in relation to his friends as the variations that follow - for every person changes slightly according to the company he finds himself in. The Finale, an indication of what Elgar intended to achieve through his music, then follows quite naturally. The complete work would then read: the composer as he is in his innermost self; the composer as he appears in company with his friends; the composer as he one day will be'.

This is a valuable insight, cogently expressed, and essentially sums up all that could be said before the discovery of the 'hidden tune' (whether from the 'Meditation' or elsewhere). But we have still not come across anything to explain what Elgar might have meant by a "dark saying."
We therefore return to the only two verbal or literary suggestions which have been put forward so far. One has already been outlined, originated by Ian Parrott, in the words of I Corinthians 13, v. 12: '*Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate,*' or 'Now we see through a glass darkly.' This associates 'Enigma' with 'darkness', but leaves out the idea of friendship. The other literary suggestion is due to Mrs

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[55]Kennedy, op cit, p 86

[56]There are two such letters, dated 10 and 25 October, 1901 (see Mrs Richard Powell (1947) pp 38-9). These signatures might be regarded as evidence against Christopher's intriguing theory that a hidden dedication `*a Carice*', Elgar's daughter, is coded into the original theme. If the alphabet is continued up the natural scale, these two words correspond to the notes `A, ca, a, d, b, C, e'. This cipher (one of several that Elgar was interested in) would therefore supply the first five notes of the original theme transposed into A minor, with the capital letters providing the two notes in the bass line which coincide with rests in the theme (Christopher Seaman : notes on his recording of the *Variations*, Pickwick IMP Classics, PCD 1080, 1994). The basic idea, that this method of coding the name `Carice' was the origin of the theme, had previously been put forward by Vernon Jones, *Royal Academy of Music Magazine*, no 198, Midsummer 1970, pp 5-9.

Cecil Dickenson, as reported in Diana McVeagh's biography of Elgar[57]:

> 'Sir Thomas Browne in his *Religio Medici* wrote (and the capital and italics are his):
> 'There are wonders in true affection: it is a body of *Enigmas*, mysteries, and riddles; wherein two so become one, as they both become two. I love my friend before myself, and yet methinks I do not love him enough: some few months hence my multiplied affection will make me believe I have not loved him at all.'
> Elgar possessed this book; if he found in it the idea and title of the Enigma will never be known.'

Here Sir Thomas Browne associates 'Enigma' with 'friendship', and since the Greek verb from which the word 'enigma' is derived means 'to speak darkly,' it may well have been this passage about the complexities of 'true affection' that Elgar's had in mind when he wrote (for the first programme note) of a "dark saying". And if the "phrase" which may be added "above the original theme", and to which this theme is a "counterpoint", is the first half of the 'Meditation' theme, sung to the words 'Light, Light!,' then the chain of thought linking *'friendship - Enigma - dark saying - Light!'* is at last revealed.

But in the final analysis, since only Elgar's wife and Jaeger were told the secrets of the Enigma, and neither passed them on to others or wrote them down (as far as we know), there does not seem to be any way of divining whether we are any closer to resolving them.

* * *

It would appear that when the *Variations* were first launched Elgar thought that the 'hidden tune' would be found quite quickly, even if the "dark saying" was more obscure (and "must be left unguessed" - but in that case, why mention it at all!)[58]. The implicit reference to his own earlier work (if we are right) might have been easily passed off as a *jeu d'esprit* had it been discovered within a few years. But as time went by the matter took on a significance greater than he could have anticipated, and it may well have been a relief to him that the solution of the Enigma continued to evade detection. In any case, as W H Reed said, 'He was himself the Enigma, and remained so to the end of his life.' Perhaps, after all, the mystery is best laid to rest with its author.

(*) These articles are reproduced in "An Elgar Companion," edited by Christopher Redwood, Ashbourne, 1982.

Acknowledgment. In addition to the works referred to here, I have read and learnt much of interest from many other books and articles dealing with the Enigma, too numerous to record. I should like to express my indebtedness to all those writers who may have influenced my views, consciously or unconsciously, but who have not been mentioned. *J.M.R.*

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[57]Diana M McVeagh : *Edward Elgar : His Life and Music*, (Dent, 1955) p 26. The same passage is quoted by Ernest Newman, perhaps from the same correspondent (see fn.33, 7 May 1939).

[58]The `dark' of the "dark saying", together with the absent `Death' of the two "late dramas" (see fn.5) suggest, by opposites, `Light' and `Life'. Perhaps Elgar intended these words to provide a clue to the source of the `hidden tune' of the Enigma.

ST WULSTAN'S CHURCH, LITTLE MALVERN

The Church of St Wulstan at Little Malvern is probably familiar to most Elgarians as the place where Alice Elgar was buried in 1920, and also Elgar himself in 1934. Elgar said of the site at the time of Alice's death : "We can see the little grave in the distance and nothing could be sweeter and lovelier, only birds singing and all remote peace brought closely to us. The place she chose long years ago is too sweet - the blossoms are white all round and the illimitable plain, with all the hills and churches in the distance which were hers from childhood, looks just the same - inscrutable and unchanging".

In her book Rosa Burley recounts : "...we took the road along the east side of the hills, a road of great beauty with the wooded heights on the right side and the drop to the Severn on the left. At Little Malvern we dismounted and entered the Catholic Church in the graveyard of which Edward and Alice were both ultimately to rest".

After many years of neglect the grave and surrounding area have been extensively restored (see article in NEWS). (Photograph courtesy Gordon Lee).

A SOURCE FOR ELGAR'S ENIGMA

Rodney Stenning Edgecombe

In spite of some hostile contemporary reactions to *La Rédemption* (notably Hanslick's), most Victorians held Gounod's sacred music in high esteem. Since even Saint-Saëns (an unbeliever) was moved by his compatriot's religiosities, we can be fairly sure that Elgar knew *La Rédemption*, and, given Gounod's influence on his own religious music, did not altogether scorn it. After all, the critic of the *Leeds Mercury* detected Gounodisme in *The Light of Life* [1], and, decades later, Michael Kennedy would make the same finding in an altogether greater oratorio: "That a *Parsifal* atmosphere can be breathed in *Gerontius* is hardly to be denied, but Gounod and Massenet are there too"[2].

Gounod might also be "there" in the *Variations*, Op 36, for if we turn to the `March to Calvary' in *La Rédemption* we find an episode (ex.1) remarkably similar to Elgar's `Enigma' (ex.2). In his introduction to the Novello score of the oratorio, Gounod observed that this is a "lamentation, for female voices, representing Christian compassion, of which the musical setting, accompanied by the wailing notes of the orchestra, is borrowed from the Hymn in the Catholic Liturgy, `Vexilla Regis prodeunt' (`Forth the Royal Banners go')"[3]. I am hamstrung by my ignorance of early music, but I should point out that Gounod's choral line, which starts as an isosceles triangle, is *not* the Dorian chant *The English Hymnal* attaches to *Vexilla Regis*. The editor of that collection points out that if "a modern tune is required for this hymn it may be sung to that at Hymn 50 [*Primo dierum omnium*] which was originally proper to VEXILLA REGIS".[4] That "modern tune" turns out to be a seventeenth-century chorale with no resemblance to Gounod's, but the plot thickens when we discover that the Hypophrygian chant associated with *Primo dierum omnium* has a stepped formation not unlike the *Rédemption* line, even though significant differences remain. How to resolve this, when the composer claims to have borrowed a *musical* setting from the liturgy, I do not know. (What chant, one wonders, did Liszt use for his unpublished piano version of *Vexilla regis*?) Nor can I be sure why the Rev J Troutbeck's translation of *La Rédemption* does not match the syllables of Venantius' text. Since I have no access to Gounod's original libretto, I would guess that he paraphrased the hymn in French, and that Troutbeck syllabified his English against that. Hence "Forth the Royal Banners go" instead of J M Neale's "The Royal banners forward go" (surely the standard version by 1882).

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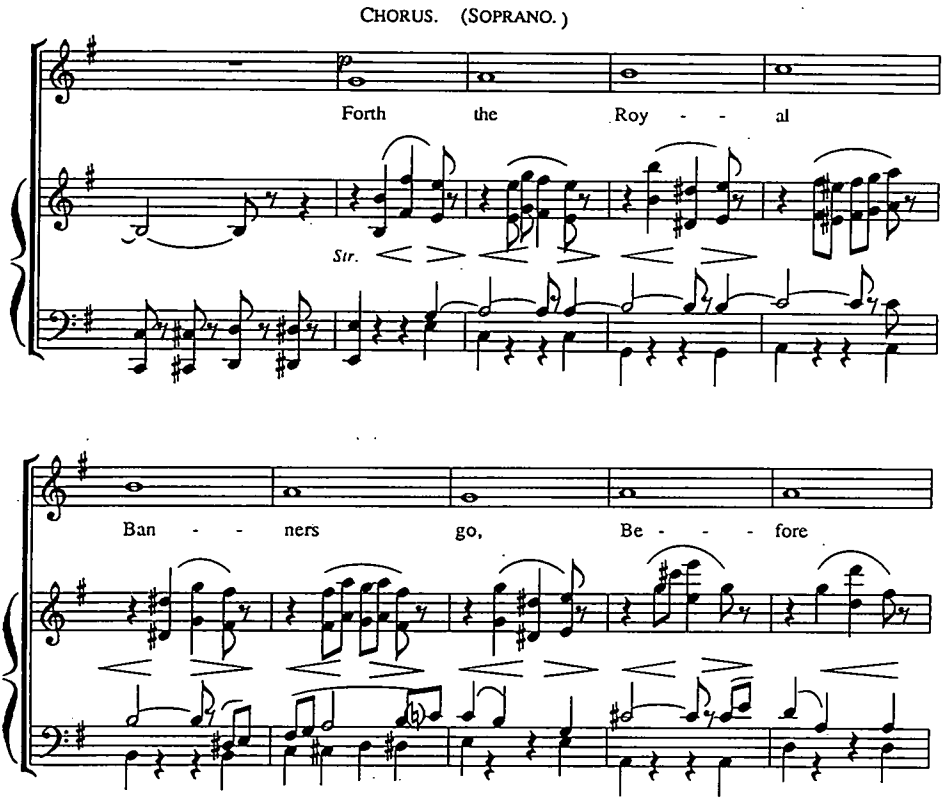
[1]Anderson, Robert: *Elgar* (London: Dent, 1993) p 33

[2]Kennedy, Michael: *Portrait of Elgar* (London: OUP, 1968) p 49

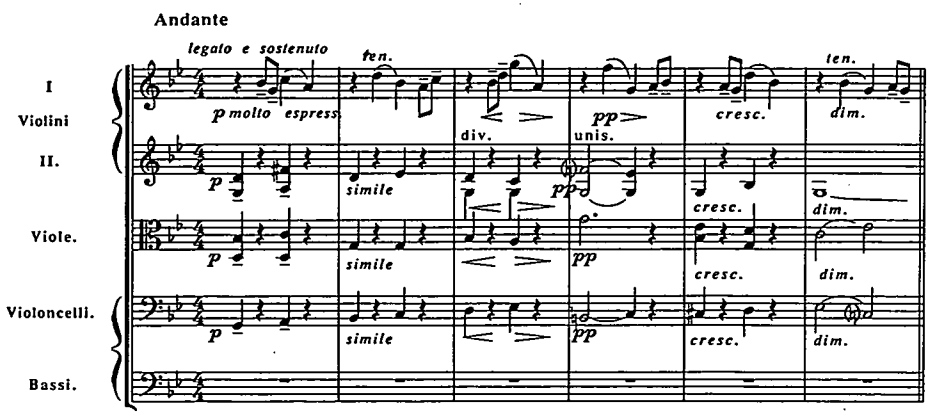
[3]Gounod, Charles: *The Redemption: A Sacred Trilogy* (London: Novello, n.d.) p v

[4]*The English Hymnal With Tunes* (London: OUP, 1933) p 133

Ex. 1


CHORUS. (SOPRANO.)
Forth the Roy - - al
Str.
Ban - - ners go, Be - - - fore

Ex.2


Andante
legato e sostenuto
ten.
ten.
I
Violini
II.
Viole.
Violoncelli.
Bassi.
p molto espress
simile
simile
simile
div.
unis.
pp
pp
pp
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
dim.
dim.
dim.
dim.

All of which is mildly interesting, but not essential to the point I want to make, viz., that Gounod took a known melody (*Vexilla regis* or an *ad hoc* variant) and embellished it with a counter subject, a counter-subject similar to Elgar's `Enigma', which also came to birth in an identical way. Indeed one cannot but notice how closely Gounod's choral line resembles W H Reed's "reconstruction" of the subject (Ex 3) that (he speculates) "may have been in the composer's mind as a kind of framework or outline before he worked upon it and evolved the `Enigma' theme with its broken rhythm and descending intervals"[5].

The fact that the *Rédemption* melody figures in the relative minor, and the Enigma in the tonic minor, of G, as well as the fact that both are scored for strings alone - these slightly increase the probability of influence, but the *melodic* parallels are more striking still. Both counter-tunes rise from a tonic note in the bass, as though touching bottom before they surface, and in both the minor third imparts a keening quality (Gounod's "wailing notes"). Equally important is the double-quaver in the third bar of Ex 1, which exactly duplicates the pattern (even to the "lacuna" at the first beat) of the violin line in Ex 2. In his 1929 notes for the pianola rolls of the *Variations*, Elgar drew attention to "the two quavers and two crotchets in the first bar and their reversal in the second bar"[6]. So far as I can tell, no one has commented on the Slavonic effect of this contour, an effect implying other influences than Gounod's upon the *Variations*.

In Eurocentric ears, quaver braces will give a Russian turn to a melody of even crotchets, especially if they are placed at "unconventional" nodes of the design. Consider, for example, the `Promenade' in Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* (Ex 4), and the `Russian Song' from Tchaikovsky's *Children's Album* (Ex 5). In the last especially, the quavers have the effect of coming "too soon", so that the marching tune seems to lose its balance and reel slightly, or (put differently) "skips" to get back in step. The Enigma has just this "Russian" colour, though its effect is slightly different. By reversing the position of the quavers, Elgar makes the tune seem even more uncertain. He creates the symmetry (almost a chiasmus) of quaver-quaver, crotchet, crotchet: crotchet, crotchet, quaver-quaver in the first two bars, but undoes that balance by having the monosyllabic crotchet at the end of bar one "rhyme" with the disyllabic quaver brace. This produces a sense of irresolution, of yearning rather than conviction. No surprise therefore,

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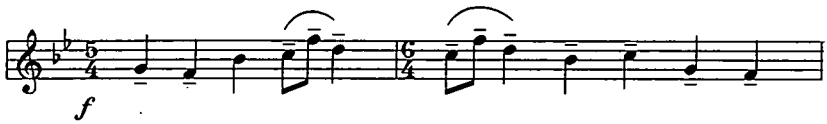
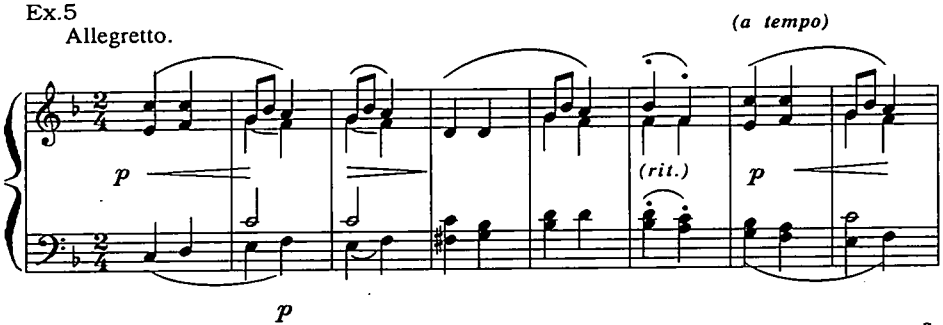
[5]Reed, W H: *Elgar* (London: Dent, 1939, repr.1943) p 153

[6]Anderson, op cit, p 311

Ex.4



Ex.5
Allegretto.



that Elgar should use the tune to express "his sense of loneliness as an artist"[7], a sense reinforced by its recurrence, with the same meaning, in *The Music Makers*. But we perhaps could take this even further. Since a similar pattern develops in Gounod's counter-subject to *Vexilla regis*, is it wholly improbable that Elgar saw the lonely artist as a Christ figure? He knew Shelley well, and Shelley had made just this connection in *Adonais* :

> He answered not, but with a sudden hand
> Made bare his branded and ensanguined brow,
> Which was like Cain's or Christ's - Oh! that it should be so![8]

In order to confirm that Shelleyan influence, we should recall that the poet played an important part in Elgar's *Second Symphony*, parts of which meditate on a passage from *Julian and Maddalo* and on the lyric "Rarely, rarely comest thou". The resemblance between the Gounod passage and the Enigma might therefore transcend a formal borrowing, and offer itself rather as an allusion, an allusion like the more tangible reference to Mendelssohn's *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* later in the work.

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[7]Porte, J F : *Sir Edward Elgar, OM, MusDoc, LL D, MA* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Trubner, 1921) p 63

[8]Shelley, Percy Bysshe : *Selected Poems* (ed. Timothy Webb) (London: Dent, 1977) p 153

ELGAR AND EMPIRE

Ian Lace

There is a scene in John Boorman's film Hope and Glory, set in the days of the blitz of World War II, where a harassed schoolteacher points to a map on which much of the world is coloured red. She then says - "It's the British Empire - and your fathers and brothers are out there fighting for it - for you!" The scene is remarkably realistic and immediately recognisable to those who were born in the 1930s, like myself, and who were then at school.

After the Second World War, the Empire disintegrated and today it is fashionable to consider the whole concept of imperialism as contemptible. Biographers of Elgar have, quite rightly, identified the recessional aspects of Elgar's ceremonial music but should we not be any less proud of its processional characteristics? It is, I think, appropriate to quote from John Keegan's Foreword to the Daily Telegraph's *publication* - The British Empire, *published this summer (1997):- "Whatever the Empire's early crimes, and there were many, the British succeeded, before the Empire's demise, in atoning for most of them and transforming the institution into what it became: a Commonwealth for the common wealth.... Should the British be proud of the Empire they left behind? Of course they should...In my childhood, the British Empire was commonly compared in importance with the empire of Rome [as Elgar did in* Caractacus*]. That may prove an exaggeration....On the other hand, Rome was not loved. There is a sort of love for the old British Empire that remains warm among most of those who belonged to it, and that is its greatest monument."*

Elgar lived through the rise, and the beginnings of the end, of the British Empire and it undoubtedly affected him and his music. In a way, it is ironic that in the year he died, 1934, the Empire reached the pinnacle of its growth. This article, therefore, traces an outline of the history of the Empire and how it impacted upon Elgar and his music. One must remember that, at the turn of the century, values were very different from those that we hold today; those values were changed, irrevocably, by the tragedies of two World Wars and all the stresses of our times.

* * *

One hundred years ago this year, on 22 June 1897, Queen Victoria stepped into the telegraph room in Buckingham Palace and sent a message to her subjects all across the globe. She then joined her Diamond Jubilee procession through the streets of London. In this huge procession, were representatives from every corner of her Empire. The British Empire was the largest empire in the history of the world; comprising nearly a quarter of its land mass and a quarter of its population.

Yet many people both at home and in the Empire felt that the best was with them then or had even begun to pass. This mood was caught by two artists: Rudyard

Kipling who expressed it in his Jubilee poem *Recessional* and Elgar who caught it in the upward leaps and downward-turning figures of his *Imperial March.*

Only two years later, in 1899, British confidence was thoroughly shaken by severe defeats in the Second Boer War. Although, Britain would eventually be victorious these setbacks nevertheless signalled the beginnings of imperial retreat.

"Recessional"

The tumult and the shouting dies -
The captains and the kings depart -
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
A humble and a contrite heart.
.....
Far-call'd our navies melt away-
On dune and headland sinks the fire-
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!

Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,
Lest we forget - lest we forget!

Rudyard Kipling

Elgar's *Imperial March* catapulted him to fame. It caught the Londoner's imagination in 1897 and made Elgar's name well known. Before the *Imperial March*, Elgar was little known outside the West Midlands. The *Imperial March* was composed in a bell tent in front of Forli, the Elgar's home in Malvern. As Percy Young says in *Elgar O M* : "It was the popular music for a popular mood: broad, simple, and richly garnished. It was played by massed bands at the Crystal Palace on April 25th; at a Royal Garden Party on June 28th, the anniversary of the Queen's coronation, [by special command of the Queen]; at a State Jubilee Concert on July 15th; and at the Albert Hall by the Royal Artillery band on October 24th."

Elgar was then 40 years old. Behind him were his early choral works and one or two small orchestral works: *Froissart, Serenade for Strings, The Black Knight* and *King Olaf* etc. Ahead of him was *Caractacus*, and then in the next decade or so the majority of his greatest works, beginning with the *'Enigma' Variations* and *The Dream of Gerontius*.

The life of Elgar spanned the years of, perhaps, the most considerable and tumultuous change in our history. He saw the introduction of motor vehicles, of aeroplanes, telephones, films, radio and television. Less than ten years before his birth, Marx and Engels were writing their Communist Manifesto. When he was born, the Crimean War had just ended and the American Civil War was four years into the future, and Darwin's *Origin of Species* two. Only the English upper and middle classes had the right to vote.

It was the trade-seeking voyages beginning with John Cabot's discovery of Newfoundland, in the reign of Henry VII, that marked the beginnings of the

Empire. In the following centuries, due to the exploits of men like Raleigh in the Americas, Wolfe in Canada, Clive in India, and Cook in Australia, plus the activities of the trading institutions such as The Hudson's Bay Company and the East India Company, a string of colonies was founded across the globe. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, after the Napoleonic War, the British Government began to recognise a deepening commitment to these colonies and so, in 1814, a separate Colonial Office was created. There was a new feeling of confidence as England began to forge ahead as the leading industrial nation and there was also a growing sense of responsibility. It was Britain's duty to take up "the white man's burden" - to outlaw the slave trade and to take enlightenment, in the form of education and Christianity, to the "natives."

Throughout the earlier years of the nineteenth century, most Englishmen thought little of Empire or of the colonies which had come together "in a fit of absence of mind" as was said of the process, in a famous phrase. Many felt that the possession of an Empire was an irrelevance, or an eighteenth century anachronism.

Six years before Elgar's birth, in 1851, the Great Exhibition was held in the Crystal Palace specially erected in Hyde Park. It symbolised and boasted to the world of the staggering material progress achieved since the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution. From this time until the 1880s, Britannia did indeed rule the waves. The Crystal Palace was, of course, later transferred to its site in Sydenham, South London but not before Queen Victoria had to personally intervene to persuade the lady who owned the land to sell it after all previous attempts had failed. The lady was the mother of Frank and Adela Schuster! [The Crystal Palace was burnt down on 30 November 1936]

We should remember that most of Elgar's life was spent in the reign of Victoria and that he witnessed the ascendancy of the Empire. Elgar was born in 1857; a momentous year in the Empire's history. The Indian Mutiny occurred in the weeks surrounding the date of his birth (2 June). The uprising began in Meerut on 10 May. The sepoys, long considered loyal, rose in rebellion. The flash point was the use of cartridges with ends greased with either cow fat (sacred to Hindus) or pig fat (unclean to Muslims). This was the last straw; for many years the East India Company had been offending by imposing Western traditions with increasing arrogance and detachment. The revolt spread quickly to Delhi and Cawnpore where the massacre of hundreds of British men, women and children caused considerable outrage in England and equally barbarous reprisals. The following year, 1858, the East India Company was obliged to hand over the administration of India to the British Government. It was both the real beginning of the British Imperial Empire and the beginning of its end. It signalled the end because the 1857 revolt was the first step on the long road to Indian independence won in 1947.

After the shambles of the Indian Mutiny, the Empire became more organised and recognised as an entity. India would become the Jewel in the Crown of the British Empire and Queen Victoria would become its Empress in 1876. Earlier in 1861, construction had begun on an imposing new headquarters for the British Empire

between Whitehall and St James Park.

In 1870, John Ruskin, art historian, painter and social reformer, had just been appointed Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford. He expressed his views with a magical conviction, and he was one of the most compelling and popular speakers in Britain. His inaugural lecture at Oxford was on the theme of Imperial Duty. In a packed hall, Ruskin delivered his call for the ideology of Empire:-

"...Will you youths of England make your country again a royal throne of kings; a sceptred isle, for all the world a source of light, a centre of peace; mistress of learning and of the Arts, faithful guardian of time-honoured principles? That is what England must either do or perish; she must found colonies as fast and as far as she is able...teaching these her colonists that their chief virtue is to be fidelity to their country, and their first aim is to be to advance the power of England by land and sea..."

James Morris, writing in the first volume, *Heaven's Command* of his brilliant British Empire trilogy, *Pax Britannica*, commented: "Such a view of the imperial summons placed the Empire in the very centre of national affairs...around which the whole of British life should revolve. Few who heard him [Ruskin] that day could have been unmoved by the appeal, and some we know were influenced by it for the rest of their lives [Cecil Rhodes, for instance]; for the first time the imperial idea now seemed to satisfy some craving in the British consciousness. .... In the 1870s, there were signs that the British conviction of merit was growing into a conviction of command. Ruskin's vision was partly an inspiration, partly a symptom: and during the next decade two astonishing statesmen forced the issue of imperialism into the forefront of British affairs, capping the Victorian age with its passions. Benjamin Disraeli became the maestro of Empire: William Gladstone, its confessor." And the increasing competition for overseas colonies amongst the European nations, epitomised by the scramble for Africa, further stoked imperial fervour.

[As a young man, Elgar had been given books by Ruskin, including *Sesame and Lilies* and *Fors Clavigera* by the owner of Severn Grange, an old house about two miles from Worcester. Elgar was later to quote, famously, from John Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* on the final page of *Gerontius* - "This is the best of me..." It is also worth remembering that the mother of `Windflower' (Alice Stuart Wortley) was the wife of the Pre-Raphaelite painter, Millais, but had been married first, disastrously, to John Ruskin.

Throughout the 1870s and into the 1880s, Elgar was taking his first tentative steps in composition making arrangements, experimenting with chamber and orchestral works and composing pieces for the church such as *Salve Regina*, and writing music for Powick Asylum etc.

During this period news reached Worcester about the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and Disraeli's purchase of shares in it, six years later, so guaranteeing Britain a swifter route to India. News also came of the successful search, in 1871, by American journalist H M Stanley for David Livingstone - ardent anti-Slavery,

missionary, doctor and explorer - who had been lost and feared dead, seeking the source of the Nile; and news arrived, too, of tragedy and heroism associated with the wars against the Zulus at Isandhlwana and Rorke's Drift in 1879. Worcester would also have read about the activities of Ned Kelly hanged in Melbourne in 1880 and of Cecil Rhodes founding the De Beers mining company in that same year. And, more significantly, for Elgarians, news reached home about the martyrdom of General Gordon at Khartoum in January 1885.

Gordon had been a hero of the wars in China. He had also been a former Governor-General of the Sudan. When the Mahdist revolution in the Sudan became a serious threat, Gladstone, against his better judgement, was forced by a press campaign to place Gordon in charge of the evacuation of Khartoum. Gordon, who had always been something of an eccentric and a loose canon, went against orders and entrenched himself in Khartoum, refusing to leave the Sudan to Mahdism. After a ten month siege, the situation was becoming desperate so a relief force, under Sir Garnet Wolseley, set off down the Nile to the rescue. But their progress was slow and an advance party reached Khartoum just two days too late after the city had fallen and Gordon had been killed.

[Later, in 1898, Kitchener would avenge the death of Gordon by annihilating the Mahdist army at the battle of Omdurman; but, more importantly for the future of the British Empire, Kitchener went on down the Nile to confront the French, in what came to be known as the Fashoda Incident, and effectively curbed French ambitions in that part of Africa.]

G W Joy's famous painting, *General Gordon's Last Stand, 1885* touched a nerve in England and Gordon became the popular image of a Christian martyr facing death calmly for the cause of humanity. He epitomised the heroic British soldier and his exploits were greatly celebrated in Boys' Own Paper-type publications and in many others. Pride of Empire and Victorian values were also prized and lauded in novels by authors such as H. Rider Haggard (*King Solomon's Mines* - 1885 and *She* -1887) A E W Mason (*The Four Feathers*-1902), John Buchan (*Prester John* - 1910), Joseph Conrad, Robert Louis Stevenson, G A Henty, and others. Then, of course, were the writings of Kipling himself: *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888), the *Jungle Books* (1894-5) and *Kim* (1901) etc.

The spirit of Gordon would touch the creation of Elgar's *Gerontius* and be part of the inspiration for both of his symphonies.

Alice Roberts became one of Elgar's Malvern pianoforte pupils on 6 October 1886 and despite intense opposition from her family, they married on 8 May 1889. Alice had been born in India, in 1848 (probably, the date is uncertain). Henry Gee Roberts, her father, had served with distinction there as a Lieutenant-Colonel active on the northern frontier under Napier and afterwards he was caught up in the reprisals after the Indian Mutiny. He was promoted to Colonel in 1852, then to Major-General in 1854. In recognition of his services, he was created a Knight Commander of the Bath. He died in 1860 when Alice, youngest of four children, was only twelve.
Clearly, Alice's family and the distinguished service record of her father would

have influenced Elgar and further increased his awareness and pride in the Empire. Indian artefacts - ivory elephants etc. - were always prominently displayed in their homes (but then, these ornaments were prized in so many other houses too).

Elgar was proud of Major-General Roberts' career. Nevertheless, he was sometimes peevish because of his feelings of social inferiority which probably caused him to make impulsive outbursts or hold quirky principles. For instance, Rosa Burley relates that when Alice told her that she had been barred from shopping at the Army and Navy Stores, Elgar had said - "No; because I don't make it my business to kill my fellow men."

Edward and Alice were married at Brompton Oratory in London. Father Knight, the priest of St George's Church, Worcester had given Edward a copy of Cardinal Newman's poem, *The Dream of Gerontius* as a wedding present. Earlier, in 1887, when Alice's mother had died, Edward had lent Alice his own copy of Cardinal Newman's poem which had Gordon's markings in it. (Copies of the markings circulated all over the Midlands when Gordon's own copy, which had been with him in Khartoum, was sent to the old Cardinal Newman, in Birmingham.)

In 1890, Elgar composed *Froissart* while the couple were living in London, the heart of the Empire (at Avonmore Road, West Kensington). On the score, Elgar inscribed a line from Keats, 'When Chivalry lifted up her lance on high'. Here, already, were flashes of the mature Elgar and here, too, was the assertive, *nobilmente*, heroic voice predating the music that would be written across the turn of the century; music that would be associated indelibly with Empire.

By the time of Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, in 1897, this heroic element had manifested itself in other works such as *The Black Knight* (1892-3), *Sursum Corda* (1894) and *King Olaf* (1896) in parallel with the progress of the Empire.

In this Diamond Jubilee year, British statesman boasted publicly of Britain's "splendid isolation", but, secretly, they were apprehensive about it - and the Empire's future safety in an increasingly competitive world where Britain had no allies. Britain was no longer the supreme industrial and commercial nation. Her share of global trade had plummeted. In the decade that Elgar was born, England had some 65%, 70% and 50%, respectively, of the world's coal, steel and cotton production. By 1897 these figures had slumped to 33%, 20% and 22.5%. Britain had already been overtaken by the USA and was about to be overtaken by Germany; and worse, the countries in the Empire were beginning to develop their own manufacturing industries, so that trade with them was falling significantly. The escalating costs of policing the Empire were crippling; the naval estimates alone soared from £13 to £22 million between 1886 and 1896.

Quoting James Morris again, this time from the central volume, *The Climax of Empire* from his *Pax Britannica* trilogy in which he writes about Elgar in Jubilee Year :

"Elgar reached middle age in the heyday of the New Imperialism, in that provincial

society which was perhaps most susceptible to its dazzle, and for a time he succumbed to the glory of it all. In Elgar's Worcestershire of the nineties, the innocent manifestations of imperial pride must have been inescapable, drumming and swelling all around him: but if at first his response was conventional enough, in the end it was to give the imperial age of England its grandest and saddest memorials....His was not the clean white line, the graceful irony, the scholarly allusion. He plunged into the popular emotions of the day with a sensual romanticism....He was forty years old in the year of the Diamond Jubilee, and he saw himself then as a musical laureate, summoned by destiny to hymn Britannia's greatness."

On 22 June, Diamond Jubilee Day, Elgar was in Malvern. His diary page for that day included the entry, "After dinner, Edward and Alice to common to see bonfires" (ie. the beacons which were lit on prominent hills such as the Worcestershire Beacon).

In Jubilee year Elgar wrote another patriotic work besides his *Imperial March - The Banner of St George,* a setting of words by a Bristol man, Shapcott Wensley. It was completed in March 1897. Apparently Elgar, himself, never heard it during the first years of its existence. The work's Epilogue is a paean to Empire ending with this verse :

....Great race, whose empire of splendour,
Has dazzled a wondering world!
May the flag that floats o'er thy wide domains,
Be long to all winds unfurled!
Three crosses in concord blended,
The banner of Britain's might!
But the central gem of the ensign fair
Is the cross of the dauntless knight!

It is interesting to compare these words with those of H A Acworth for another paean to Empire at the end of *Caractacus* (dedicated to Queen Victoria) which was composed during the following year, 1898 (see the end of this article). Acworth is concerned with emphasising the more altruistic concerns of Empire; and how much better Elgar responds to such noble sentiments!

Actually, Elgar had wanted to write a large-scale orchestral work in preference to *Caractacus*. He had suggested a symphony written round the subject of General Gordon, but there was no interest. The demand, then, was for choral works for the large choirs that were popular in those days.

In 1898, Elgar also composed a `Festival March' which was first performed, under the baton of August Manns, in London at the Crystal Palace on 14 October. Michael Kennedy in his *Portrait of Elgar* writes that only a fragment of this work remains. It is thought that this `Festival March' is the `Triumphal March' from *Caractacus* (both are in C Major.)

Following the success of the *Enigma Variations* (again with a *nobilmente* finale), two of the songs from the recently completed *Sea Pictures* were performed, in

October 1899, by Royal Command at Balmoral. Earlier that year Queen Victoria had favoured Elgar by requesting performances of his works on two occasions. Also in 1899, Edward was asked to compose a madrigal in honour of Queen Victoria's birthday on 24 May. He was summoned to Windsor for that occasion and so it was that Elgar saw the Queen. It was the beginning of Elgar's associations with royalty which would develop significantly with the reign of Edward VII. (Queen Victoria died on 22 January 1901.)

After Elgar had recovered from the disappointment of the premiere of *Gerontius* in October 1900, he turned to the composition of *Cockaigne* (first performed on 20 June 1901) - "stout and steaky", as he described it to Jaeger. Here again the *nobilmente* and pomp and circumstance elements are prominent. Surely this is a proud, affirmative, affectionate portrait of the capital of Empire?

In that summer of 1901, Arnold Bax met Elgar at Birchwood. In his autobiographical *Farewell, My Youth*, Bax commented that Elgar's appearance, at that time, "was rather that of a retired army officer turned gentleman farmer than an eminent and almost morbidly highly strung artist." Was this image of a retired army officer cultivated? Cultivated, perhaps, partly, for Alice's benefit? Alice was always one to preserve the proprieties and, after all, she had married "beneath herself", as they put it in those days. She supported and guided Elgar towards the pinnacle of his success now practically upon him. Soon they would be equals with the cream of society and would be meeting people influential in business, the military, the arts and politics. Bax's impression of Elgar as a highly strung artist is likewise perceptive. How much, one wonders, in addition to those mysterious and prophetic forces that compel the pens of geniuses like Elgar, did the violent mood swings that burdened him, etch into sharp relief for us, the high processional proclamations and the contrastingly deep recessional lamentations in his music?

In October 1901 the First *Pomp and Circumstance March* in D Major, received a tumultuous ovation at the Queen's Hall. Henry Wood recalled the scene : "The people simply rose and yelled. I had to play it again with the same result. In fact they refused to let me get on with the programme. To restore order, I played the march a third time."

Elgar knew its worth. To Dorabella he had said, "I've got a tune that will knock 'em - knock 'em flat!" and to King Edward VII - "I've been carrying that around in my pocket for twenty years."
It was the King who first suggested that the air from this *Pomp and Circumstance March* should be sung. It was first incorporated into the *Coronation Ode* as the Final Movement but then became a work on its own. *Land of Hope and Glory* swept the country in 1902 and it practically became a second national anthem.

Elgar was proud of his stately music. In 1904, he said : "I like to look on the composer's vocation as the old troubadours did. In those days it was no disgrace to a man to be turned on to step in front of an army and inspire the people with a song. For my part, I know there are a lot of people who like to celebrate events with music. To these people I have given tunes. Is that wrong? Why should I

write a fugue or something which won't appeal to anyone, when people yearn for things which can stir them."

Parry recognised this ability. Speaking of Elgar when he was awarded the O M in 1911, Parry said, "He deserves it. You see he has touched the hearts of the people." [Elgar was particularly proud of his Order of Merit and he valued it above all his other honours. Sir Edward Elgar (knighted in July 1904) had most definitely overtaken Alice's father the old Major-General who had been a KCB. The Order of Merit (O M) was instituted by King Edward VII, in 1902, to be awarded personally, by the sovereign, to those who excelled in the arts, in public life or in other fields. There can only be 24 O Ms at any one time]

The Edwardian era - and we must include the years up to 1914 - was an age of transition. The foundations as well as the surface of a long familiar world were moving - although few people realised it at the time. King Edward did. So, too, did Elgar, for not only was he on friendly terms with the King himself, but he was also meeting political and military leaders including Admiral Lord Beresford who showed Elgar something of the fleet in the Mediterranean in 1905, and who was outspoken about naval unpreparedness in comparison to the growing naval strength of Germany. Elgar saw the changes evolving and sensed the implications. And this is conveyed in the music - the shadows lurking behind the Pomp and Circumstance.

Before his accession, Edward VII's reputation for unconventional behaviour and dubious associations gave rise to concern about the future of the monarchy. They were unfounded. Edward became a conscientious monarch who made pleasure his servant not his master. He revived pageantry and moved his court from Windsor to Buckingham Palace. He took immense interest in affairs of state (including the forging of the Entente Cordiale with France, leading Britain away from her dangerous "splendid isolation"), and he sought every opportunity to improve the state of the armed forces.

Although it was not a colony, Ireland had been dominated and exploited, as though it had been one, for centuries and the clamour for Home Rule had grown more and more insistent since the last years of the old century until it would climax in open rebellion with the Easter Rising of 1916. Elgar himself was caught up in the controversy of Home Rule for Ireland, for in March 1914, as the Liberal government prepared to pass the Home Rule Bill through Parliament for a third time to override the Lords' veto, he was persuaded, with "twenty other distinguished men [including Rudyard Kipling]," to sign a "solemn covenant" against Home Rule for Ireland and the implied subordination of Ulster to an uncongenial government in Dublin. The pledge appeared in *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* and it very quickly gathered more than a million supporters. It was widely felt that the granting of Home Rule to Ireland might cause an unfortunate precedent that could threaten the stability of the Empire.

In spite of the great inspiration of Empire, Elgar saw remarkably little of it. He visited the colonies the Empire lost, that constituted the USA - which he appears to have loathed - four times in 1905, 1906, 1907, and 1911; and on the latter

occasion, he took in Montreal and Toronto. Apart from that, Elgar seems to have only come close to what had been a Mediterranean British protectorate (between 1815 and 1864 before it was ceded to Greece) - Corfu. [In 1905, Elgar and Frank Schuster were invited by Lady Charles Beresford, whose husband had recently been made Commander-in-chief of the Mediterranean Fleet, to join a party on *HMS Surprise* to cruise with the Fleet in the Mediterranean for a fortnight. Elgar and Schuster travelled by train and thence by ship from Brindisi, in Southern Italy, across to Patras via Corfu and thence on to Athens, Lemnos, Istanbul and Smyrna which of course inspired Elgar's piano piece, *In Smyrna*.]

Three more *Pomp and Circumstance Marches* were to follow from Elgar's pen: No 2 in the same year as No. 1 (1901), No. 3 in 1904 and the magnificent No. 4 in 1907.

But Elgar had ambitions to write a symphony. This ambition had been nurtured since 1898 (or earlier) when he had the idea of composing a symphony based on the idea of the life of General Gordon. Sketches and ideas had been accumulating for years. At length, in June 1907, Elgar felt ready to commence composition of his *Symphony No 1 in A flat major* which was completed in September 1908, and first performed in Manchester by the Hallé Orchestra conducted by Richter who said of it, "Let us now rehearse the greatest symphony in modern times and not only in this country." Elgar writing of the Symphony to Walford Davies said, "There is no programme beyond a wide experience of human life with a great charity (love) and a massive hope in the future." The Symphony's music is forceful and confident. The *nobilmente*, heroic elements are very pronounced and one senses that it proclaims the greatness of Britain and her Empire (It also includes an exquisite Adagio, evoking the serenity and beauty of the Worcestershire countryside, which Jaeger considered to be the best of its kind since Beethoven).

The Symphony was outstandingly successful. In 1909, it received nearly 100 performances - all over Europe and in America, in parts of the Empire and in Russia. Londoners even heard it played by palm court orchestras in the large department stores. But from then on Elgar's music took on an increasingly sadder, and much less confident tone.

King Edward VII died on 6 May 1910. He had been greatly depressed about the constitutional crisis into which he had been drawn following the rejection of the People's Budget, and about his fears of war with Germany. The shadows were beginning to lengthen. Quoting Morris again :

" His (Elgar's) Jingo period was short and delusory, for very soon there entered into his music, once so bellicose, a sad and visionary note...Greater matters than pomp and circumstance engaged his spirit, those manly tunes deepened into more anguished cadences, and there seemed to sound through his works premonitions of tragedy - as though he sensed that all the pride of Empire, expressed at such a comfortable remove in the country drawing-rooms of the West Country, would one day collapse in bloodshed or pathos."

The shadows were prominent in Elgar's *Second Symphony* first performed on 24 May 1911. The second movement was a funeral march - a lament for the passing of King Edward (and Rodewald) and the small audience at its first performance was puzzled by the quiet ending of the Finale. They were undoubtedly expecting the work to end on a high note of confidence. They were disappointed - especially when they were in a mood to celebrate the coronation of the new King (George V), scheduled a month later on 22 June (and for which Elgar composed a *Coronation March.)*

In 1912, Elgar wrote the music for a masque *The Crown of India*. He drew upon surplus material from *The Apostles*, sketches for a second *Cockaigne* overture and other ideas that would not fit into the symphonies etc. *The Crown of India* was staged at the London Coliseum to mark the Royal visit to India. For the most part, and despite some exotic rhythms and harmonies, *The Crown of India* music was rather more "Malvern-flavoured" than Indian. Of it, Elgar remarked ruefully, "When I write a big serious work like *Gerontius*, we have to starve and go without fires...this small effort allows me to buy scientific works I long for." The masque proved to be enormously popular and through the first fortnight of its run, Elgar himself conducted two performances a day.

Only two years later, *Land of Hope and Glory* was to become the rallying cry to the Great War -causing Elgar great anguish. The First World War cost 1,115,000 lives, many of them from all over the Empire - 4,000 Empire troops died at Gallipoli alone. Appositely, in *The Spirit of England* (1916-17) the sentiments of Laurence Binyon's words were made almost unbearably poignant by Elgar's music:

> They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
> Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn
> ... At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
> We will remember them.

In 1917, too, Elgar was approached by Lord Charles Beresford to set some verses by Kipling entitled *Fringes of the Fleet*. The pairing of the two laureates of Empire - the author of *Recessional* with the composer of *Land of Hope and Glory* seemed too good a chance to miss. Kipling's verses drew breezy pictures of life aboard small commercial vessels now mounted with guns for minesweepers, and the submarines and patrol boats in outlying waters. Elgar sketched hearty tunes for four baritones but then Kipling objected to his verses being turned into entertainment after his son had been reported missing in action. Attempts were made to get Kipling to change his mind, and a year later they seemed to be successful. The completed *Fringes of the Fleet* was signed up for a fortnight's run at the Coliseum, with Elgar conducting, in June 1917. It was a big success and the cycle was recorded with Charles Mott (who sang on-stage). The run of performances was extended but eventually, Kipling succeeded in stopping further performances.

Elgar also composed a number of patriotic songs for the war effort. *Big Steamers*,

1918, again a setting of Kipling verses, is a song for children, in praise of the merchant ships risking enemy fire to bring home their cargoes. It is simple, direct, and wholly charming. Of it, Elgar wrote, "I have endeavoured to bring the little piece within the comprehension of very small people indeed."

Quoting the first two verses :

> "Oh, where are you going to, all you Big Steamers,
> With England's own coal, up and down the salt seas?"
> "We are going to fetch you your bread and your butter,
> Your beef, pork, and mutton, eggs, apples and cheese."
>
> "And where will you fetch it from, all you Big Steamers?
> And where shall I write to you when you are away?
> "We fetch it from Melbourne, Quebec, and Vancouver,
> Address us at Hobart, Hongkong, and Bombay"

In the latter days of the War, Elgar sought peace and solitude in Sussex where he composed his last great masterpieces: the chamber works and his *Cello Concerto*. Here was an autumnal and reflective Elgar. The pomp and circumstance of Empire was but a memory.

Picking up the threads of the history of the course of the British Empire, as James Morris shrewdly observes in the third volume, *Farewell the Trumpets* of his *Pax Britannica*: "...the British Empire more than survived World War I. The straightforward annexation of colonies was unacceptable now, it was as distasteful to the mass of the British people as it was to the world at large. Instead, the British Empire took shrewd advantage of the peace terms to extend its power and safeguard its security.... Nearly a million square miles were added to the Empire with 13 million new subjects... In Africa the Empire gained control not only of South-West Africa, satisfactorily rounding off Imperial South Africa, but also of Tanganyika, at last fulfilling the vision of an all-red Cape-to-Cairo corridor. In the Middle East, Iraq, Transjordan, and Palestine became British Mandates and Persia was virtually a British protectorate, so that India was linked with Egypt and the Mediterranean by a continuous slab of British-controlled territory, and one could travel overland from Cape Town to Rangoon without once leaving the shelter of British authority."

But in the 1920s the British were losing interest in their Empire. H G Wells estimated that nineteen out of twenty knew no more about the British Empire than they did about the Italian Renaissance. It is amazing how quickly events that seem so imperative, become dusty, forgotten history. People were disillusioned after the Great War. The times were changing, leaving behind the old world Elgar knew and revered. This feeling of being out of joint with the times coupled with his depression after the death of Lady Elgar in 1920, inhibited the composition of new works.
The British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924 was meant to remind people of the importance of Empire; but many went to the Exhibition for the wrong reasons, preferring the dodgems and the dance halls to the exhibits of New Zealand or Ceylon. Elgar, now Master of the King's Musick, and the most

celebrated musician of the Empire, conducted the massed choirs at the opening ceremony and they sang *Land of Hope and Glory*; but by now the very sound of that work was anathema to its composer's ears. Writing to 'Windflower on 16 April about the preparations for the Exhibition, Elgar had commented, "the K. insists on Land of Hope & there were some ludicrous suggestions of which I will tell you.... But everything seems so hopelessly & irredeemably vulgar at Court....I was standing alone (criticising) in the middle of the enormous stadium in the sun: all the ridiculous Court programme, soldiers, awnings etc: 17,000 men hammering, loudspeakers, amplifiers - four aeroplanes circling over etc. - all mechanical and horrible - no soul & no romance & no imagination..."

For the Wembley Exhibition, Elgar wrote *Pageant for Empire* - eight songs to words by Alfred Noyes for solo or S A T B. The songs' titles reveal all: `Shakespeare's Kingdom', `The Islands', `The Blue Mountains', `The Heart of Canada', `Sailing Westward', `Merchant Adventurers', `The Immortal Legions', and `A Song of Union'.

Elgar was also asked to write a March for the *Pageant of Empire* to open the huge Exhibition on St George's Day 1924. The idea of the March appealed to him rather more than the songs. When he finished it, he was told that it would not be performed at Wembley because of the difficulty of all the contingent bands rehearsing a new piece separately. He was asked to conduct the old *Imperial March* instead together with *Land of Hope and Glory*, Parry's *Jerusalem*, and the National Anthem.

[A Pearl recording (SHE CD 9635) by The Tudor Choir directed by Barry Collett (who is also the pianist on this recording) with Teresa Cahill (soprano) and Stephen Holloway (bass), includes *Sailing Westward* and *The Immortal Legions*. Barry Collett in his booklet notes writes, "Incidental music for the masque The Pageant of Empire occupied Elgar during 1924. Much of the score seems to be lost, although the *Empire March*, a song and these two choruses remain."]
Elgar would eventually retreat from London, and the heart of the Empire, to retire to his beloved Worcestershire. Then, in 1930 came the final *Pomp and Circumstance March No 5 in C Major*. The germ of it went back fifty years to a sketch from his Powick days. It was as brilliant as any of its four predecessors - a recalling of the glories of Empire in an Indian summer of composition. It was at this time that Elgar felt a renewed vigour for composition, but the promise of an opera and the *Third Symphony* was never to be realised.

T E Lawrence (of Arabia) whose World War I adventures had played no little part in the overthrow of the Ottoman Empire and the spread of British influence in the Middle East, was a great admirer of Elgar. In August 1932, Lawrence, with George Bernard Shaw, visited Elgar at Marl Bank and was able to hear the first test pressings of the HMV recording of the *Violin Concerto* with Yehudi Menuhin. Vera Hockman wrote of this occasion:-

"..we all sat spellbound... Aircraftsman Shaw (Lawrence was then hiding in the Air Force under that name) serious and silent, looking straight ahead with those unforgettable blue eyes which seemed to see into the life of things.."

Lawrence was to go to his rest in the year after Elgar - in May 1935. Rudyard Kipling died in the following January, 1936.

The end of Empire was in sight even though it reached its greatest extent in 1934 as Elgar passed away. Ireland had become an independent, self-governing Dominion in January 1922; then in 1937, as Eire, the country abolished all symbolic ties with Britain; and finally, in 1949, it became the Republic of Ireland. In India, Ghandi's campaign of passive resistance eventually led to independence but the road to it was long and bloody (the Amritsar massacre of 1919 was probably the most notorious incident in that struggle.) Then the rest of the Empire would break free as the twentieth century progressed

In conclusion, I would again quote from John Keegan writing in the *Daily Telegraph's The British Empire* : " The test of the greatness of the British Empire is that its former subjects treat its surviving servants as friends, and not only them but the British as a people also. Of what other Empire is that true? The French dare not go to Africa. The Hapsburg Empire has little but unresolved ethnic hatreds. The Russians are at war with their ex-imperial provinces. The Ottoman Turks are unloved by the Arab successor states. Latin America is another world away from Spain. By contrast, the British, as they wander backpacking about Rajasthan or in the Himalayas, are welcomed as old familiars." [British law, custom and culture still thrive throughout the territories that were once occupied.]

This benevolence is reflected in those words that Elgar set at the end of *Caractacus*, and which are too often forgotten or chosen to be ignored by insensitive critics or subeditors -

> And where the flag of Britain
> Its triple crosses rears,
> No slave shall be for subject
> No trophy wet with tears
> But folk shall bless the banner
> And bless the crosses twin'd
> That bear the gift of freedom
> On ev'ry blowing wind...
> .....
>
> For all the world shall learn it
> Though long the task shall be
> The text of Britain's teaching,
> The message of the free;...

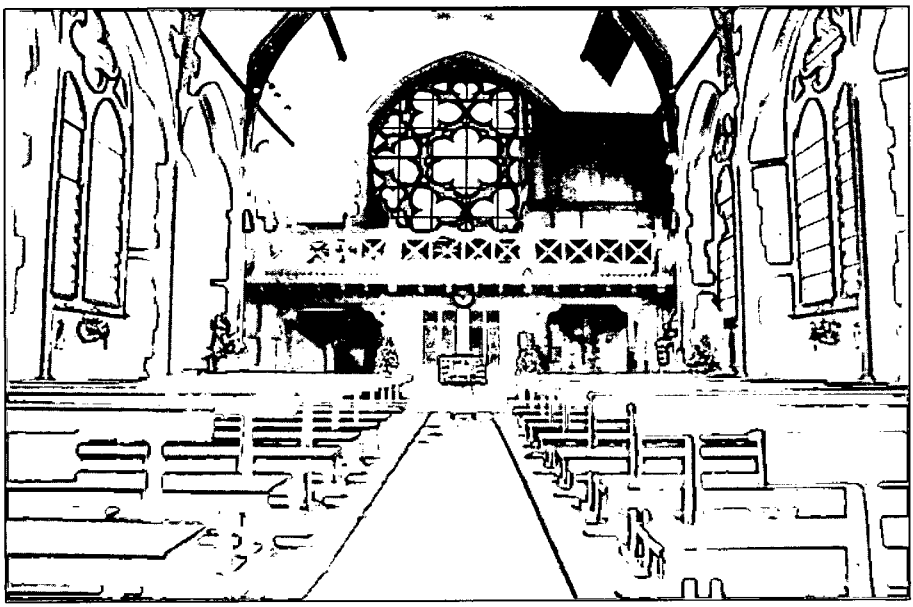
Looking back on Elgar and Empire from the perspective of the late 1990s, and thinking of the Finale of the *Second Symphony* that puzzled audiences at its premiere in 1911, surely this might be viewed as a radiant vision of a sun setting on an Empire sometimes cruel but more often benevolent and paternalistic. The last word comes from Morris : "Elgar, who wrote the paean of Empire, lived to compose its elegy."

Sources and recommended reading :

Jerrold Northrop Moore : *Edward Elgar - A Creative Life* (O U P, 1984)
Michael Kennedy : *Portrait of Elgar* (O U P, 1968)
J N Moore (ed) : *Edward Elgar - The Windflower Letters* (O U P, 1989)
Percy M Young : *Elgar O.M.* (Purnell Book Services)
Percy M Young : *Alice Elgar - Enigma of a Victorian Lady* (Dobson, 1978).
Raymond Monk (ed) : *Edward Elgar - Music and Literature* (Scolar Press, 1993)
The Daily Telegraph : `The British Empire'
James Morris : *Pax Britannica* (The Folio Society/ Faber and Faber)
Roger Hudson (ed) : *The Jubilee Years* (The Folio Society)

Extract from Elgar's Diary (Tuesday 22 June 1897) reproduced by courtesy of Raymond Monk.

Information within square brackets is either additional data or explanatory comments of the author on quotations from other sources.



The interior of St Wulstan's Roman Catholic Church, Little Malvern, looking west. On 10 April 1920, at the funeral of Alice Elgar, it was arranged that the slow movement of the String Quartet should be played from the small gallery at the west end of the church. W H Reed, Albert Sammons, Raymond Jeremy and Felix Salmond were the instrumentalists.
(Photo: Gordon Lee. Reproduced by kind permission of Dom Aidan Bellenger).

SIR GEORG SOLTI, K B E (1912 - 1997)

I suspect that most obituaries of Sir Georg Solti will not have mentioned the important contribution he made to the internationalisation of Elgar's music. A few commentators here, notably Richard Morrison in *The Times*, noted Solti's understanding of the Elgarian idiom, particularly through his recordings of the two symphonies. I know that these interpretations are not to everyone's taste, but for me they are indispensable.

I understand that Solti studied Elgar's own recordings of the symphonies, prior to making the records. Where this is most apparent is in his ability to move the music forward, whilst not appearing to hurry. There are those who feel the *Second Symphony* is more successful than the *First*, but I am not so sure, for he is in many respects equally successful in both works. Perhaps he had learnt more of Elgar's idiom before recording the *Second*, but the shafts of insight and overall perception in both recordings were, and still are, examples of analogue at its very best.

Let me take a few examples. Solti clearly understands the variety of mood in the *E-flat Symphony*'s first movement, managing the changes of tempo, atmosphere and themes magically. His Rondo is inevitably powerful, but it is controlled with an iron hand, making the perfect contrast to the slow movement which precedes it. Again it does not linger, but its intensity draws one into Solti's world without complaint. I suspect Solti and Richter were very different, but again his pointing of the Finale and its uneasy sunset is majestic, and the theme `Hans himself is pointed to perfection.

Surprisingly, in the *A-flat Symphony* it is the slow movement which is the heart of Solti's performance, if not his Elgar. Made at the time of the three-day week and regular power cuts, the intensity brought about by impending darkness is palpable, and at fig 104 Solti's control is absolute, the LPO playing exquisitely, as this fresh approach from a different musical heritage gets to Elgar's heart. His control over the fourth movement is a lesson for many others too. It should be in every collection.

When a Solti performance worked, as here, the result was memorable. His recorded legacy is unique, preserving vital memories : *Elektra, Salome, Die Frau ohne Schatten* and *Arabella* in Strauss; *Don Giovanni* and *Le Nozze di Figaro* for Mozart (if the second act is one of the masterpieces of western civilisation then Solti understood this as well as any conductor I have heard, spinning it along and pointing up the humour and bathos of the action with intensity and great insight); his *Ring* cycle, and Verdi *Requiem*; just to name some instant thoughts. To this list we should add these symphonies, and his accompaniment of Kyung-Wha Chung in the *Violin Concerto*. Also particularly fine are his *Falstaff* and *In the South*. I remember attending the recording session of *In the South* in the (greatly-missed) Kingsway Hall and feeling the warmth of Italy imbuing the `canto popolare' section.

Sir Georg was, sadly, a short-lived Vice-President. The world is poorer for his going, but richer - like the music of Elgar - for his life.

Andrew Neill

BOOK REVIEW

"Dear Carice" : Postcards from Edward Elgar to his Daughter, with additional text by Michael Fardon

Osborne Heritage Books, 1997. £8-95

This is the kind of book of which you buy two copies - one to give as a birthday or Christmas present, the other one you keep! Here are over thirty postcards, dating from 1901 to 1913, reproduced in colour or monochrome from the originals in Carice's album, now at the Elgar Birthplace. The Edwardian period was the heyday of postcard production, and all right-thinking people, whether on holiday or not, spent a lot of time sending and receiving postcards of all kinds.

The Elgars travelled a great deal in the years prior to 1914, and with a young and probably lonely child at home, sending a cheery or informative card was almost a parental duty. The cards presented here (and how well presented they are with fine colour reproduction), show an affectionate father (and to a lesser extent her mother); though how many parents today would sign cards to their very young and only child as `E.E' or `Edward Elgar', or `C.A.E.'? From 1904 onwards, when Carice was thirteen, Elgar begins to sign as `Faser', a pet family version of Father. Could it be that as Carice grew older she became more interesting to her much preoccupied parents?

Many of the cards are from the Elgars' triumphant journeys in Germany, and there are signatures or greetings to Carice on some from those who either travelled with them, or whom they met. Among these signatories are Jaeger, Kalisch, Felix Weingartner, Percy Pitt, Henry Ettling(known as `Uncle Klingsor' for his skills as an amateur magician!), Rodewald, Richter, and no less a luminary than Siegfried Wagner! Some of the cards are from trips much nearer home, and together make a charming and fascinating little book. The publishers are to be congratulated on a fine piece of book production at little more than the cost of a paperback. Highly recommended.

Ronald Taylor

Going off the Rails, by Bill Gage, Michael Harris, and Tony Sullivan.
Mallard Communications for West Sussex County Council. Soft covers, 96 pp, fully illustrated. £8-95

Subtitled (helpfully) `The Country Railway in West Sussex', and with a foreword by Dr Patrick Moore, this book celebrates the centenary of the opening of the Selsey Tramway. Before all non-railway addicts stop reading, I should quote from the publicity : "This is not a conventional railway enthusiast's book. Essentially, it is concerned with people and through their personal memories sets out to provide an insight into the life and times of the Selsey Tram and the branch lines that served Petworth, Midhurst and Chichester". Indeed, I would go so far as to say that this is an important social document for this part of Sussex over the last hundred and fifty years. The reminiscences of local people, and of children who were evacuated there during the war, make for fascinating reading. The railway

politics of the competing companies in mid-Victorian times is clearly set out; and other topics of interest concern the Norfolk family and the railway at Arundel; trains bringing racegoers to Goodwood; and the aforementioned Selsey tram (which was used by Eric Coates and his family). Another fascinating vignette concerns the journey from the Isle of Wight of the body of Queen Victoria to London for the funeral. The good Queen had always insisted that no train she travelled on should exceed 40 mph; and the driver was instructed accordingly. However, delays meant that he had to make up time, and actually touched 92 mph, to arrive two minutes early!

The reason for the book's inclusion here is chapter 5, `Elgar and milk-carts at Fittleworth', which deals with the composer's stay at Brinkwells from 1917 to 1921 (not continuously of course). The chapter contains reminiscences - written down years later - from two men who worked at Fittleworth Station during the First World War, one of whom worked there until it closed in 1963! (No mention is made of Elgar by either of the men, unfortunately).

The book is beautifully produced, and contains 150 pictures - mostly black and white - including reproductions of tickets, season tickets, share certificates, and posters. West Sussex folk can count themselves fortunate to have such an enlightened Council who are prepared to spend public money in this way; let us hope they recoup all their outlay! Copies can be obtained for £10 (including £1-05 p + p)from West Sussex Record Office, County Hall, Chichester, West Sussex PO19 1RN (cheques payable to West Sussex County Council). An ideal Christmas gift - and not just for Elgarians.

The Editor

RECORD REVIEWS

The Dream of Gerontius, Op 38.
Sarah Fryer (mezzo-soprano), William Kendall (tenor), Matthew Best (bass), Waynflete Singers, Bournemouth Symphony Chorus and Orchestra conducted by David Hill
Naxos 8.553885-86

That this is the twelfth complete recording of *The Dream of Gerontius* should in itself be a cause for rejoicing amongst Elgarians. That it is released on the bargain-price Naxos label should add to the joy, and not only to the impecunious CD collector. Naxos has done well by Elgar to date, with outstanding performances of the two symphonies, the *Violin Concerto*, the *Cello Concerto*, and the chamber works. With this recording of *Gerontius*, however, I feel that this run of good fortune has foundered somewhat.

It is not often that one comes across a modern recording of which the recorded quality actually impairs pleasurable listening. However, whatever the merits of the performance, this recording is sadly compromised by the quality of the engineering. Of the elements involved in the performance, the orchestra undoubtedly comes off best, presented in full, vivid sound, even though some of

the inner detail of the instrumentation is not as clear as it might be. The choirs are backwardly placed and do not always make the effect they undoubtedly would in better circumstances. The first entry of the semi-chorus, `Kyrie eleison' (fig 29) is wellnigh inaudible, even at a high volume setting. Surely not Elgar's intention, even though it is marked *ppp*? The semi-chorus is treated similarly throughout. To my ears at least, there appears to be some adjustment of sound levels, particularly in the main statement of `Praise to the Holiest'.

It is the soloists who suffer most from the vagaries of the engineers. All three seem to be recorded in a different acoustic from the rest of the performance going on around them. This acoustic is recessed and dry, taking away the bloom from the voices, particularly that of William Kendall. The sheer size of Matthew Best's bass-baritone may have caused the engineers to take him further away from the microphone; thus he appears even more distant than his colleagues. This may not be inappropriate in concept, but here it sounds clumsy.

With both neighbours and the rest of the household out, I tried the recording at a much higher volume than would normally be the case for comfortable domestic listening. It must be said that aural irritations were not as great, although still apparent. However, it was at this particular listening that I realised the performance had grown on me and it was the *performance* I was focusing on, not necessarily the sound quality.

David Hill's conducting of the Prelude alerts the listener to what is to follow. There is a forward momentum, linking and moulding the disparate sections into a fine whole. Throughout the work, Hill generates much excitement, but, whilst bringing out many of the beauties to be found in the score, the spiritual side is somewhat understated. The only real miscalculation I can find in Hill's interpretation is the very slow speed adopted for the final section, `Softly and gently...', which at times threatens to grind to a halt, the effect becoming merely maudlin. He is fortunate to have the BSO in very fine form, the woodwind in particular being very characterful.

The combined choirs provide thrilling singing when required, as in the rhythmically taut and biting Demon's Chorus, and finely-textured tone in the quieter passages. Despite reservations about sound quality, `Praise to the Holiest' shows these contrasting qualities at their best in a performance which leaves one marvelling afresh at the sheer virtuosity of the music.

Of the three soloists Matthew Best, taking time off from his own conducting duties (!), is much the most successful. He is an authoritative and powerful priest, if lacking subtlety; his Angel of the Agony is huge and rugged, inspiring real awe, much helped by Hill who keeps the section moving forward. In both parts he is short-breathed, resulting in some choppy phrasing, but his performances are thrilling in the best sense and are amongst the finest on disc.

Sarah Fryer has a voice which seems not yet ready to have her interpretation of the Angel committed to permanence. There are some lovely moments, as in the varied responses to the word `Alleluia' in her opening solo; but her tone lacks

individuality and her delivery of the text is a little bland. There is no "inner glow" which one finds in the finest interpretations such as those by Dame Janet Baker and Alfreda Hodgson.

Upon William Kendall, of course, lies the heaviest burden, not only in dealing with his own interpretation of Gerontius, but in fending off the shadows of great recorded performances. My initial reaction was of a voice which is a size too small to encompass the full range of the part; whilst almost ideal in the openings to both Part I and Part II, the bigger moments stretch him uncomfortably. That having been said, the weary resignation in his smaller-scale `Take me away' convinces me almost as much as the heroic outpourings of bigger-voiced tenors! In its wide-eyed innocence and trust, his utterance of "My soul is in my hand : I have no fear" (just before fig 71) should melt the stoniest heart. At times the tone seems shallow, and a lack of bite on consonants robs the text of vitality - but both of these faults could be the result of the poor balance mentioned above, and perhaps judgment on Mr Kendall should be reserved.

I have many reservations about this recording, not least those relating to sound quality, but I have found myself warming to the performance overall. There are many rewarding moments and some fine elements, even if these do not add up to a satisfying whole. At its bargain price it should find a place on any Elgarian's shelf; but for someone purchasing their first recording of this great work they should move slightly upwards in the price bracket towards Britten, Handley, or above all, Barbirolli.

Walter J Essex

String Quartet, Op 83. Piano Quartet, Op 84.
Maggini String Quartet, Peter Donohoe (piano)
Naxos 8.553737

Violin Sonata, Op 82. With Franck : Sonata.
Midori (violin), Robert McDonald (piano)
Sony SK 63331

When I first came to a knowledge of Elgar's music the chamber pieces were still something of a Cinderella. I think their recent revival and reappraisal is linked to the incredible popularity of their companion piece, the *Cello Concerto*. Like that work, they possess what Felix Aprahamian calls the `deep vein of melancholy' which has made such an impact on listeners at the end of the 20th century. There are no longer obvious recommendations for recordings of these works, and even if you already have them on disc, these new versions demand to be heard.

It says much for Naxos' reputation for producing first-class recordings at budget price that someone like Peter Donohoe is happy to appear on the label. The result is another (and there are now so many) fine recording of the *Quintet* : no histrionics, just an honest, straightforward account of the score by some fine musicians. The integrity of the music is not only preserved but enhanced by the playing, and the almost perfect balance of the recording helps enormously. There is no sense of a battle between the piano and the strings but a wonderful blending

of sound. It is delightful to hear Elgar's markings achieve the effect he wanted, and not ignored or overplayed. As an example, the *poco a poco piu tranquillo* after fig 35 leading to the *tempo primo* at 36 is beautifully judged; but there are many such passages, too many to be mentioned.

If the *Quartet* is less successful, I believe it may be because it is a much more difficult work to bring off. The opening, "unquiet of spirit and hesitant", as Maine described it, is seldom played to my satisfaction; perhaps only the Stratton Quartet (Dutton CDLX 7004) really achieve the desired effect. Yet the remarks made above about integrity of approach and technical proficiency apply just as much here. The *piacevole* movement tries to raise its head above the trough of wartime despair, but if Elgar succeeds at all, it is only "smiling with a sigh". The Maggini Quartet are more successful in capturing this mood; and are totally convincing in the final movement, with its mixture of *risolutos, marcatos* and *appassionatos*. This disc can stand comparison with the best, and at around a fiver is an absolute bargain.

Midori is one of the new generation of string prodigies from the Orient, and her performance of the *Sonata* is, to use a much over-used word, phenomenal. She is in complete control from first note to last; the playing is effortless, but far from mechanical. Once again, as with the *Quartet* and *Quintet*, the effect is gained from an unfussy adherence to the score. With Elgar there is normally more than enough expression marks to be going on with, without introducing any more! Midori is simply superb; plenty of power in the *bravura* passages, and delicate expression where required, especially in the `Romance'. The confidence with which she plays suggests a lengthy knowledge of the piece, whereas of course she is still very young. She is helped by Robert McDonald, a wonderfully sensitive accompanist; their ensemble is impeccable throughout. I shall stop now before I begin to exhaust my limited range of superlatives, and just urge you to buy it! The glorious *Sonata in A* by Franck is the other work, should you need any further persuasion.

The Editor

Symphonies nos 1 & 2, Opp 55 & 63. In the South, Op 50. Pomp & Circumstance Marches, nos 1, 3 & 4, Op 39.
BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Andrew Davis
Teldec Ultima 0630-18951-2 (2 CDs)

Symphonies nos 1 & 2, Opp 55 & 63. Pomp & Circumstance March no 5, Op 39
Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Bernard Haitink
EMI Classics Forte CZS 569761-2 (2 CDs)

When my biography of Hans Richter (the dedicatee of Elgar's *First Symphony*) was published, a member of the Richter family gave me a bound miniature score of the *Enigma Variations*, the first one off the press according to the composer's inscription to Richter contained within it. Also of interest was another message in the composer's hand : `True Artist and True Friend'. This score was dated 1904 (at the time of the Covent Garden Festival which Richter helped to put on for the composer) four years before the symphony which bears the same dedication. In the opening of the *First Symphony* I hear the tread of Richter's footsteps as he

plods from Oxford Road Station or from the Midland Hotel to the Free Trade Hall in a Manchester fog to conduct a Halle rehearsal or concert at the turn of the century. Haitink certainly takes this opening slowly (crotchet 54) but, in a performance (recorded in 1983 at Walthamstow Town Hall) which conveys his evident love of the music, caresses and lingers over much of what follows in Barbirolli-like fashion (no mean comparison this). The Philharmonia play superbly, horns and woodwind are outstanding, its leader's violin solos sweet of tone, the brass have a field day, trombones and trumpets blazing in a well-balanced recording. The Scherzo is fleet of foot, the second subject avoiding any hint of banality, the Trio played in chamber music fashion with a Mendelssohnian touch. Haitink does not sentimentalise the Adagio but goes for textures in his string sound. The opening of the Finale is eerie and full of dramatic tension (fourteen years ago Haitink was well immersed in his Glyndebourne post). The Allegro is rather breathless for my taste until the grand reprise of the `Richter' theme which is broadly taken. How the self--effacing and modest Elgar could have sent the conductor a postcard (dated 1 August 1908) saying "two movements go the printer; it is not good enough for you", beggars belief.

Andrew Davis, a proven Elgarian, takes the opening perceptibly but noticeably faster than Haitink (crotchet 60) in his 1991 recording made at Barking Town Hall, and is spot on when it recurs in the development during an exciting Allegro. One suspects an admiration for Boult in Davis's reading of this work. A few indulgent moments of overdone *rubato* notwithstanding, the reading throughout has pace and sensitivity, the climaxes finely judged. Richter takes on Falstaffian proportions in the Scherzo (but then he was himself no sylph), and the harp gambols deliciously among the woodwinds. The Adagio is spacious and lush of string sound in the middle and lower registers, the E string passages occasionally tend to be somewhat lean. The opening of the Finale lacks that sense of something about to happen so evident in Haitink's version. Later in the movement the horns are superb in their whooping phrases, whilst the BBCSO's violins make light of the fiendishly tricky passages which take them from one end of their instrument to the other in a trice. The conclusion to the symphony is thrillingly played.

The *Second Symphony* is seen by some to reflect Elgar's regret at the passing of the Edwardian age in 1911, but Alfred Rodewald's sudden death in 1903 had already given rise to sketches for what became its second movement (Larghetto). The loss of the 43-year-old Rodewald (Elgar's Liverpool-based champion who was by profession a textile magnate but who was also an accomplished amateur conductor) devastated the composer and produced a movement full of angst normally associated with symphonies by Bruckner or Mahler. Haitink is two minutes longer than Davis in each of the first two movements, and it is not without coincidence that, as one of the greatest living interpreters of the music of both Bruckner and Mahler, he particularly excels in the Larghetto. Elgar's overwhelming sadness and anger at being robbed of one of his closest friends dominates this powerful performance (Abbey Road studios, 1984). To a certain extent this resentment infects the Rondo, adding a biting irony to its angular melodies in the violins, the cross-rhythms and the incessant drum pedal points. The Finale, like the first movement of the *First Symphony*, is full of purple patches and imperial grandeur, though Haitink does not fail to remind his

listeners of the underlying sadness which pervades the whole work to its final bars, the opening swaggering theme by now more reflective in mood. This is overall a very fine performance, not likely to induce an audience to sit "like a lot of stuffed pigs", which the composer endured at its premiere.

Davis bustles along the symphony's opening moments, highlights the Meistersinger-influenced (Preislied) melody, and develops its grandiose qualities in stylish fashion (recorded at St Augustine's Church, Kilburn in 1992). Highly appropriate is the prominent string *portamento* in the Larghetto, whilst the Rondo is skittish both in tempo and articulation. The Finale has great clarity of structure and is the most committed in performance terms by the excellent BBCSO, but, satisfying though it may appear, the overall concept does not seem to plumb the depths of Haitink's moving account.

The Ultima package is far more generous (half an hour longer) than EMI. They give us not only Nos 1, 3 & 4 of the *Pomp & Circumstance* Marches but also *In the South*; whereas EMI use just the fifth March as a filler to the *First Symphony*. Elgar dedicated the first march to Rodewald (who conducted the first performance of the first two); and the fifth (written in 1930, 23 years after the fourth) to the Hereford Cathedral organist Percy Hull who had encouraged its composition. Haitink's performance is highly idiomatic, crisp dotted rhythms, a broad, expansive second subject, and a thrilling conclusion being its dominant features. Davis is much used to no 1 with its annual appearance at the Last Night of the Proms but nevertheless it still gets a fresh reading. Notwithstanding some absent details in no 3, perhaps the least interesting of the five, the players give their all. Despite what is printed on the cover (elsewhere it is correctly labelled but the cover is what the purchaser will see), it is no 4, not no 5, that completes this set; and as in the performance of no 1, Davis manages to avoid all hackneyed cliches. The best playing, however, is reserved for *In the South*, as Davis gets lush Straussian string sounds and thrilling horns in this glorious work.

Christopher Fifield

CD Round-up

Ida Haendel has had a long association with the Elgar *Violin Concerto* and recorded it for EMI with Boult nearly twenty years ago. Like many another child prodigy, she never quite fulfilled her early promise; yet her performances are rarely anything other than characterful and pleasing. Her performance of the Elgar at the 1986 Proms with the BBC SO under Sir John Pritchard has been released on the BBC Radio Classics label (15656 91942). As with many live performances, there are occasional blemishes - some dubious intonation in places, poor ensemble after fig 57, and an early entry in the final Allegro molto; but these are more than compensated for by the passion and commitment of the playing. I found the Andante a little too aggressively played, but Haendel rarely hangs about and creates that nervous tension which characterises so many of the composer's own performances. She is well supported by Sir John and the orchestra. If you are not yet persuaded to buy this, then the fill-up may change your mind. It is *Polonia* - receiving only its third complete recording - played by the BBC Northern

(as it then was) SO in a stirring performance at the Manchester International Organ Festival in 1978. Elgar wrote it in 1915 for Polish charities, and it certainly brings out the patriot in its conductor, Sir Andrzej Panufnik, a distinguished Polish composer and conductor, who spent the last few years of his life in England (he died in 1991). The *cantabile* theme at fig 6 is beautifully done, and Panufnik lingers a great deal over the slower passages, wringing every last ounce of emotion from the music (and why not?) Do get this record, if only for *Polonia*.

A disc for those who seek the out-of-the-ordinary in Elgar; a recording of the *Organ Sonata* by Arturo Sacchetti at the Church of San Geraldo a Majella in Rome. Different it certainly is; his choice of registration is often very weird, and the use of tremulant in the Andante positively irritating. Sacchetti looks for slow movements where there are none; the perky subjects of the outer movements (the 9/8 section in the first, and the *mf dolce* in the fourth) become *adagios*. The recording takes well over 32 minutes, about five minutes more than the average, and a good ten slower than Herrick's (admittedly fast) version on Meridian! Music by Vaughan Williams, Thalben-Ball, Britten, and Arnell complete the disc (Arts 47391-2).

Sir Simon Rattle's ten-year-old recording of *The Dream of Gerontius* is available again (CDS 749549-2). It is a fine performance, very strong all round, with no real weaknesses anywhere. If anything it lacks a `spiritual' feel, but such a statement is a very personal thing, and others may feel differently. The soloists in particular are a very strong group; Baker and Shirley-Quirk each recording the work for the second time, and Mitchinson giving an extremely sensitive and intelligent performance. (Anyone wanting a more detailed description should refer to Walter Essex's excellent overview of all the recordings in the JOURNAL for July 1996). The only real gripe is that the two-disc set is still at full price; and at 97 minutes, without a `filler', not much longer than a single CD these days.

Another ten-year-old reissue comes from Carlton Classics, a disc entitled `Serenade' (30367 02242) by the Serenata of London conducted by its leader Barry Wilde. It contains Mozart's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* and *Serenata notturna*; Grieg's *Holberg Suite*; and Elgar's *Serenade for Strings*. The playing is first-rate, but the performances themselves are a little bland. There are so many recordings of popular works like these; though perfectly acceptable, this is not really a strong challenger, though of course its budget price may make it more attractive.

As part of its plans to celebrate its centenary, EMI have launched a new series `Mini Classics'; which is really the old Extended Play disc under another name in CD format. The best `bits' of the great composers are put on a CD lasting twenty minutes or so; Elgar's disc is entitled `Land of Hope and Glory (as popularised by the Last Night of the Proms)', and contains Boult conducting *Pomp & Circumstance no 1*; `Nimrod'; the Larghetto from the *Serenade for Strings*; and Tortelier playing the opening movement of the *Cello Concerto* (883921-2). Ho hum.

The Editor

LETTERS

From: Richard Turbet

Carl Newton's article `The Nightmare of Gerontius' in the most recent Journal was both scholarly and enthralling. Unfortunately it is not unusual that writings about recent *British music contain solecisms about* early *British music. Mr Newton includes without comment two references to Byrd's* Great Mass. *There is no such work. Byrd composed three masses in three, four and five parts, none nicknamed `Great'. He also composed what came to be known as the* Great Service, *a setting of the seven appropriate movements of the full service of the Church of England. The latter is more likely to be what was intended, as Bliss might have known that Boult had conducted the entire work as early as 1927, when it was hailed as "the greatest achievement of the greatest of British musicians". Bliss deserves great credit for suggesting such a work be recorded, but I also share Mr Newton's dismay at Bliss's equivocal attitude towards Elgar. If the* Great Service *is the work intended, this nullifies Mr Newton's point on p 85 about the acceptability of a work in Latin to Roman Catholic countries. Notwithstanding the points I have raised, Mr Newton has done Elgar scholarship a great service.*

From: Alan Sanders

Mr Carl Newton's article The Nightmare of Gerontius *(JOURNAL July 1997) raises a number of interesting issues in connection with the 1945 Sargent recording of* Gerontius, *but the papers he cites do not provide complete evidence of the events which led to the recording being made.*

It is certainly not true that Walter Legge and HMV "made only three records in 1942, none in 1943 and one in 1944" (his footnote 47). My discography in On and Off the Record, *to which Mr Newton refers in making this statement, was, as its introduction makes clear, a* selected *discography of Legge's recordings. In fact, Legge produced numerous HMV (and Columbia) recordings during those years.*

It is also not the case that Legge "targeted" Boult and the BBC Symphony Orchestra as a source of work. Legge's pre-war reviews for The Manchester Guardian *show that he was not an admirer of Boult or his orchestra. He was certainly not at all "pally" with Sir Adrian, and in a 1941 letter to Sir Thomas Beecham he declared that the "slovenliness" of the BBC Orchestra's playing in broadcasts had to be heard to be believed. There was also another practical difficulty for legge in engaging the BBC SO, since recordings made in England were then issued on EMI's cheaper labels, and the Corporation wanted its Symphony Orchestra to appear only on HMV's expensive red label. As a result Boult and the BBC SO made no records between August 1940 and August 1944. During this period Legge made many recordings with the Hallé Orchestra, the City of Birmingham Orchestra and the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, with various native conductors (Boult had just one recording engagement each with the Hallé and Liverpool orchestras). From the end of 1942 onwards Sargent made several recordings with the Liverpool orchestra, whose chief conductor he*

had become. Legge certainly had reservations about his music-making, but in a 1936 review he had written that Sargent conducted Gerontius *"admirably". Legge was a close friend of Walton and it is likely that the latter's stated preference for Sargent reflected his views. Legge himself possessed a considerable knowledge of Elgar's music and great insight into performances of it, as his reviews show clearly enough.*
I suspect that the deliberations of the British Council were less influential than they might seem. Legge disliked committees and preferred to go his own way. Since HMV had a 50/50 share in the venture it seems likely that as the company's recording manager his influence on events was powerful. Only in one respect did he ultimately give way over the Gerontius *recording : Sargent was insistent that Gladys Ripley should be engaged as a soloist, and not Kathleen Ferrier.*

From: Harrison Oxley

Carl Newton's revelations about the first recording of Gerontius *(Journal, July 1997) do indeed tell an extraordinary story. It is exciting to know that another great British composer, William Walton, may have been the principal influence towards the inspired choice of the Heddle Nash - Malcolm Sargent partnership which gave the world what became the definitive* Gerontius.
I was glad to read that Jack Westrup, a redoubtable and dedicated Elgarian, was on the committee. I am sure that his influence, too, would have been strong in pressing for a recording of Gerontius *to be made, and that he must deserve our gratitude for this.*

From : David Bury

Well, we certainly now know that the Editor is no supporter of the Referendum Party! (Elgar Society News no 2, p 3).
As for that Party's appropriation of `Nimrod', there are, of course, plenty of precedents. Elgar's music turns up in some very strange places - perhaps a comprehensive listing should be attempted? - and `Nimrod', itself, has long been an essential patriotic item at the annual Remembrance Day Service in Whitehall each November.
Far be it from me to be drawn into controversy regarding `Euroscepticism', but I will declare an interest of sorts. Just two days before reading the Editor's piece, I accepted an invitation to present a programme of recorded music at a local Society to be titled `Music for St George's Day'. It will, I feel sure, include some Elgar; and he, I am also confident, would have approved of that!
Elgar Society friends are welcome to attend and should reserve the evening of 23 April 1998.

THE ELGAR BIRTHPLACE APPEAL PROGRESS REPORT

Once again the building plans for the Elgar Birthplace Museum have attracted criticism, which was disappointing after we had held a well-publicised open day at the Birthplace, with revised plans on display, and the architect and relevant Councillors on hand to answer any queries and concerns. The proposed additional wing was instigated by our Lottery advisers, the Heart of England Tourist Board and the Regional Museums Council, together with the museum designer Martin Pyant of 3D Concepts Ltd. They all felt the existing shell was actually too limited as there was no real provision for educational projects, music workshops and seminars. These are now incorporated in the revised plans, together with excellent accommodation for the Birthplace custodian, and storage space for temporary exhibitions etc. Despite its romantic sounding name, Rose Cottage is a badly-constructed house in very poor condition which needs £40,000 spent on it to make it even habitable.

Planning permission has been granted by Malvern Hills District Council having previously been unanimously supported by Lower Broadheath Parish Council. Keith Tattersall, the architect, and I would be very willing to discuss the plans with anyone who has concerns about them. Michael Messenger, Senior County Museums and Arts Officer, has been appointed a Trustee and Chairman of the newly-constituted Birthplace Management Committee, and Sir Geoffrey Dear as Trustee and Chairman of the proposed Friends' organisation. This will forge an important link between the Foundation and the Society and we hope will be a vital support to the Birthplace Museum. With all this in place we are working hard on the revised Lottery application, and again I am happy to try to answer any questions about this. As one who works for the Elgar Foundation but is also closely involved with the Elgar Society I can only say that all projects of this ilk seem bound to attract opposition along the way. But it *must* succeed in order to fulfil the vision of Carice Elgar and to further an essential part of our national heritage.

Melanie is due to return on 1 December after maternity leave and will be warmly welcomed : at the same time it will be sad for us to lose Cathy Sloan who has fitted in so well and done such an excellent job as locum Curator. I hope we won't be saying too final a goodbye to her. Our thanks are also due to Chris Bennett, and in particular for his unstinting work in the garden which has looked beautiful throughout the summer and still does.

I must mention the Tree Dedication Party which was held on 31 July, when 160 trees were blessed by Father Doolan of St George's Church, Worcester (where Margaret Elgar sings in the choir and thereby preserves the Elgar connection). Despite the weather it was a very happy occasion and we were delighted that over a hundred people came to see the site of the trees they had sponsored. Earlier in July we had a very successful event at Eastnor Castle which raised £12,700; and there are plans for another concert there next summer, plus concerts in 1999 and 2000 in London and Birmingham on a centenary theme; more details in the next JOURNAL.

Diana Quinney

100 YEARS AGO...

After their month-long stay in Garmisch in August 1897, the Elgars returned in time for the Hereford Festival and the first performance on 12 September of Edward's setting of the *Te Deum & Benedictus*, described by Alice as "most beautiful noble music". Jaeger travelled to Hereford to hear it, but missed seeing Elgar. However he recorded his impressions in a long letter, the first of his to the composer to survive. At the end of the month the Elgars spent a few days at Belbroughton, a village between Stourbridge and Bromsgrove, with his friends Hew Steuart-Powell and Basil Nevinson. The three men had met to play trios for some years. (Elgar, the violinist, later immortalised the other two in the *Enigma Variations*, as pianist and cellist respectively).

Despite a growing reputation and a good reception for his works Elgar was frustrated. The premieres of *King Olaf* and *The Light of Life* had resulted in considerable expense on his part, and as he told Jaeger he had written six sizeable works over two years but was still out of pocket! Local music making was not providing an outlet for his gifts; the new organist at Worcester Cathedral, Ivor Atkins, had taken over the Festival Choral Society, and Edward Vine Hall was still conducting the Worcestershire Musical Union. The Elgars were contemplating a move back to the London area. Some of Elgar's friends decided to try and create a musical organisation covering the whole county, possibly with the intention of keeping him from moving away. On 18 October he wrote to Jaeger : "They (the public) are trying to get up a large choral and orchl. Society for the County with the idea of offering the Conductorship to ME". It was an impressive body, with titled people on the committee, including Lady Mary Lygon; and two efficient secretaries, Martina Hyde from Worcester, and Winifred Norbury who lived at Sherridge, a large house between Malvern and Worcester. Elgar decided to accept the position of conductor, and arrangements began to be made to recruit a choir and orchestra. Familiar names from the Elgar story now begin to appear - Fitton, Acland, Ehrke, and many others. The new body eventually took the name `Worcestershire Philharmonic Society', but not before Elgar had written a humorous letter to Miss Hyde on 19 October going through the various alternative titles: "...The County of Worcester Choral & Orchestra Association the initials `pan out' rather well C.O.W.C.O.A which suggests temperance..." The inaugural planning meeting was held in Worcester on 30 October. On 13 November he auditioned 58 voices, and the following day had "badsley headaches"! The first practice took place on 1 December.

At the end of October the arrangement of the *Three Bavarian Dances* was given at Crystal Palace, and whilst in London Elgar left a short violin piece with Novello to which he had given the provisional title `Evensong'. It was eventually published as *Chanson de Nuit*. On 9 November Cowen gave *King Olaf* in Liverpool, "the most glorious King Olaf we had heard", Alice reported. Two days later in London, Elgar met with Henry Embleton, and the subject of writing a cantata for the next Leeds Festival was raised. Two weeks later Elgar met "Mr Acworth at Club" in Malvern; and soon the composition of *Caractacus* would be under way.