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Front cover: Elgar photographed at Birchwood on 3 August 1900, just after completing *The Dream of Gerontius*. The photo was taken by William Eller, whom Elgar met through their mutual friend, Richard Arnold.

The Editor does not necessarily agree with the views expressed by contributors nor does the Elgar Society accept responsibility for such views.

ELGAR & GERONTIUS: the early performances

Lewis Foreman

Part II

Ludwig Wüllner

We should note that there were two Wüllners. Ludwig was the singer and actor; Franz was his father, the Director of the Cologne Conservatoire and conductor of the Gürzenich Concerts. He was there at Düsseldorf and promised to consider *Gerontius* for a concert in 1902, but I cannot trace that it ever took place.

We need to consider Ludwig Wüllner, for he would sing *Gerontius* again on two further key occasions, the second Düsseldorf performance at the *Lower Rhine Festival* in May 1902, and then in London at Westminster Cathedral in June 1903, as well as the Liverpool premiere in March 1903. He was widely admired by English music lovers, including Elgar himself.

Wüllner was born in 1858 and started out with an academic career in German philology. Family reservations stopped him following his desired stage career and so he studied music. On the death of his grandmother he auditioned for the Duke of Meiningen and was engaged as a leading man and character actor taking part in the Meiningen company's final tours and leaving in 1895 with the title of "Ducal Court Actor". We follow the story according to the 1900 edition of Spemann's *Das Goldene Buch der Musik*. I am again most grateful to David Mason for this translation :

After a short and extraordinarily successful career giving dramatic readings, in 1896 Wüllner began to appear as a singer. This venture was all the more remarkable in that he was by no means generously endowed vocally. However, the admirable determination which had helped the actor to overcome a natural speech impediment also helped him to make up to some degree for his lack of vocal endowment. By sheer hard work, he managed to wring the utmost possible melodiousness and flexibility from his voice, and what he is lacking in pure beauty of tone he makes up for in artistic intelligence. He is helped in this not only by the force of his strong-willed personality but also by the mastery he has in the handling of words. To convey his intuitive musical and poetic feelings, Wüllner uses first and foremost the language and it is by this very means that he is able to convey such powerful suggestions to the listener. In this way he has become the representative of a new German trend in the singing of lieder and other songs. His singing of German folksongs is unrivalled and his concerts, which at first were only sparsely attended, are attracting larger and larger audiences. Wüllner continues to give occasional dramatic readings. His Manfred [Byron] is a significant and unique achievement.

I illustrate Wüllner with postcards of him with and without his moustache. It is probable that he was not clean-shaven at Düsseldorf; reference to the illustrations in Franz Ludwig's book³⁸ shows him thus in 1898 and 1900. Wüllner was widely admired as a lieder singer, and the reception given to his recital at St James Hall in Piccadilly on 20 March 1903 is an additional clue to his success in *Gerontius*³⁹:

³⁸ Ludwig, Franz: *Ludwig Wüllner - sein leben und seine kunst* (Leipzig, Erich Weibezah Verlag, 1931). I examined the copy in the Library of Congress.



*Ludwig Wüllner (right)
with and without
moustache!*

*(below left) Richard Strauss;
(below right) Felix Weingartner
who conducted Gerontius at
Queen's Hall in April 1904.*



... a notable event ... His musical and powerful tenor voice and keen dramatic perception were advantageously displayed in an admirable selection of songs ...

Edward F Kravitt⁴⁰ quotes a review by E F Taubert from the *Berliner Post* which vividly evokes what audiences saw, as well as heard :

There is nothing of consequence to mention about his voice with respect to its quality, but his treatment of text is so full of life, so richly endowed, so saturated with his unique perception that as soon as the singer opens his lips one is at once spiritually gripped by him. Every fibre of his being appears to take part with complete devotion to the subject and content of the poem that he sings. The singer follows the music inwardly even when his voice is silent [during instrumental passages]. His bearing is always composed. But this composure seems to be externally forced because, from his heaving breast, his facial pantomime - his raising and lowering of his brow - the listener can feel the performer's excitement very intensively.

Wüllner delivered the text clearly. He came from that tradition of crisp enunciation, pronouncing "the individual consonants, such as 'k' in the word 'gehenkt' ("hanged") [in August Strindberg's *Ein Werb*], so that they formed an image of complete barbarism"⁴¹. Yet curiously enough the critics who praised him, in both the United States and Europe, called Wüllner "the singer without a voice"⁴².

At once exciting and frustrating to any study of Wüllner is that he made a number of recordings, but only of dramatic readings. Thus we have his speaking voice but only briefly and in passing do we hear him singing. Wüllner's recordings are in a now dated histrionic style. An example is Goethe's "Der König in Thule"⁴³ [- "A king there was in Thule, was faithful unto death, to whom his lady, dying, a golden goblet gave." -] which was made during the First World War. Later, Wüllner recorded von Schillings' *Das Hexenlied* with orchestra⁴⁴, again giving an idea of the voice when projected against an orchestral tapestry, albeit thirty years after *Gerontius*. What do they tell us? Well, it is true that there is often no connection between the register of a speaking voice and singing, but I think it suggests a personality and an approach.

³⁹ *Musical Times*, April 1903, p 249

⁴⁰ Kravitt, Edward F: *The Lied - mirror of late romanticism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996) p 60

⁴¹ *ibid*, p 54

⁴² *ibid*, p 59

⁴³ Issued in 1915. Grammophon 041028 (single sided); 65086 (double sided).

⁴⁴ Recorded by Wüllner with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Max von Schillings on Grammophon 35000/2. Earlier, he had made a now forgotten acoustic recording on Odeon R 80113/18, which I have not heard.

Elgar, in his letter to Novello⁴⁵ after the second Düsseldorf performance, called Wüllner :

...splendid - not in voice - but intelligence, *genius* - he carried everyone away & made Gerontius a real personage - we never had a singer in England with so much brain - even here he is exceptional.

For Felix Weingartner "Ludwig Wüllner was the 'master of the art of interpretation'. Wüllner 'reflects his deep inner agitation not only upon his face but also upon those of his listeners'. Brahms, Gerhardt and Culp . . . agreed that Wüllner was the most expressive and thus the most modern interpreter of lieder... The stimulus of the moment was so important to Wüllner . . . [he] might suddenly perform a lied that was not on the program[me]." ⁴⁶

There is one further clue : Wüllner's recording of von Schillings's orchestral melodrama *Das Hexenlied*, noted above, made in 1933 - when Wüllner was almost seventy-five. "The intensity of Wüllner's reading is astonishing. His emotions range from the calm to the violent, even hysterical."⁴⁷ It is certainly histrionic. In his recording Wüllner actually sings in some passages - or rather uses elevated speech at moments of high emotion. One can imagine that the technique, even if only an element of his style, when applied to *Gerontius* would have made for a very emotional, un-British, effect. In fact it may have been this aspect of his performance which generated a number of hostile British criticisms of his performance at the first London *Gerontius* in 1903 (see below). Yet when Wüllner sang the solo at Liverpool on 24 March 1903, possibly his first outing with the English text, it was reported⁴⁸ that :

His phrasing was a delight; his intonation perfect; his method something of a revelation, whilst his finely sympathetic embodiment was peculiarly rich in that spirit of imaginativeness to be found in the work itself.

I think we also need to remember that Wüllner sang "Sanctus Fortis" transposed down, and as the first Düsseldorf performance was immediately followed by the choral leading to the publication of the full score, Elgar must have taken it very seriously to propose publishing the alternative key version, in A \flat , as an appendix. So, in fact, when John Coates, and later Gervase Elwes, came on the scene, they benefited from the contrast, "Sanctus Fortis" gaining in their hands a degree of brilliance that may not have been apparent in these early hearings.

⁴⁵ Moore, *Elgar and his Publishers*, op cit, p 320

⁴⁶ Kravitt, *op cit*, p 192

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Musical Times*, April 1903, p 261

The Second Düsseldorf Performance

The next performance of *Gerontius* was the most celebrated early one, the second at Düsseldorf, this time in the presence of Richard Strauss, and Elgar arrived in Düsseldorf on 17 May. By then rehearsals for the Worcester Three Choirs in the coming August were already well under way, and Ivor Atkins, in charge of rehearsals at Worcester, in only his second festival as Cathedral Organist, was unable to join him there, but Elgar and Jaeger later gave him detailed accounts, of which he left notes. I think we can do no better than take these from Wulstan Atkins's book⁴⁹:

There were banquets each evening, and the English party were lavishly entertained, Strauss going out of his way with Buths to ensure their comfort. For the performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* on 19 May, the organ was again played by professor F W Francke of Cologne. There was an orchestra of 127 players: 42 violins, 16 violas, 12 cellos, 10 double basses, 6 flutes . . .

There are some flights of fancy here : some of the woodwind can't be right -

oboe d'amour, 6 cor anglais, clarinet, 4 bass clarinets, bassoon, 4 contra bassoons, 8 horns, 6 trumpets. The chorus of 490 singers, which included members of the Düsseldorf Society who had sung in the previous performance, included 169 sopranos, 169 altos, 56 tenors and 96 basses. The semi-chorus was again placed behind the soloists and in front of the orchestra. Dr Ludwig Wüllner repeated his 1901 success as *Gerontius*, and Johannes Messchaert of Wiesbaden rendered the parts of the Priest and the Angel of the Agony with great dignity and understanding, but it was Muriel Foster, with her impressive and moving performance as the Angel who was the great sensation at this festival. Buths directed a superb, brilliant and deeply moving performance, which was cheered to the echo, with Elgar once again making repeated appearances on the platform. Again he was presented with a large laurel wreath, which for long afterwards adorned a wall in his study.

It was at the Grand Festival Supper at the Town Hall in Düsseldorf, before all the performers and many eminent visiting musicians that Richard Strauss made his now celebrated toast⁵⁰:

I raise my glass to the welfare and success of the first English Progressivist, Meister Edward Elgar, and of the young progressive school of English Composers.

The English party included Jaeger, Alfred Rodewald, Alfred Kalisch, Vernon Blackburn, Arthur Johnstone, Henry J Wood and "two or three Lancashire enthusiasts, among whom was the late R G W Howson, of the Morecambe Festival"⁵¹. Arthur Johnstone, music critic of the *Manchester Guardian* was bi-lingual in German and English, and it was he who replied in German for the English party. "Elgar was lionised in the approved fashion, and I recall an excited admirer gripping

⁴⁹ Atkins, E Wulstan: *The Elgar-Atkins Friendship* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1984) p 74

⁵⁰ Scholes, Percy A: *The Mirror of Music 1844-1944*. (Novello and Oxford University Press, 1947) Vol 1, p 123

⁵¹ 'Düsseldorf & Morecambe Reminiscences' (From a Correspondent), *Manchester Guardian*, 2 June 1927.

the shy composer's hand and telling him that 'the orchestra was his instrument'. Butts, the recogniser of his genius, stood quietly by enjoying the enthusiasm which his discernment had generated. Twice in company with the late Arthur Johnstone I was privileged to share the homely hospitality of the Butts family to Dr (as he then was) and Mrs Elgar, the second being a family lunch party. As the party broke up I recall the scene as composer and champion rose from the table and, in true Rhinelander fashion, embraced each other. Never can I forget the light of pride shining in Lady Elgar's eyes.⁵²

It is the Angel we need to note at this performance. In Muriel Foster, then only 24, Elgar had found his ideal interpreter. She also sang in the Düsseldorf B minor mass before *Gerontius* and seemed poised for a big career. In 1906 she was in the premiere of *The Kingdom*. But after her marriage that year she sang much less and a serious illness took her away from oratorio singing, though she later sang in the premiere of *The Music Makers*, and was long associated with Elgar. She never recorded so we have to content ourselves with this postcard portrait. Sir Henry Wood remarked in his autobiography⁵³:

A richer, warmer mezzo-soprano voice I have rarely heard, and her musicianship was of the highest. I am quite sure that Elgar conceived all his mezzo-soprano parts in *Gerontius* and later oratorios with Muriel Foster in mind. I do know that no other mezzo-soprano or contralto ever extracted a word of praise from him over their interpretation of his parts.

I do not have so many extended accounts of this second Düsseldorf performance, but it is of interest, I think to note the account in the *Niederrheinische Volkszeitung* for 20 May 1902 (again translation by David Mason).

The 79th Lower Rhine Music Festival

Second day Düsseldorf, 19 May

On the second day the general picture was much the same as on the first: outside a grey, cold rainy sky discouraged the casual visitor to the festival while inside there were the yawning gaps left by the many unfilled seats in the body of the hall and the gallery. Nor was the public in a particularly enthusiastic mood, probably because the programme, enticing though it may have been to the musician, offered too little fare of a kind easily digestible by festival-goers generally. It would have been better if, after Bach's Mass in B Minor, the second day had not presented two works so difficult to come to grips with as Cardinal Newman's religious poem "The Dream of Gerontius" to music by Edward Elgar, and Liszt's Faust symphony. But who can blame the organiser of the festival, our civic Musikdirektor Julius Butts, who this season performed "The Dream of Gerontius" for the first time in Germany, for wanting to present the work to guests coming to the festival from far and wide, like a proud mother wanting to show off her newborn baby, so that a path can be smoothed for it through Germany's concert halls as expeditiously as possible? And what a splendid work the cantata is. Not since the days of Liszt - and here we include Philip Wolfrum's Weihnachtsmysterium - has anything been created in the field of oratorio which can equal the grandeur and significance of this sacred cantata. The story delves so deeply into the religious, the metaphysical, the eternal that only biblical stories can be put forward as in any way comparable to it. It was written by one of the greatest minds England has ever produced, Cardinal Newman, and in his poem Newman has given the most exalted poetic expression to the Catholic view of life after death, of judgement, heaven, hell and purgatory (in some cases by taking over word for word prayers belonging to Catholic ritual).

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ Wood, Sir Henry: *My Life of Music* (Gollancz, 1938) p 214

The thoughts and feelings of a dying man and ideas about the life of the soul after death, developed on the basis of Catholic doctrine - these in short are the subjects of Newman's poem "The Dream of Gerontius"...

In every sense, material like this which is such a tight fusion of the highly poetical, the human and the divine, demanded from the composer an even more profound expression of the imaginative idea at the heart of it. Such deep absorption in the religious spirit could only be achieved by someone whose innermost being was rooted in the religious sentiments of Catholic dogma. As far as the technicalities of composition are concerned, what has to be borne in mind is that, although people's ideas of what the art of religious music is have been different at different times, music in the field of oratorio and the cantata has to keep pace with the art of contemporary music generally and must allow for the advancing demands that art is making. However, because of the work of Berlioz, Liszt and Wagner, the music of our own times has undergone such an enormous increase and expansion in its capacity for expression that the modern-day composer is almost faced with an *embarras de richesses* as far as the means of expression available to him for constructing his harmonies and melodies are concerned. Edward Elgar, whose opus 38 "The Dream of Gerontius" is, has made use of these means in his compositional practice with good sense and originality and to excellent effect. It is not, say, poor taste when he combines melodic structures from old church music with a mode of expression which seems modern but rather, the spirit of the poem. There is a unity of feeling in the poem but the external form this takes is subject to fascinating changes and it is this that gives the atmosphere it creates its power and conviction. As a creator of atmosphere Elgar is supreme and here the contrapuntalist has even been able to deploy his mastery of polyphonic construction in the service of feeling and atmosphere. The first part concludes with a chorus which is divided into ten or twelve parts and develops with all the grandeur and impressiveness of the old classics above a pedal point: and choruses like this, or the full and semi-choruses of the angels and demons in the second part which, unrivalled though their characterisation may be, present the performers with inconceivable difficulties, are towering monuments to the art of modern-day polyphony. The listener will hear the splendid multipart writing in the choruses, but in some of the solos he will also be conscious of a certain monotony of mood which even the highly artistic handling of the orchestra and the most ingeniously modulated writing for the voice cannot compensate for. Otherwise, there is in the solos a simplicity, directness and truth about the composer's melodic structures, which are as beautiful to the ear as they are deeply expressive, which go directly to the heart, and the great success which this most significant work, whose imagination and deeply felt expression cleave to a line that is not of this world, again had at yesterday's performance provides the most convincing proof of the powerful effect the work has. The composer was present and at the end of the first part and at the conclusion of the performance he was warmly applauded. In him we have made the acquaintance of the man who is probably England's most important living composer. Professor Butts - who is also the German translator of Newman's poem - gave the work a consummately beautiful second performance which in many respects was even better than the first in Düsseldorf (about which Elgar and the British music critics who were present sent enthusiastic reports to England at the time). Both the choirs, who made child's play of the formidable difficulties of the Chorus of Demons and the other polyphonic and fugal choruses, and the orchestra performed with superb sound and uncommonly vivid expression. Of the work's three solo roles, that of Gerontius was taken by Dr. Ludwig Wüllner from Cologne, who interpreted it with a forthright expressiveness and a masterful intellectual meaningfulness which allowed one to overlook the inadequacy of his purely vocal resources and the sometimes highly arbitrary way in which the notes were treated. The Priest's prayer for the dying man was sung expressively, with the correct sentiment, and in fine style by Professor Messchaert of Wiesbaden, who yesterday gave a most effective performance of the bass part in Bach's Mass. The songs of the Angel were quite splendidly sung by Fräulein Muriel Foster, before whose lovely voice and technically accomplished singing in the Mass yesterday even Frau Noordewier-Reddingius in the less prominent soprano part paled, even though her middle register seemed to be more affected by the bronchial trouble she was suffering from today than it did yesterday. The organ was again played by Professor Francke from Cologne. After the interval, the second work and the final one of the evening was Liszt's great Faust symphony. It is several years since this work of genius, which is one of the towering monuments of 19th century music and one of the peaks in the development of the symphonic style since Beethoven, was last performed by Professor Butts. On this occasion it was performed by the Festival's honorary conductor, Kapellmeister Richard Strauss.

Gerontius Finally Arrives in 1902

Novello had now printed all that was needed for performances, and so more than one performance could be prepared at a time. The full score was published in the summer of 1902, as were the

remaining orchestral parts, and inspection copies could be sent to prospective conductors all over Europe, indeed the world. Henry Wood, for instance, insisted on having his own personal copy as a condition of programming it, which he now did at Sheffield. Thus in the remainder of 1902 there would be English performances at Worcester in September, with a new Gerontius, John Coates, with Muriel Foster and Plunket Greene, and in Sheffield in October conducted by Elgar himself. The Sheffield Festival also saw the first performance of the *Coronation Ode* which had been delayed by the King's illness.

At Worcester Elgar experienced his first exposure to the doctrinal problems that would cause him considerable worry in the promotion of the work at the Three Choirs over the next few years. Wulstan Atkins acknowledges his father's appreciation that there would be difficulties in promoting it in the Cathedral at Worcester, and summarises them as well as anyone⁵⁴:

the Invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints in the poem, although in accordance with Roman Catholic doctrine, were contrary to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. Atkins therefore had informal discussions with Canon T L Claughton (the Chairman of the festival executive committee) and with the Dean, Dr R W Forrest. All were anxious for the performance to take place in the cathedral and for a solution to be found. It was clear that the Litany of Saints would have to be omitted, and alterations or omissions made in the references to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

There was also the Cardinal Newman copyright to be resolved, and when Elgar agreed to pursue this, choral rehearsals had already started. However by the time he had to leave for Düsseldorf for the second German performance he still had not taken action. Already the proofs of the programme book were to hand, which had been set with omissions rather than changes, as agreed with Bishop Gore. In the event it was Atkins who called on Father Neville at the Birmingham Oratory, an interview of which he left a verbatim account⁵⁵:

I spoke of my own feeling for the poem and pointed out that no word would be changed. 'No,' he said, 'there must be no alteration'. I then produced the proofs of the poem as it was to appear in word books. He looked at the opening line where the word 'Maria' had been omitted and indicated by dotted lines - 'Jesu, . . . I am near to death'. He went carefully through the poem, I at his side . . . At the end he put the proofs into my hands with the words, 'In that form I give my consent. . .'

As seems to have been the case with most festival performances of major choral works when London orchestral players were to be employed, there was to be a rehearsal for soloists and band in London, and this had been set to start on 2 September, Elgar having taken the choral rehearsal in Worcester the previous evening. It was over the rehearsals that the solo line-up changed, at the time seeming a disaster but in the event one of those lucky changes that found two principals who would have a significant impact on the future progress of the work, and become inseparably associated with it. William Green had to bow out on finding himself double booked for the rehearsal. This gave

⁵⁴ Atkins, op cit, p 70

⁵⁵ op cit, p 73



The two performances which established Gerontius in England were those in 1902 at the Three Choirs Festival in September, and at the Sheffield Festival the following month. In each case the work was conducted by Elgar (right) with John Coates (above left) in the title role, and Muriel Foster (above right) as the Angel. For the next few years these two soloists were very much associated with their respective roles.



Elgar considerable worry, writing "I will not say a word to W Green - it is really absurd to think Gerontius can be whistled through like a well-known work. . . ."⁵⁶

The tenor John Coates, then little-known, was available and at the age of 37 his assumption of the role of Gerontius became the turning point of his career. Coates had only changed from singing baritone parts a year or two earlier, in which guise he sang in musical comedy. As a tenor he moved into operatic roles and also sang the lead in Elgar's *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom* as well as singing *Gerontius* many times. His earliest records date from 1907 including "Lohengrin's Narration" and "Farewell", and "Celeste Aida" and, in 1915, Elgar's *In the Dawn*. These give us an idea of the timbre of the voice when he first performed *Gerontius*, while much later two scenes from Holbrooke's *Bronwen* recorded in 1929 give a flavour of his dramatic delivery and pacing of an extended scene⁵⁷.

To compound the difficulties, Marie Brema who was to sing the Angel now fell ill and had to withdraw. Although both Green and Brema would sing their roles again, it provided the opportunity for Muriel Foster to step into the role, and like Green and Coates she effectively replaced Brema as the first choice Angel for years afterwards. It was, of course, a triumph, and the cathedral was packed, Northrop Moore⁵⁸ telling us that the attendance was 3130, though the *Musical Times* noted that "the tremendous strain of the work told upon them somewhat at the end"⁵⁹.

In the remaining years before the War, *Gerontius* was due seven more times at the Three Choirs - in 1903, 1906 and 1912 at Hereford, in 1905 and 1908 at Worcester; and 1910 and 1913 at Gloucester, where Dean Spence-Jones held out longest against its Catholicism, and even in 1910 insisted on its "Protestantized" version⁶⁰. At Hereford, Sinclair started the tradition of having two bass soloists, so notably embraced by Sir Malcolm Sargent in his first complete recording in 1945.

We now reach the Sheffield Festival performance on 2 October 1902, just one day short of two years after the first performance. This marked the final acceptance of the stature of the work, self-evident to all present.

⁵⁶ op cit, p 84

⁵⁷ See *The Record Advertiser* Vol II, no 3 (March-April 1972) pp 2-7 for a Coates discography. The Lohengrin arias are on G&T 02108/9. *In the Dawn*, HMV 02584, reissued on the Elgar Society LP ELG 001, and *Bronwen* is issued on CD Symposium SYMCD 1130.

⁵⁸ Moore, *op cit*, p 375

⁵⁹ *Musical Times*, October 1902

⁶⁰ Boden, Anthony: *Three Choirs - a history of the festival* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1992) pp 148, 267

Dr Coward noted the failure of an historic festival choir . . . Birmingham failed, Sheffield must succeed. Sheffield did succeed. The composer at last heard his conception realised. He had attended a choral rehearsal prior to the Festival and was amazed at the finish and colour of the singing. In connection with the singing of the Demons' chorus, which, under the trainer's teaching, had become a hard snarling, unmusical orgy of 'despairing, cursing rage,' the composer said to the chorus: 'You are just right; you cannot overdo that expression'.⁶¹

This was certainly the impression left with the blind organist Alfred Hollins⁶²:

It was as great a success as the performance at Birmingham had been a failure. I shall never forget the realistic effect of the demons' chorus; the snarling was terrifying . . . In the Sheffield rendering I lost much of the musical detail of the chorus of demons, but the effect was infinitely more realistic.

This was a time when Sheffield - along with most other major cities - was very conscious of its civic dignity, and so Elgar's presentation of a copy of the printed full score to the Sheffield Free Library as a "token of sincere gratitude and friendship"⁶³ must have been a matter of considerable local pride.

The Gerontius and Angel from Worcester were now joined by David Ffrangcon-Davies in the bass parts. This really established *Gerontius* with the British public, and until a nervous breakdown only five years later ended his public singing career, it forged a link between Ffrangcon-Davies and Elgar. Perhaps these performances were particularly important as springboards for the most prestigious performances in 1903, which was the final breakthrough as far as the reputation of the music was concerned. It was

a huge success: just as at Worcester, the demand for seats was greater than any other festival event.⁶⁴

Performances in 1903

In Britain there were performances in Sheffield, Manchester, Hanley, Wolverhampton, Liverpool, Birmingham, Middlesbrough, Bristol, at the Three Choirs at Hereford and at long last in London at the newly built Westminster Cathedral. There were also performances in Europe at Danzig and Darmstadt and very probably in many other centres. Certainly in 1902 in the euphoria of Düsseldorf, performances were promised at Cologne, Aix-la-Chapelle, Heidelberg, Breslau, Liege and Utrecht.

⁶¹ Rodgers, J A: *Dr Henry Coward - the pioneer chorus master* (John Lane, the Bodley Head, 1911) pp 33-4

⁶² Hollins, Alfred: *A Blind Musician looks back - an autobiography* (Edinburgh and London: W Blackwood & Sons, 1936) p 268

⁶³ Mackerness, E D: *Somewhere Further North - a history of music in Sheffield* (Sheffield: J W Northend, 1974) p 99

⁶⁴ Moore, *op cit*, p 375

We might take special note of seven of these; those at Hanley and Manchester, Bantock's performance at Wolverhampton, the London premiere, the two first American performances, and the Sydney performance. Much of this was crowded into March, which saw eight performances, five in the UK and three overseas, by when Elgar was deeply involved in the headlong crisis attendant on writing *The Apostles* in time for the Birmingham Festival at the beginning of October.

In Edinburgh in January, conducted by the composer Frederick Cowen, it achieved good notices and further established John Coates and Muriel Foster in their roles. There followed in Danzig on 11 March what may have been the first overseas performance since Düsseldorf in May 1902. Reporting to the *Musical Times*⁶⁵, Dr Carl Fuchs rated it :

. . . an artistic achievement of the first rank, chiefly on the part of the conductor, Herr Fritz Binder, but also of the chorus (that of the Sing-Akademie) and the orchestra. The excellent soloists, Fr. Frida Kisielnicki, Herr Fr. Dierich and Herr Joseph Staudigl, rounded off and completed a performance which was received with enthusiasm . . .

Mentioning civic pride as a driving impulse in the Sheffield performance reminds us of the involvement of various crack northern choirs in the final establishment of Elgar's masterpiece. Reginald Nettel has reminded us⁶⁶ of the strong sense of rivalry engendered by the competitive choral festival movement largely in the north. These provided highly trained bodies of singers anxious to outdo their neighbours :

Elgar received a deputation from the Potteries asking him if he would be prepared to conduct a performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* in Hanley. The proposed arrangements, moreover, were such as would gladden any composer's heart. Elgar was to be consulted about the choice of soloists, he was to choose the members of the orchestra himself, and he was offered a chorus that had just achieved a record by winning the premier award of the Welsh National Eisteddfod two years in succession. . . Few of the singers had any doctrinal sympathy with Cardinal Newman's faith. Being mainly recruited from the northern end of the Potteries, the chorus comprised a good proportion of Methodists, but that in no way damped their ardour for Elgar's music. Indeed the performance went far to justify Mr Ernest Newman's theory that music is a direct transmitter of spiritual feeling, transcending the quibbles of theology.⁶⁷

The driving force behind this performance, by the North Staffordshire Choral Society, was Havergal Brian, but the architect of its success was their choirmaster James Whewall⁶⁸.

⁶⁵ April 1903, p 247

⁶⁶ Nettel, Reginald: *Music in the Five Towns - a study of the social influence of music in an industrial district* (Oxford University Press, 1944); *North Staffordshire Music - a social experiment* (Rickmansworth: Triad Press, 1977)

⁶⁷ Nettel, *Music in the Five Towns*, op cit, pp 89-90

⁶⁸ Bury, David: 'Elgar and James Whewall - a study of the North Staffordshire Choral Society', *Elgar Society Journal*, Vol 2 No 3, September 1981, pp 10-16

In fact there was a near clash with Richter's first performance since Birmingham, to be given in Manchester, and the one at Hanley which Elgar conducted himself. At Manchester Richter took great care with the performance⁶⁹, but although scheduled for 5 March it had to be postponed for a week when John Coates fell ill. It thus took place the night before Elgar's own performance at Hanley, in which many of the Hallé Orchestra were to participate. Richter must have been chagrined when Elgar's dress rehearsal in the Victoria Hall, Hanley, clashed with his performance, meaning that Elgar was not there to witness his champion from the Birmingham Festival finally triumph. The *Musical Times* reported⁷⁰:

Nothing, it may safely be said, in the way of a musical performance in Manchester has ever been better prepared than the rendering of Elgar's 'Gerontius' . . . The orchestral parts were, I believe, considerably better done than ever before - and having heard two German renderings, as well as the original production at Birmingham and the repetitions at Worcester and Sheffield, I may perhaps be allowed to express an opinion on the point. The chorus and semi-chorus showed themselves completely at home in the music; Mr Coates gave his highly expressive interpretation of Gerontius's tenor solos; Miss Brema sang in the Angel's part with her customary power; and Mr Black gave the utterances of the Priest and the Angel of the Agony in unexceptional style. The impression created by the performance was altogether extraordinary, most of the vast audience remaining till some time after the end to applaud the conductor, principals, and, in fact, everyone connected with the performance.

Richter would go on to give a total of ten performances of *Gerontius*⁷¹.

The Hanley performance followed the next day and it seems probable that many people attended both. The local paper felt "without exaggeration the singing of the Choir was the finest which has yet been heard in the work"⁷². Elgar would not forget what they had done for him. After Hanley Elgar wrote to express his thanks⁷³:

I was delighted, and, I will add, deeply impressed by their performance. I have rarely heard such finished, musicianly singing, and have never had less trouble to get my exact reading - often a difficulty with one [orchestral] rehearsal. This was made easy for me by the splendid training of Mr Whewall and by the alert, attentive, and friendly attitude of the chorus. The tone is magnificent - silvery, yet solid, well-balanced, and sonorous, and the attack fine. The infinitesimal trifles, not shortcomings, which did occur, were caused by want of more time in rehearsal with the orchestra. I place the chorus in the highest rank, and I thank the members for giving me the opportunity of hearing a performance of my work almost flawless.

⁶⁹ Fifield, Christopher: *True Artist and True Friend - a biography of Hans Richter* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) p 360

⁷⁰ *Musical Times*, April 1903, p 262

⁷¹ Fifield, *op cit*, p 504

⁷² Bury, David: 'Elgar and James Whewall...', *op cit*, p 14

⁷³ Nettel, *op cit*, p 91



(Above left) David Ffrangcon-Davies, early interpreter of the bass solos; and three notable choral trainers; (above right) Arthur Fagge of London, (below left) Henry Coward of Sheffield, (below right) James Whewall of the North Staffs.



At the time this was important for Elgar, but it soon achieved a wider significance as the North Staffordshire District Choral Society were chosen, at Elgar's insistence, to sing in the London premiere in Westminster Cathedral in June.

Before then, the performance trained and conducted by Granville Bantock had been a notable one. The concert closed the Wolverhampton Festival Choral Society's 35th season, at Agricultural Hall, Wolverhampton. Bantock started his programme with Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, thus presenting the two leading novelties of the day in the one concert, and it was certainly very much a new music concert. The *Midland Evening News* reported⁷⁴ that the society

had been busy preparing for the performance for some months past, and Mr Granville Bantock, who has special advantages in relation to its interpretation, had done everything possible to ensure a performance worthy of the work itself, and of the reputation of the Wolverhampton Society.

Reviewers noted the "magnificent" contribution of the orchestra, and highlighted Henry Lyell Taylor, principal violin, who would later become celebrated in his own right as the conductor of the Brighton Municipal Orchestra.

Bantock only had one soloist of national reputation, in William Green as Gerontius. The *Wolverhampton Express & Echo*⁷⁵ wrote :

Mr Green's robust style seemed a trifle too much so in the earlier portions - one could hardly conceive a dying man being quite so lusty. Afterwards he subdued himself more in keeping with the idea of a disembodied spirit, and sang with great beauty and effect. . . Mr Green, however, is a singer of whom we have such a high opinion that we expect very much from him, more than we quite obtained on Monday. For Miss [Alice] Lakin's singing as the Angel, however, we can have nothing but praise. It was beautiful in quality, and reverent in expression. Any attempt at display in such a part would be fatal, and Miss Lakin sang with perfect taste in this respect. Mr Charles Knowles's great voice and sincere style left nothing to be desired.

The critic of the *Wolverhampton Daily Gazette* put a slightly different spin on it; clearly Alice Lakin was not as bold in her presentation as her colleagues in theirs⁷⁶:

Mr William Green sang grandly, as usual; Mr Charles Knowles was in every way excellent, and Miss Lakin proved herself thoroughly adequate to a part which is intellectually as well as vocally exacting.

How far this same critic was exercising poetic licence when he quoted Elgar as shaking his head deprecatingly at the end and saying; "It was too perfect: it was too perfect!" as he walked away slowly and sadly, it is difficult to judge.

⁷⁴ *Midland Evening News*, 24 March 1903. Cutting in Bantock Collection, Worcester Record Office.

⁷⁵ 24 March 1903. Worcester Record Office.

⁷⁶ 24 March 1903. Worcester Record Office.

Performances outside Europe began to take place, and the first productions in Chicago, New York, and Sydney provided a notable test of the music's prospects in the longer term. They also provided the choral forces in those places with a considerable technical challenge.

The American première took place in Chicago on 23 March 1903, quickly followed by New York on 26 March. In Chicago the concert was given by the Apollo Music Club conducted by Harrison M Wild, a notable pioneer of turn of the century choral works. In the programme of their concert on 9 February 1903 the forthcoming performance of *Gerontius* was announced as "one of the foremost musical works of the present generation and has awakened wide enthusiasm among musicians in England and throughout Europe. It contains some of the most marvellous orchestral and choral effects that have ever been conceived. Musicians who have heard it compare it with Wagner's 'Parsifal'."⁷⁷

The scrapbook of the Apollo Society is held by the Chicago Historical Society. Unfortunately owing to the very deteriorated and very brittle state of the paper on to which the cuttings⁷⁸ were originally pasted, it is likely that this will not long survive. The following extenso quotations paint a vivid picture of how the music was received.

Inter Ocrum [Chicago] 24/3/1903

'THE DREAM OF GERONTIUS'

First American Performance of Cantata Given by
Apollo Club

A noteworthy occasion in music the country over last night was the first performance in America of Edward Elgar's musical setting of Cardinal Newman's poem 'The Dream of Gerontius' . . .

The scene in the theatre was little short of inspiring. An audience of over 4,000 filled almost every seat back of the parquet to the last row of the family circle. On the stage stood the conductor, Harrison M Wild, facing an orchestra and chorus of over 400 persons, one of the largest gatherings on the Auditorium stage. The Chicago orchestra, assisted by several outsiders, occupied the center, with the three soloists in front and a small portion of the chorus to one side.

Back of the orchestra sat the gigantic chorus with the kettle drums, the trombone players, and the other brass instruments wedged in between the front rows of the altos and sopranos. On both sides were the men in solid rank far back almost to the rear wall. Their rows of black set off the light dresses of the women. It was a striking, picturesque sight, impressing the eye - as the words and music later impressed the ear - with the dignity, solemnity, and power of the occasion.

⁷⁷The Chicago Public Library provided me with a copy of the programme for the concert.

⁷⁸ The cuttings themselves are in rather better condition but as in the case of some photograph albums of that period as the pages crumble they are likely to take the cuttings with them unless restoration takes place very soon. It is beyond photocopying. I had to transcribe the cuttings in longhand.

THIRTY FIRST SEASON
ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-FIRST
CONCERT

Apollo Musical Club

PRESENTING

The Dream of Gerontius

Elgar

SOLOISTS

MRS. JENNY OSBORN HANNAH, *Soprano*
MR. EVAN WILLIAMS, *Tenor*
MR. GWILYM MILES, *Bass*

THE CHICAGO ORCHESTRA

MR. WM. MIDDERSCHULTE, *Organist*
MR. ARTHUR DUNHAM, *Rehearsal Accompanist*
MR. HARRISON M. WILD, *Conductor*

THE AUDITORIUM
MONDAY EVENING, MARCH TWENTY-THIRD
NINETEEN HUNDRED AND THREE

*The Water Ground is used at the
Apollo Club Rehearsals.*



*The US première of
the work; the choir
(below); the title page
of the programme
(left); and the
conductor, Harrison
M Wild (above).*



And the music! An orchestra of 100 pieces, in which the composer had skilfully utilized drums and brass to produce the utmost wealth of sound; the grand organ - the loudest and voluminous organ in the world - pealing forth its droning double bass and its pealing treble like a dozen church bells on Easter morning . . .

Musically considered the evening was not above criticism. But it should be remembered that the task attempted last night was perhaps more difficult than any ever before undertaken by the Apollo club. Elgar's music bristled with technical difficulties . . . William Middelschulte, organist, was, as always, above criticism.

[Chicago] Daily News 24/3/1903

Edward Elgar's "Dream of Gerontius", presented last evening, came as the crowning work not only of this season but of the years of previous endeavour of the Apollo Music club. This great choral composition, neither oratorio nor cantata, which was given last night in the Auditorium for the first time in Chicago, is such a departure from the time worn form of the sacred musical drama that its presentation was in the nature of a revelation. Modern composers with the exception of the Englishman and the American have not expended much time on the oratorio and its ilk, contending that this class of music is losing its popularity; its range is too narrow for modern ideas - and, in fact, that the oratorio is about to become extinct, to put the matter bluntly.

"The Dream of Gerontius", however, introduces new and great possibilities along this line of composition. The orchestral work becomes the prominent feature as in the Wagnerian dramas, the leit-motif is the keynote to its construction and the choral work is divided and subdivided . . . The tenor has a monopoly of the solo work, which was unfortunate last evening because of the indisposition of Evan Williams, to whom was assigned the leading role. Mr Williams was suffering from a cold of such severity as to cause wonderment that he could proceed with his difficult task and have any voice left. He held bravely through, however, with no apparent nervousness, delivering the Sanctus Fortis with its involved tempo and dramatic requirements in a manner that convinced as to his capability under more propitious circumstances. Mrs Jeannie Osborn Hannah, who is well equipped both vocally and interpretatively for oratorio, was, as usual, successful with the soprano solos - which lie rather low, by the way. As for Gwilym Miles, his magnificent barytone [sic] rolling forth was never more grateful than when it sounded the chant of the priest with clear enunciation and resonant volume after muffled and half-lost tones of the tenor . . .

Harrison Wild was most successful with the orchestra and the chorus, the latter rising with fine enthusiasm in the Demon chorus . . .

[Chicago] Record Herald 24/3/1903

"The Dream of Gerontius" lies in the tonality of "Everyman". Several centuries before Cardinal Newman put pen to paper the Dutch monk who wrote the old morality play sounded the keynote - the chord of human agony and unfaltering faith - which dominates the later work. But the poem, with its luxuriant musical garb, differs as widely from the primitive, Gregorian quality of the play as do the Cardinal's rich vestments from the monk's severe garb. At the fundamental notes the resemblance stops; the monk halts at the gate of the unknown, the cardinal goes on and follows the soul of Gerontius even past the final judgement.

Thematically, harmonically and orchestrally, Elgar's oratorio, founded on Cardinal Newman's poem, which was presented at the Auditorium last evening by the Apollo Musical Club, shows the influence of Wagner. The use of the leit-motiv, with various metamorphoses; the surprising and daring harmonic progressives [sic]; the remarkable orchestration; the treatment of the vocal passages - especially in the second part - prove that the composer has sat at the feet of the master of Baireuth [sic].

Elgar has, however, outstripped Wagner, Berlioz, Richard Strauss and all other original writers in his demands on the orchestra, and the listener feels at the close that he has heard the work of one who is undoubtedly the greatest composer England has produced since the days of Purcell at least. That it is a masterly work cannot be doubted.

With regard to devotional fervour spiritual exaltation, the opening chorus, the "Kyrie", sung by friends at the deathbed, was one of the most effective features of an evening of music that was a delight from beginning to end. A chorus of French horns in the distance could hardly have surpassed the mellow softness of the singers' tones. It was a tone, too, that by its living, fervent quality fairly searched out the heard strings and made them vibrate in sympathy with the pain of those who watched the final agony.

With the opening of the second section, which is devoted to the Soul's flight, the composer faces the difficult task of representing the silence of infinite space through the medium of an enormous sound-producing organism. It is not hard for the imagination to accept the music for what it is supposed to represent, for the interweaving of the instrumental parts gives a peculiar effect.

Following this soon came the high lights of the work, and the colours are laid on with a daring hand. The orchestral representation of the demons is striking and the choruses with their double fugues and augmented intervals are extremely difficult. When the soul of Gerontius is taken into the divine presence there is a passage where the composer has written: 'For one moment must every instrument exert its fullest force.' This chord comes suddenly, out of silence, and the effect is appalling.

It was a herculean task that confronted Mr Wild, the conductor, but both he and the singers succeeded admirably. It is current rumour among musicians that Elgar himself almost gave up the attempt to do what Mr Wild succeeded in accomplishing. At the first performance in Birmingham the final rehearsal was a dismal failure, and Elgar, it is said, came close to not presenting his work.

Evan Williams, the tenor soloist who represented Gerontius, sang unevenly. His tone was sometimes of pure quality and again defective. His low notes were almost gone and several passages were cut out for his benefit. Gwilym Miles, barytone [sic], has a resonant voice of great volume that is always even and musical. Mrs Jenny Osborn Hannah fully sustained her reputation as a soprano of unusually high class.

W L Hubbard wrote in the *Chicago Tribune* :

The first performance in America of Edward Elgar's 'The Dream of Gerontius' took place last evening at the Auditorium, under conditions that were both propitious and gratifying. The Apollo club, under the leadership of Harrison M Wild, was in exceptionally fine form; the Chicago orchestra, after more thorough preparation than is, as a rule, possible for an oratorio performance, played the intensely difficult score with a technical finish and a beauty worthy of the splendid organization's high standing; the solo parts were in competent hands, and - what was especially gratifying - the audience was of a size that left no unoccupied space in the great hall, and that gave assurance that the giving of a new work does not of necessity mean financial loss. It was an evening important in the music annals of the country, and it is subject for congratulation to all concerned that no untoward condition marred its success.⁷⁹

Having read these various reports of the performance, the account in *The Musical Leader and Concert Goer*, which we do not have space to quote at length, suggests that there were considerable problems with the performance, concluding "the choral part of it (always judging by the results obtained) seems to be distinguished chiefly for monotony. Never once was there a suggestion of life or spirit." The biggest bombshell was left for the end, where the writer reports : "never was there a colder, more unenthusiastic audience gathered for an 'Apollo' concert. The work fell flat, and petered out at the finish without so much as a hand raised to applaud."⁸⁰ In the light of the other accounts can this be true? It would be interesting to trace corroborating evidence in diaries, letters or autobiographies of those present.

In fact, the *Musical Times*⁸¹ published one such report, but an account in glowing terms. It underlined the emerging nationalist phenomenon, that once the place of *Gerontius* had been established in the British press, it was no longer acceptable to report it in negative terms.

The first performance in America of Dr Elgar's 'Dream of Gerontius' was given by the Apollo Musical Club of Chicago, on March 23, with every indication of success. The President of the Club, Mr Clarence P Van Inwegen, in a private letter to an English friend, thus refers to the event:-

"I thought you would be interested in learning how 'The Dream of Gerontius' was received by a representative American audience . . . We had more than four thousand people present - hardly a vacant seat in the vast auditorium. It was an audience made up of musical people of the city and for a hundred miles around Chicago, some enthusiasts coming five hundred miles to hear the work presented by the Apollo Club".

⁷⁹Hubbard, W L : 'Dream of Gerontius' *Chicago Tribune* 24 March 1903 p 5

⁸⁰"Production of Elgar's 'Dream of Gerontius' at Apollo Club" *The Musical Leader and Concert Goer* April 1903 p 13

⁸¹*Musical Times* May 1903 p 311

Speaking from my own standpoint it was the greatest and most satisfactory concert the Club has ever given. The work was studied on-and-off for upwards of five months, and though it was not given so well as it will be next season (for we are to repeat it), it was a great triumph. All through the first part you could literally have heard a pin drop, and so intense was the feeling that many sat as in a trance.

In that same Chicago Historical Society file there is preserved the typescript memoirs of the conductor of *Gerontius*, Harrison M Wild. These were later published in many instalments in *The Music News* during 1929. As a guide to choral conductors seeking repertoire this is a wonderful record of enterprise, and a number of works that are named and were then successful are now totally forgotten. There is also the typescript of a thesis history of the Apollo Music Club which lists the works first produced in Chicago by the Club. Other Elgar performances included *The Light of Life* (30 November 1903), *The Apostles* (23 April 1906), and *Caractacus* (4 March 1912).⁸² Looking at the programme for the first of these I was delighted to find it in a double bill with *King Olaf*, until, on looking more closely I discovered that this was not Elgar's *King Olaf*, but the Danish-born American composer Carl Busch whose *King Olaf* was one of a succession of cantatas written in the 1890s. The vocal score, published by Ditson, seems remarkably elusive and I have so far not been able to see a copy. Can any reader help?

In his memoirs Harrison Wild highlighted the difficulties he had with *Gerontius*. "We had rehearsed it several months, when I was requested by the president to give it up. 'It was too difficult and the audience wouldn't receive it.' But we did give it, and the audience did receive it. I didn't get, and couldn't get the club to do for me as I wished in the Demon chorus. I wanted a thin, harsh, nasal tone, but the idea prevailed, I guess, that to sing in such manner was beneath the dignity of the Apollo. Along came the Sheffield chorus⁸³; that body sang with just that snarl and the effect was startling.⁸⁴ Then the Apollo gave in, and in our second performance my wish was carried out."⁸⁵

In New York the performance took place on Thursday 26 March, but in fact the work had been heard two nights previously, on Tuesday 24 March when the performers gave a "special invitation rehearsal" of the work "for the benefit of the public school teachers, who are concerned with the teaching of music and many of whom are unable to hear the best concerts."⁸⁶ The performers on this occasion were identical to those of the public concert two days later, except that David Bispham was unable to take the bass roles which were taken by the local soloist Julian Walker.

⁸²Hilton : *History of the Apollo Club of Chicago*. Thesis p 91 (Carbon copy in Apollo Club papers, Historical Society of Chicago).

⁸³ On 24 April 1911 conducted by Elgar himself.

⁸⁴ For the story of the tour of the Sheffield Musical Union during 1911 see *Round the World on Wings of Song* by Sir Henry Coward, (Sheffield, J W Northend, 1933). The account of the visit to Chicago is on pp 65-70

⁸⁵Wild, Harrison : "History of the Apollo Club of Chicago" *The Musical News* [Chicago] 3 May 1929 p 30 [Cutting in the Apollo Club papers, Historical Society of Chicago]

⁸⁶"Invitation Rehearsal of 'The Dream of Gerontius'", *The New York Times* 25 March 1903

The conductor, Frank Damrosch, reported to the *Musical Times* :

'The Dream of Gerontius' has been heard in New York, and has made a deep impression. No work of recent years has created such profound interest, both during its preparation and at the performance, and the general sentiment is one of joy and gratitude that at last there has appeared a composer who has original ideas and is able to express them sincerely in his own way and language'.

The New York papers wrote at considerable length about the performance, *The Sun* giving the concert 12 column inches the next morning and two days later in its Sunday edition two complete columns, writing in eulogistic terms. The Sunday edition of *The New York Times* gave a similarly lengthy treatment. These and other accounts deserve to be reprinted but there is not space to do so here. As Richard Aldrich wrote in his piece "The Dream of Gerontius does indeed show a vital power, a soaring imagination, a fervour of religious exultation, a dramatic impulse, a command of the resources of choral and orchestral writing that put it far above any other piece of music brought forth in England for generations."⁸⁷

When we come to the Sydney Town Hall performance, on 21 December 1903, *The Sydney Morning Herald* critic was inclined not to be impressed, and it is difficult to decide how good the performance may have been. However, a clue to the local musical climate and the critic's sensibilities may be found in his preference for Spohr's *The Last Judgment* which had been given in St Andrews Cathedral - next door to the Town Hall - the previous Sunday.⁸⁸

A debt of gratitude is certainly owed by the entire musical community to Mr J A Delany, the choir of St Mary's Cathedral, and the hundreds of singers associated in last night's performance for their enthusiasm and enterprise in producing Edward Elgar's new oratorio, 'The Dream of Gerontius'. The complex character of the new work, with its choruses that occur in eight and sometimes in twelve parts, must have involved the most arduous rehearsal for the attainment of such accurate results as those yielded last night.

The oratorio itself is devotional but gloomy, and in spite of some melodious phrases the solo music must be summed up as ungrateful. Wagner's influence is shown in the employment of motives, of which Dr Jaeger, in his analytical notes to the book of the words, enumerates more than thirty. The importance of the instrumentation, which is paramount, should also be noted. Regarding the work as a whole, it must be pronounced dull. Hence, once more, our gratitude to Mr Delany and the orchestral forces so ably led by Mr Rivers Allpress. But for their art-enthusiasm, the first performance in Australia of Elgar's oratorio might have been delayed for years, and in that case we should all have been 'bursting in ignorance' of a work which the great body of English writers have trumpeted forth as likely to rival the immortal efforts of Handel. In the meantime we shall adventure the prediction that the London press will gradually withdraw from this untenable position. The new oratorio, composed for the Birmingham Festival of October, 1900, and rendered last year [ie June 1903] at the Roman Catholic Cathedral, Westminster, by a choir from North Staffordshire has not yet been produced by a London choral society, nor will it be performed in that way until March, 1904. This delay might not have meant anything. After hearing the work, the conclusion to be drawn is that it meant a great deal.

⁸⁷Aldrich, Richard : "Elgar and the English Oratorio", *The New York Times* 29 March 1903.

⁸⁸ I am most grateful to Max Keogh of Sydney for researching Australian newspapers and reminding me of the local geography.

At this far remove from the centre of action, conjectures can but be of a hazardous character, yet it should be reasonable from the course of events to suppose that Dr Elgar is not only a musician of undeniable talents, but also a smart business man. Reference has already been made to a masterly analysis of the oratorio by the eminent musical critic Dr Jaeger. It is erudite, amazingly detailed and of immense length. Also it has to be added that it is from the pen of a writer who is intoxicated with admiration for Dr Elgar. Either because he was commissioned to make this analysis, or for pure love of art and hard work, Dr Jaeger prepared this pamphlet in such good time that it was ready for distribution at the Birmingham Festival already mentioned. That is to say, the entire audience, including all the journalists had this amazing eulogy of Dr Elgar's oratorio placed before them as a guide to the work. The question which must always remain unanswered for a few years is this - 'Had this fact any influence upon the press opinion of the hour, and in that way upon the public opinion of the day?' Because Jaeger's talent must not be underrated. His analyses have long been celebrated, and very properly so. What is more is that it is so complete and shows such a minute study of the music (from the viewpoint of a rapturously enthusiastic Elgarite), that after reading it is impossible to write a line about the work without trespassing upon the ground it covers.

Before leaving this subject, which is important also because many who were present last night left the hall with the book in their possession, it may be useful to quote one of many instances in which the voice of honest commonsense is forced to protest against the finely-worded comments of the eminent but too partial Jaeger. It is at the point where Gerontius dies, and the 'Miserere' theme (p 19) 'vanishes into space, its last chord unresolved, the prayer unfinished, as the immortal soul of Gerontius takes its flight to God.' Then follows the bass solo of the Priest, and we are instructed (p 29) 'As the sunshine suddenly flooding an erstwhile darkened sick room is welcomed when the patient is well, so the bright, sonorous chords, which announce and support the Priest's words "Proficiscere, anima Christiana," are welcomed.' Not at all. Pure, authoritative, misleading Jaegerism. Whatever the chords are the whole effect of the solo is inky-black, 'a darkness that may be felt,' a gloomy piece of declamation which possesses some element of grandeur, indeed, but taken as a whole is so frightfully lugubrious as to be almost ugly. And the new oratorio is flooded most gloriously with 'sunshine' of this kind! Similarly, there is a learned note on p 45 concerning the bass solo of the Angel of the Agony, to the effect that the composer shows 'an exquisite effect in spite of a flagrant violation of the rules against consecutive fifths, and proving once more that a master of his art can step boldly outside the pale of restricting rules to produce the intrinsically beautiful.' 'But no,' cries the reader, who has an ear for melody, and the courage of his opinions, 'this is not beautiful. I know little of your consecutive fifths, and care less, but I do know when an aria is uncouth and inexpressive from a vocal standpoint, and I am listening to such an aria now. The "intrinsically beautiful" is just exactly what I do not find.' Very few readers will dare to say this, unfortunately, because they cannot help seeing that the writer of the Notes is a learned musician, and it does not occur to them that he may also be a violent partisan. This at any rate is the only conclusion that we can come to after listening most carefully to the new oratorio. Just as Berlioz's 'Faust' and Brahms's [sic] 'Song of Destiny' when first produced here but a few years ago exceeded in emotional power and beauty all that we had dared anticipate, so equally do we find 'The Dream of Gerontius' clever and learned, but very rarely inspired and in no wise exciting to the emotions.

Taking this view of the new oratorio, that it will ultimately be catalogued with a vast number of other works which have been similarly praised in their day and subsequently forgotten, a detailed commentary of any length becomes superfluous. By far the finest part of the work is the orchestration, and the prelude, which opens with the impressive 'Judgement' theme and includes many other of the 'motives' subsequently employed, is an imaginative and attractive piece of music. The general tenor of Cardinal Newman's poem is lyrical, however, and as the great author never intended it to be adapted to oratorio purposes he had no object in affording dramatic contrast. Nevertheless, at the moment of dissolution the horrified anguish of the Soul gives occasion for an imposing orchestral ensemble, in which the demoniac element transitionally prevails, and attention is arrested at the end of the first part, where there is some of the finest music in the work for a four-part semi-chorus and eight part chorus. Mr Delany had the singers perfectly in hand all through, and the pianissimo close, during which the first violins were heard in high harmonic descending passages, possessed an ethereal charm which aroused enthusiasm. At this point the conductor was rewarded with a laurel wreath and floral harp.

Chorus and orchestra, the former with an especially weird 'ha-ha-ha', also triumphed over the difficulties of the colossal 'demon ensemble'. 'We are approaching a cloud [sic] of demons and hear their distant howls (p 29). A scene of great power, remarkable boldness, and wild grandeur commences and holds us in its grip.' Thus Jaeger.

But does it? Or is it merely clever and superior pantomime music? Does it, for example, as a pure piece of 'theatricalism', come anywhere near the final movement (in the Hall of the Mountain Troll) of Grieg's 'Peer Gynt' suite? Let someone other than Jaeger give answer! One other triumph of the united forces must be mentioned, namely the Choir of Angelicals in the tremendous setting of Newman's own unrivalled hymn, 'Praise to the Holiest in the Height'. The composer touches greatness at this point, and is genuinely inspired by the majesty of his theme. The interpretation was magnificent, and after the sudden silence which follows the *fff* close the enthusiasm was so insistent that the whole had to be repeated. Unfortunately two or three really fine pieces of music will not redeem a dull work.

The solo music had the effect of considerably raising Miss Florence Gibson, a young light contralto, in the public estimation. Her mezzo soprano part of the Angel had been admirably studied, and the solo, 'My Work is Done' with its many gracious phrases, and the elevated beauty of the 'Alleluia' passage proved effective. To this part also fell the solo, 'Softly and Gently' charmingly orchestrated, and rendered with tenderness by the singer. Mr A R Richards may be congratulated upon his sureness in the tenor music. But - was there a tune in it anywhere, anyway? It is possible, to enjoy Bach's Passion music, and yet to find oneself asking such questions as these as do the Philistines when listening to Elgar. Mr Reginald Gooud had some moments of grandeur and of gloom in the dual role of the Priest and the Angel of the Agony.

This interesting performance of a new and much-talked-of work by one of the foremost English musicians of the day was in commemoration of the Sacerdotal golden jubilee of his Eminence Cardinal Moran, who was present, and during the evening cordially congratulated Mr Delany upon the success achieved.

Already a Gerontius tradition was beginning to develop. It is interesting that David Bispham, the baritone in Damrosch's New York premiere had been present in Birmingham in 1900, where he had been heard both in the Brahms' *German Requiem* and William Byrd's Five Part Mass. At New York Ada Crossley sang the Angel, but Ellison van Hoose as Gerontius is a name not remembered by us today. H E Krehbiel reported the performance as making "the most profound impression of any novelty of the last fifteen years."⁸⁹ Bispham later made a reputation for recitations in the Wüllner mould.⁹⁰

However, after sixteen performances, the work still had not reached London. There were four performances which established it in the capital. The first was at Westminster Cathedral on 6 June 1903 with Wüllner, Foster and Ffrangcon-Davies conducted by Elgar himself. This performance was all the more remarkable in that it took place in the middle of the Richard Strauss Festival held at St James's Hall from 3-9 June at which Mengelberg and the composer presented Strauss's then complete works almost in their entirety.

The Cathedral was not completely finished and had not been consecrated when the performance took place. While it was undoubtedly a *succés d'estime*, a great new Catholic work performed in the new Catholic cathedral, the acoustic was not kind for a first performance in London.

The circumstances of its introduction to the Metropolis . . . were, it must be admitted, appropriate enough, if from a practical point of view they left something to be desired. The setting of Cardinal Newman's poem by one who in religion and temperament is in perfect sympathy with it should naturally come under the special protection of the Roman Catholic community, and it was fitting, if only from the point of view of sentiment, that it should be given in the great building which, when completed, is to be the cathedral church of their Archbishop. Even in its gaunt incompleteness, destitute of the wealth of colour which is meant to adorn it,

⁸⁹ "Music in America", *Musical Times*, May 1903 p 329

⁹⁰ Kravitt, *op cit*, p 96. For photographs of Bispham's dramatic reading see p 56.

the interior of Bentley's spacious building is immensely impressive, and seems a fitting place for the 'Solemn Musick' of which Milton wrote. Unhappily its acoustic properties are, at least in its present condition, of a somewhat capricious kind, and one has to be very favourably placed to form a clear judgement of the music performed. From some positions the details were fairly distinct, but I doubt whether in any portion of the church the weight of tone was sufficiently felt to be as impressive as it should be. Delicacy and distance certainly lent charm to much of the music, but on the other hand the more massive choral effects lost something. The choral and orchestral forces, though thoroughly efficient, were not numerous enough for so large an auditorium. The chorus numbered only about 200 voices, but insufficient numbers proved the only fault chargeable to the exceedingly well-drilled singers of the North Staffordshire District Choral Society. The finish and precision of their performance and their excellent intonation deserve high praise, and these virtues were intensified in the semi-chorus, though for the reason already mentioned the refined singing of these twenty-three picked members was, at least for the majority of the audience, refined away to an almost imperceptible point. The Society's conductor is Mr. James Whewall, and to him is due a share of the honour belonging to this very practised chorus. The band consisted of well-known London musicians, and was thoroughly up to its work.

The novel feature of the performance was the appearance of Dr Ludwig Wüllner in the title-role, for the first time in this country. [*Actually the second time, see above.*] Dr Wüllner was obviously handicapped by the English words, but his reading was characterized by an intensity of feeling which atoned for this, and also went far to atone for the marked absence of purely vocal charm. His two colleagues, Miss Muriel Foster and Mr. Ffrangcon-Davies, combine to a remarkable degree sensuous beauty of voice with dramatic insight, and it would be difficult to imagine more completely satisfying renderings of their respective parts than they, who are now familiar in the work, are able to give. As for the work itself, repeated hearings help to convince one of its power and of the absolute greatness of its not infrequent moments of real inspiration. One who heard it for the first time on this occasion would hardly realize its full impressiveness, and to this extent it may be said that less than full justice has even now been done to 'The Dream of Gerontius' in London. With this reservation, however, the performance, which was conducted by the composer, was one of exceptional sympathy and finish in all its details.

Dr Edward Elgar has been the recipient of a very remarkable gift which well represents the esteem in which he is held in North Staffordshire. It consists of a splendid specimen of the potter's art executed by Mr C J Noke, a resident of Stoke-on-Trent, an artist and designer well known in the district. The gift, a loving cup over twelve inches in height, was executed at the Doulton Works as a remembrance of the performance of the 'Dream of Gerontius' given at Hanley. The cup is enriched with a portrait of Dr Elgar in his academic robes, surrounded with symbolic bays.⁹¹

David Bury has recounted the story⁹² of this performance, with particular reference to Wüllner. From this it is clear that Wüllner's engagement was engineered by the promoter of the performance, Hugo Görlitz, his agent in the UK. Wüllner was not universally admired by the English critics, *The Monthly Musical Record* finding the "unattractive quality of his voice and unsatisfactory vocalization made his performance anything but a thing of beauty."

⁹¹ "The Dream of Gerontius in London", *Musical Times*, July 1903, p 477

⁹² Bury, David: "Ludwig Wüllner and the Westminster 'Gerontius'", *Elgar Society Journal*, Vol 2, No 1, January 1981, pp 8-13.

Later, in 1904 Arthur Fagge appears to have secured the first Queen's Hall performance on 15 February, soon followed by two others, more prestigious: the Elgar Festival at Covent Garden in March, and the performance conducted by Weingartner at Queen's Hall in April.

This is the point where another exponent of the role of Gerontius comes on the scene and deserves special mention, despite not recording the part. This was Gervase Elwes who first sang the role of Gerontius under Weingartner on 9 April 1904. It was a great success and by his own estimation he sang it again three times in 1904, five in 1905 and seven in 1906. In all during the sixteen years remaining to him he sang Gerontius a hundred and eighteen times. Winefride Elwes in her book *Gervase Elwes - the story of his life* records how they attended Wüllner's London performance in Westminster Cathedral⁹³.

Wüllner was a fine singer, rather of the operatic type, but to our way of thinking he was too eager to emphasise the dramatic aspect of the part, even to the point of being theatrical. Moreover, Newman's verse inevitably suffered from being delivered in a strong German accent.

She records that "Gervase realised our most soaring hopes" and she quotes this letter from the critic Robin Legge⁹⁴:

I cannot help writing to say how enormously you impressed me by the tremendous conviction and sincerity of your performance in 'Gerontius' this afternoon. . . . I shall not forget it: it has earmarked Gerontius' for me.

There is a mystery about this performance. The mezzo soloist is listed in the programme as "Harriet Foster", surely a misprint for Muriel Foster, and yet in her book Winefride Elwes refers to her as "Mrs Harriet Foster". I am grateful to David Bury for pointing out that there were two Foster sisters, twins and both singers. Whether Hilda Foster could have been chosen by Elgar for so prestigious a performance seems extremely unlikely, and Winefride Elwes is not exactly celebrated for her accuracy elsewhere in her book⁹⁵.

After a first half consisting of the whole of *Gerontius* it is remarkable to a late-twentieth century listener to discover that it was only the first half. It was followed by Beethoven's *Choral Symphony*! You certainly got value for money in those days.

⁹³ Elwes, W and R: *Gervase Elwes - the story of his life* (London: Grayson & Grayson, 1935) p 138

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ See also: Bury, David: *Elgar and the Two Mezzos* (Thames Publishing, 1984). The two mezzos are Foster and Brema.

⁹⁶ Henschel's *Morning Hymn*, HMV B 322, was reissued in Volume Two of *The Record of Singing*, EMI RLS 743, side seventeen.

Can we in any way recall how Elwes gave the part? His singing in other repertoire certainly gives us some clues. A good example is his recording of Sir George Henschel's *Morning Hymn* recorded in 1912⁹⁶. Later, in 1916, Clara Butt promoted a week-long season of *Gerontius* at Queen's Hall conducted by Elgar himself in aid of war charities. "Mr Gervase Elwes (*Gerontius*), who is able to infuse into his voice a singular poignancy and awe-stricken feeling"⁹⁷.

Performances of *The Dream of Gerontius* now proliferated and it entered the permanent repertoire of choral societies, and the nation's musical consciousness. However, its appeal has remained an international one, and it is appropriate to end with a cutting from the first Paris performance⁹⁸. This took place on 25 May 1906, with the celebrated French mezzo-soprano Claire Croiza as the Angel. Croiza was another young exponent of the part, being only 23 at the time, having made her debut the previous year. You will probably best remember her on disc as Genevieve in the letter scene from *Pelleas*, recorded many years later.

Grateful acknowledgements are due to various expert helpers without whom the original presentation and its recasting here would not have been possible. To Julia Chandler, who despite influenza and bronchitis translated the German cuttings used in the talk and to David Michell, David Mason and Eliot Levin for locating and dubbing for me many of the 78s that were played then. The Elgar Birthplace for allowing me to photograph pages from the scrapbooks. Finally to Garry Humphreys who took the voice of Jaeger and read the bulk of the extracts, and to my wife Susan, who portrayed the voice of Rosa Burley.

*David Mason kindly translated the extensive German verbatim reports and reviews of the D, sseldorf performances, from difficult Gothic script originals. We are all greatly in his debt. To librarians and archivists at the Elgar Birthplace, and at Westminster, Worcester, Birmingham, the Barbican, Washington, New York, Chicago and Sydney, very many thanks. To Susanne Meusel of Vienna for locating for me a postcard portrait of Wüllner and to the many dealers and book sellers who over the years have provided me with a considerable library of material used in this article. To Max Keogh in Sydney and Erik Johnson in New York. To Dr Percy M Young for his kind agreement that I might expand the tables first quoted in his *Elgar OM*. To the copyright owners of all material quoted still in copyright, and especially to Wulstan Atkins, my thanks.*

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⁹⁷ "A Remarkable Musical Event", *Musical Times*, June 1916, p 296.

⁹⁸ *Musica*, Juillet 1906, p 112.

Le «SONGE de GÉRONTIUS»

PAR les soins de la Société des Grandes Auditions Musicales de France, dont M^{me} la comtesse Greffulhe est présidente, a été exécuté, pour la première fois en France, le 25 mai, au Palais du Trocadéro, le *Songe de Gérontius*, oratorio en deux parties, poème du cardinal Newman (traduction française de M. d'Offizi), musique de Sir Edward Elgar. On attendait avec curiosité cette œuvre du plus illustre représentant de la jeune école musicale anglaise; cette attente n'a point été déçue.

DANS un argument qui fut écrit sur le *Songe de Gérontius*, il est dit ce qui suit :

« Le poème chrétien du *Songe de Gérontius* a été inspiré au cardinal Newman par un douloureux événement de sa vie : la perte d'un ami qu'il assista à son chevet de mourant.

« Gérontius, agonisant, entouré de ses amis, cherche dans leurs visages douloureusement affectueux et dans la suprême affirmation de sa croyance, le courage nécessaire pour la dernière lutte, la force de combattre l'ultime assaut des puissances démoniaques, et surtout le réconfort dans sa douleur extrême.

« Soudain, le calme s'est fait en lui; une voix angélique vient de retentir, appelant son âme au ciel, et voici que nous suivions cette âme dans son mystique voyage. Alors commence à proprement parler le rêve de Gérontius, rêve de l'au-delà, vie ineffable des âmes pures et libres dans un monde lumineux et paisible, immatériel et subtil, qu'il nous faut entrevoir suivant la tradition de la foi catholique. A cette merveilleuse vision de la vie des âmes, le cardinal Newman s'est élevé avec l'élan intense d'un sincère et enthousiaste croyant, et l'imagination d'un vrai poète lui en a révélé toutes les splendeurs.

« L'auteur, pourtant, voulait mieux encore; sans doute comprit-il que dans la vision de ce monde idéal, la parole seule n'avait pas assez de puissance, et que toujours elle gardait un sens trop précis, trop limité, surtout dans l'évocation d'un monde mystérieux et infini. La musique seule avait le pouvoir de nous faire entrevoir cette sphère mystique; génie ailé, à l'envoûte puissante, elle pouvait nous emporter loin des réalités de la terre, dans ce monde invisible des âmes heureuses et libres. Le cardinal Newman proposa donc son manuscrit à plusieurs musiciens dont aucun n'osa accepter une tâche aussi difficile.

« En 1886, lors d'une visite de Dvorak, le cardinal lui montra le



LE CARDINAL ANGLAIS NEWMAN
Librettiste de *Foratorio* : Le *Songe de Gérontius*

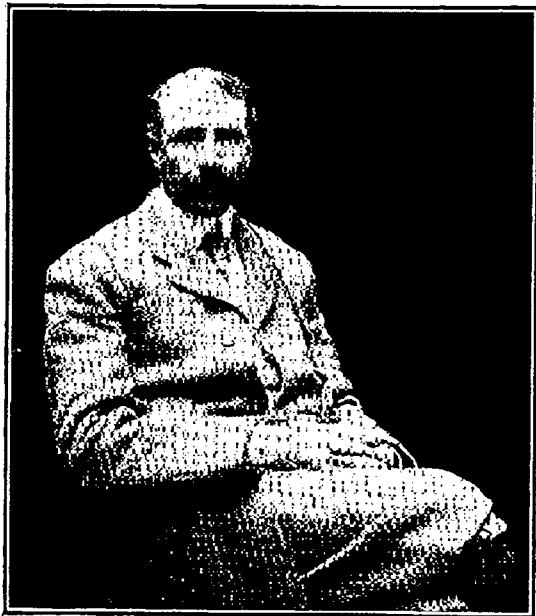
poème, lui fit aussi part de ses désirs et crut bien que le compositeur allait enfin les réaliser. Celui-ci, en effet, promit d'exécuter le sujet en détail, mais ne donna pas de suite à la chose. En 1892, Elgar prit à son tour connaissance du manuscrit qui, première lecture, l'enthousiasma; il vit aussitôt tout le merveilleux parti qu'il pourrait en tirer; toutefois, avant de se mettre à l'œuvre, il voulait s'en pénétrer tout entier, se l'assimiler complètement cet effet, l'étudia pendant des années. Au fur et à mesure, le poème se gravait plus profondément dans son esprit, il lui ressortait de plus en plus clairement dans sa nouvelle lumière, de cette atmosphère idéale, évidemment inhérente à l'œuvre primitive à laquelle la musique seule pouvait donner tout l'éclat, toute la vibrante intensité. A cette existence profonde et à Elgar allait enfin donner son libre essor par la puissance magicienne libératrice de la musique, et en 1900 eut lieu, au festival de Edgemoor, et sous la direction de Hans Richter, la première exécution de *Songe de Gérontius* dans sa double conception poétique et musicale telle que le cardinal Newman l'avait souhaitée.

Le *Songe de Gérontius* ne laisse point de rappeler *Mort et Résurrection* de Richard Strauss; mais il faut bien dire que l'œuvre grand compositeur allemand a, plus que celle de M. Edward Elgar, de l'espace, de l'ampleur et d'intensité.

Ce que l'on pourrait reprocher à cette dernière œuvre, c'est de paraître un peu britannique, puisque l'auteur est anglais et là, y contrastant avec trop de soudaineté, des mièvreries convenues guère à la gravité du sujet traité. Mais une noblesse remplit cet oratorio; la ligne mélodique y est souvent et pure; l'orchestration en est solide; les voix y sont traitées avec franchise et vigueur. L'opposition des chœurs d'anges et des chœurs de démons est vraiment saisissante. Le *Songe de Gérontius* méritait la Société des Grandes Auditions de France sacrifiât pour le faire connaître; on doit l'en louer grandement.

Il faut louer aussi, et sans réserve, l'interprétation si fouillée, intense, que M. Chevillard, dirigeant son orchestre, a donnée; les chœurs, en nombre considérable, furent par M. César Galeotti fit preuve, à l'orgue, d'un jeu excellent. Éloges sont dus aussi à MM. Plamondon (Gérontius), à M. (l'Ange de l'agonie) et à M^{lle} Croiza, débutante (l'Ange).

Au résumé, une glorieuse manifestation à l'actif de la Société des Grandes Auditions musicales de France, à celui de M^{me} la comtesse Greffulhe, à qui les arts doivent beaucoup. Il suffit de rappeler les représentations de *Béatrice et Bénédict*, de Berlioz, à l'Opéra; plus tard les *Trois à Carthage* du même compositeur, représentations mémorables au cours desquelles débuta la célèbre Marie Lescaut; les auditions d'œuvres de modernes compositeurs français; les représentations, à Orange, de *Jules César*, de *Mefistofele*, de *Les Troyens à Carthage*, et le récent festival de



'E's FAVOURITE PICTURE'

Elgar and the Pre-Raphaelites

Geoffrey Hodgkins

1848 was the year of political revolution in Europe, and Britain was virtually the only country to avoid upheaval, although an attempt was made that year on the life of Queen Victoria. The last great Chartist rally took place that year, in April on Kennington Common in south London. It was attended by two young aspiring painters who had met at the Royal Academy School - the nineteen-year-old John Everett Millais, and William Holman Hunt, two years his senior. No doubt they caught something of the spirit of the age; but the object of their revolutionary fervour was specific - British art. They were ambitious for themselves, impatient and critical of their elders, and in September 1848 with their friend Dante Gabriel Rossetti and four others they formed the 'Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood'. They were united by a dislike of the prevailing ethos in British art, and yearned for the truth to nature, directness of appeal, simplicity of sentiment and high moral purpose of European art before Raphael, hence the group's name. Like most youth protest movements, it is easier to identify what they opposed than what they actually stood for. Rossetti's brother, William, who later became the historian of the movement, wrote that "the bond of union" between them was fourfold :

(1) to have genuine ideas to express; (2) to study nature attentively, so as to know how to express them; (3) to sympathise with what is serious and direct and heartfelt in previous art, to the exclusion of what is conventional and self-parading and learned by rote; and (4), and most indispensable of all, to produce thoroughly good pictures and statues.¹

The first and last of these are clearly artistic truisms, whilst the other two show the influence of Hunt. He wanted to paint nobler, more serious pictures than the "Monkeyana ideas, Books of Beauty, and Chorister Boys" which, as he wrote later, characterised the Royal Academy at the time. He despised the careless brush techniques of earlier artists such as "Sir Shoshua Reynolds". Hunt was fired by Ruskin's comment in his *Modern Painters* : "...go to Nature in all singleness of heart and walk with her laboriously and trustingly, having no other thoughts but how best to penetrate her meaning and remember her instruction; rejecting nothing, selecting nothing and scorning nothing; believing all things to be right and good, and rejoicing always in the truth".

The Brotherhood drew up a list of 'Immortals', heroes of art and literature whom they particularly admired. Christ was alone at the apex (at the insistence of Hunt). Below him were Shakespeare and the author of the Book of Job; while on the third level were twelve names - Homer, Dante, Chaucer,

¹ Quoted in *The Pre-Raphaelites* (Tate Gallery/Penguin, 1984) p 11

Leonardo, Goethe, Keats, Shelley, King Alfred, Landor, Thackeray, Washington, and Browning. As a critic has written, "the jumpy and irregular nature of this selection is some indication of the Pre-Raphaelites' intellectual uncertainty"².

The idealisation of women, the emotional impact of landscape, and the emphasis on chivalry and gallantry from former ages all show that Pre-Raphaelitism was a true descendant of the Romantic movement; yet paradoxically the emphasis (in Hunt especially) on truth to nature linked it to the scientific realism which emanated from the Enlightenment. The earliest pictures, dating from 1849, varied in quality, and met with considerable criticism, more than anything because of the dislike of the secrecy behind the initials 'PRB' which they added to their signatures on the paintings. The following year they produced a magazine called *The Germ*, which contained literary as well as artistic contributions. Various outsiders were asked to contribute, including Rossetti's sister Christina, the poet Coventry Patmore, and fellow artist Ford Madox Brown. The intention was to enshrine the values of the Brotherhood, but it lasted for only four issues. That same year saw the appearance of Millais' *Christ in the House of his Parents*, which was vehemently attacked on all sides for its portrayal of the Holy Family as ordinary peasant folk. *The Times* called it "revolting" and "disgusting", and Charles Dickens launched an oft-quoted diatribe in *Household Words*. In fact, the critics were now in full flow, and because of this the three Pre-Raphaelites became the most famous, or possibly notorious, painters in the country. However, the tide of public opinion began to change when John Ruskin, the most influential art critic in Britain, wrote two letters to *The Times* in their defence in 1851. In the second he opined that the Pre-Raphaelites "...may as they gain experience, lay in our England the foundation of a school of art nobler than the world has seen for three hundred years".

But growing fame and fortune caused the Brotherhood to grow apart rather than together. Members left and were not replaced, and meetings became more infrequent. In 1851 Rossetti began his ill-fated love affair with Elizabeth Siddall and his preoccupation with his namesake, the poet Dante. In 1853 Millais was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy, and that same year went for a holiday to Scotland with the Ruskins. Their marriage was already in disarray, and Millais and Effie Ruskin fell in love. This led eventually to a scandalous divorce, and Millais' marriage to Effie two years later. In 1854-55 Hunt paid the first of three extended visits to the Holy Land (the other two were 1869-72 and 1875-78). The Brotherhood as a body was a thing of the past, but the fame of its three main figures, and its influence on the artistic world of late Victorian Britain, was only just beginning. 1857, the year of Elgar's birth, was in many ways a turning point in the artists' fortunes. Ford Madox Brown organised a Pre-Raphaelite exhibition at Russell Place in London; the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition included PRB paintings; and an Exhibition of British Art (which was largely Pre-Raphaelite) was shown in New York (and in Philadelphia and Boston the following year). Also in 1857, Rossetti was asked to paint a series of murals at the Oxford Union building. To fulfil this commission he collected a group of artists, again seven in all, including Arthur Hughes, William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones. In effect this began what is sometimes referred to as the second phase of Pre-Raphaelitism, but it was actually based on different principles and eventually metamorphosed into Aestheticism and Symbolism. Indeed, the very word 'Pre-Raphaelite' conjures up to many what Evelyn Waugh called "picturesque medievalism", plus the image of the voluptuous women of Rossetti's later period, and the expressionless, often androgynous women of many of Burne-Jones' paintings, all of which are far removed from the movement's original ideals. It is important to be aware of this divergence of meaning; for instance, Jaeger in referring to the Angel's

² Timothy Hilton : *The Pre-Raphaelites* (Thames & Hudson, 1989) p 35

opening Song in *The Dream of Gerontius*, says that "our thoughts seem to wander, we know not why, to some saintly picture by a pre-Raphaelite painter"³. It is impossible to say what exactly Jaeger had in mind; yet angels are remarkably absent from the work of Millais and Hunt (if one excepts the souls of the children in *The Triumph of the Innocents*⁴); and apart from his first two PRB pictures - *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* and *Ecce Ancilla Domini* - they are usually only background figures in Rossetti. Yet angels are common in Burne-Jones' output, often in connection with designs he did for William Morris's firm. However, Canon Gorton linked Elgar very definitely with the first phase of the Pre-Raphaelites in a letter to Alice Elgar written in October 1903 after the first performance of *The Apostles*:

...While you are in Birmingham I hope you will go to the Art Gallery - & see three of the noblest works of the Preraphaelites [sic], recognising the kindred spirit - First Ford Madox Brown's *Exiles* [ie. *The Last of England*] - He painted it when the indifference of English patrons led him to resolve to leave England - it is his wife who holds his hand, and faces the future with sad courage - Dr.Elgar will recognise the wife - The two others are the Two Gentlemen of Verona [*Valentine rescuing Sylvia from Proteus*] & the Christ in the Temple [*The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*] - In the latter, a work of five or six years I think Dr.Elgar must here recognise fellowship in work - all perfection of skill, all mastery of form & colour subordinated to the gaze in the eyes of the child Christ ["] Wist ye not [...?"] - I am sure it will rest Dr.Elgar to see it.⁵

There was not time to visit the Birmingham Gallery before leaving, but they did go to the Cathedral, as Elgar noted in a memorandum in his notes on *The Apostles* :

On leaving Birmingham after the Festival we (Alice & I) went into St.Philip's Church, walked up it to see the stained glass and on turning round were struck by Burne-Jones' 'Ascension' ...the sun shining thro' it. Very impressive ending to our glorious week E.E.⁶

³ *The Dream of Gerontius*, analytical notes (Novello, 1900) p 25

⁴ "The children must be so treated that they shall not be mistaken for infantine angels of heaven or amoretti, which previous illustrations of the subject would lead people to expect them to be" (Hunt to William Bell Scott, 1882, quoted in Anne Clark Amor : *William Holman Hunt: the true Pre-Raphaelite* (Constable, 1989) p 231

⁵ Hereford and Worcester Record Office 705:445:2441. Five years earlier Gorton had written an article on Hunt for *The Parents' Review*.

⁶ In fact, Elgar was mistaken; the Ascension is celebrated in the East Window triptych. As they "turned round" they saw the sun shining through the West Window, which depicts the Last Judgement.

Alice Elgar had cultivated an interest in art since her early years. So impressed was she by Burne-Jones' *The Golden Stairs* at its exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1880 that she wrote a poem on it'. In 1882 she and her mother visited Italy, a country whose artistic treasures would later give such pleasure to her and her husband. When she and Edward moved to London after their marriage in 1889, Alice took advantage of the opportunity to visit galleries and exhibitions; for instance, the Burne-Jones' *Briar Rose* murals in July 1890, when she was eight months pregnant! The following April, with their move back to Worcestershire pending, was a hive of artistic activity. Elgar "bought pictures", some Lacroix lithographs for ½d each; they visited Watts' studio and gallery; the Sir John Soane Museum; an exhibition of Raphael's cartoons; the National Gallery; the Dulwich Gallery; and "commenced a Chart of Painters". The house they took in Malvern Link was named after the painter Melozzo da Forli (1438-94); a framed photograph of an angel by Forli "was always in any house where E lived", according to Carice.⁸

Foreign holidays always included a visit to a gallery or museum - Dürer's house at Nuremberg in August 1892, the Schack Gallery at Munich in September 1894, Bruges (to see paintings by Hans Memling) and the Louvre in 1895, amongst many others. As Elgar's fame grew, there were visits to Novello's in London, and whilst he was busy there Alice often took the opportunity to visit a gallery. Later visits to Italy included numerous trips to churches, museums and galleries.

As with chemistry, heraldry, and theology, Elgar spent considerable time and effort in becoming knowledgeable about a new subject, and became sufficiently confident to speak on Italian art at a meeting in Hereford on 23 January 1906. Elgar attended the Royal Academy Banquet in 1905, where the Prince of Wales (later George V) "took him off through 2 or 3 rooms & discussed the pictures & talked". In March 1905 Elgar gave his inaugural lecture, entitled 'A Future for English music', as Professor of Music at Birmingham University, and there are numerous references to art in it, including (importantly) the following : "...The younger men should draw their inspiration more from their own country, from their own literature - and, in spite of what many would say - from their own

⁷ See Young, Percy M: *Alice Elgar : Enigma of a Victorian Lady* (Dobson, 1978) p 65

⁸ It is not entirely clear whether the house was so named by the Elgars. Alice's diary on 22 May 1891 notes : "E & A... seeking a house. Isabel Fitton & A saw Forli". Yet the *Malvern News* only refers to it by that name *after* the Elgars moved in; previously it was known as 5 Park Villas. Possibly the diary entry was completed later.

climate" (in the margin of his notes he wrote "Turner").⁹ In the second lecture (in November 1905) entitled 'English Composers', he said: "I would like to sketch an education necessary for a musician in case he should develop (or dwindle) into a composer". This education should comprise "...Literature, the study of Art, and LAST of all music..."¹⁰

He took great delight in collecting engravings, and they were clearly a spiritual and artistic refreshment to him. On 4 April 1919 he took possession of some Italian engravings and Alice wrote: "E. said [that] after tiresome letters about trivial things looking at these made one think *great* again"¹¹.

There are several indications that the Elgars were discriminating in their approach to art, such as this from the Birmingham inaugural lecture:

I have spoken of the want of inspiration in English music. Many respectable and effective works have been written during the twenty years 1880-1900. To me they represent more or less - I will not particularise - such a phase of art as in another way was represented by Lord Leighton. There you had a winning personality, a highly educated man, a complete artist, technically complete, but the result was cold and left the world unmoved.¹²

The 1860s and '70s in Britain had seen the rise of Aestheticism through such artists as Leighton, Whistler and (having deserted the principles of Pre-Raphaelitism) Rossetti. This movement had its origins in the 1830s in France as 'l'art pour l'art' - art for art's sake; in other words colour, line, and tone were rated as more highly valued aspects of art than subject matter. Aestheticism rejected not only Ruskin's interpretation of art as an imitator of nature and a means to convey moral and spiritual truths, but also the genre, narrative and anecdotal paintings so beloved of the early Victorians. When Swinburne wrote in 1867, "Handmaid of religion, exponent of duty, servant of fact, pioneer of morality, [Art] cannot in any way become", he was really saying that art's purity or integrity depended on the rejection of all conventional rules, and certainly there are signs in the final third of the century of flood gates opening. For instance, there was a considerable increase in the erotic content of much British painting, especially from Albert Moore, Leighton, Watts, Simeon Solomon, and Burne-Jones, leading ultimately to Beardsley; although Leighton's great friend Watts escaped Alice Elgar's censure due to the allegorical nature of his later paintings:¹³

⁹ Young, Percy M (ed): *A Future for English Music* (Dobson, 1968) p 51

¹⁰ Op cit, p 91-3

¹¹ An inventory of Elgar's pictures made by Carice after his death listed eleven engravings which "were part of a large collection made by EE when living at Hampstead".

¹² Op cit, p 55. These comments on Leighton are similar to some by William Rossetti, which may have been known by Elgar.

¹³ Quoted in Young, *Alice Elgar*, op cit, p 146

To Watts also belongs the rare glory that in the representation of the nude female figure, he clothes it with such a noble ideality that far from its having a debasing influence, or appealing to any lower side of human nature, it stands vested with a sacred purity, an Emblem as it were, of what should be encompassed with reverence.

Clearly, the Elgars tended towards the Ruskinian view, as two further quotes from Edward's inaugural Birmingham lecture demonstrate :

A work of art is none the less a work of art if it is never seen; and a piece of sculpture of Michael Angelo (*sic*) or a Symphony of Beethoven would be just as great if buried in a cellar as if in its proper place educating, helping and improving mankind generally by being placed before an audience.

...the [future] I want to see coming into being is something that shall grow out of our own soil, something broad, noble, chivalrous, healthy and above all, an out-of-door sort of spirit.¹⁴

Alice, too, in the same essay quoted earlier, aspires to an 'ideal' in subject matter:

...Yet in the midst of our hurried life and massive incomprehension of lofty art, we must remember with joy and astonishment that there is an ideal side even to this age, weary, worn out and sordid as it seems in many respects.

The 'ideal', however, is still manifested in art, and...it is one of the glories of the time and a hope of salvation amongst the darker aspects of the age that this is true, though alas! its influence is far from all pervading. To see that we need only to go round the rooms of the Academy or those of any other Exhibition. The appalling commonness of subjects will oppress the mind with a weary weight. To what a vast mass of people the pictures with their terrible suburban flavour must appeal. Drawing room and nursery scenes without an intuition of poetic story or artistic teaching prevail, scenes void happily of harm, but replete with common domestic vulgarity.¹⁵

Though Leighton's paintings were generally in a classical setting, there was certainly an "appalling commonness of subject... without an intuition of poetic story or artistic teaching". Alice was echoing Ruskin who, as already stated, believed that the business of art was to interpret and to edify, and no work designed as pure ornament was worthy of serious consideration. Elgar seems to have tried to live up to similar ideals, though it was more of a curse than a blessing to him. He wrote in a particularly depressed state to Jaeger: "I am not allowed to beg a dispensation of a benevolent providence who objects to the world being saved or purified or improved by a mere musician".¹⁶ And in setting O'Shaughnessy's words in *The Music Makers* he identified with "the movers and shakers of the world", despite the loneliness and rejection that such a status brought. Yet he tried. Elgar wrote to Canon Gorton about the libretto of *The Apostles* on 17 July 1903 :

¹⁴ *A Future for English Music*, op cit, p 33, 57

¹⁵ *Alice Elgar*, op cit, p 145

¹⁶ 3 June 1908: Moore, Jerrold Northrop : *Elgar and his publishers* (Clarendon Press, 1987) vol 2, p 697

In these days, when every 'modern' person seems to think 'suicide' is the natural way out of everything (Ibsen &c.&c.) my plan, if explained, may do some good..¹⁷

And to the Rev W E Torr on *The Apostles* project :

I am not at all sure if I shall ever complete my task, but it is the one work to which I devote my best thoughts¹⁸

Such a statement links Elgar closely with Holman Hunt. Hunt was the only one of the original Pre-Raphaelites to remain faithful to the movement's principles, and although he lacked the talent of Millais and the personal charisma of Rossetti, he was blessed with tenacity and singleness of purpose, often spending years in completing a picture. He was the most religious of the three, and saw his career almost as a mission. He believed that art must be "a handmaid in the cause of justice and truth". In our own time, Hunt's religious paintings have come in for a good deal of criticism and neglect, possibly due to the decline of Christian influence in society, or more likely a reaction against the immense acclaim accorded to paintings such as *The Light of the World* during the last century. But in the same way that other eminent Victorians such as Mendelssohn and Sir George Gilbert Scott have been re-assessed favourably over the last thirty of so years, it is surely time now for an objective and unprejudiced re-evaluation of Hunt's work. For Hunt was more in touch with "real" life than Millais, who was drawn towards society portraits, and Rossetti, whose last twenty years were spent in an increasingly dream world of his own making. More than the other Pre-Raphaelites, Hunt produced pictures with a moral message, often in a contemporary setting, such as *The Awakening Conscience* and *The Hireling Shepherd*.

Like Elgar, Hunt found inspiration in the natural world. As a young man, he said, "I revelled in the blossoming trees showing their loveliness to the rising sun, and turned into secret lanes, and leas... beside a rushy river... I spied out the shy fish, and rejoiced with the happy birds, and summoned courage for my novice hand to interpret the rapturous charms"¹⁹: while Elgar "used to be found in the reeds by Severn side with a sheet of paper trying to fix the sounds". There are many other similarities between Hunt and Elgar. Both escaped in their mid-teens from their fathers' attempts to force them into jobs which would bring financial security. They were early risers, and disciplined in their approach to work. Both men were avid readers, and loved dogs. Both could be full of fun with intimates; Gabriel Rossetti, who loved giving people nicknames, referred to Hunt as "the Mad" or even "the Maniac", while William Rossetti said Hunt had "a full gusto for the humorous side of things". Yet both were prone to paralysing bouts of depression, especially over the completion of

¹⁷ Moore, Jerrold Northrop : *Edward Elgar - Letters of a Lifetime* (Clarendon Press, 1990)
p 131

¹⁸ BL Add MS 47906 fo. 122; the draft letter is in Alice Elgar's hand, and dates from late October 1905

¹⁹ Quoted in Diana Holman Hunt, *My Grandfather, his wives and loves* (Hamish Hamilton, 1969)-p.35

works; Hunt's comments on *The Shadow of Death* are remarkably similar to Elgar's on *The Kingdom*. Hunt, according to William Rossetti, "was the only PRB who had some notion of music as an art: he enjoyed it much, and could speak of it with intelligence".²⁰

Hunt painted many of his pictures in the open air, in obedience to Ruskin's dictum of "truth to nature". The development of *The Light of the World* is well-known; it was begun in November 1851 at a farm in Ewell in Surrey, when Hunt painted from 9 pm to 5 am to get the correct effect of the moonlight. Similarly, the creative stimulus to Elgar of the natural world, especially when he was walking, cycling, etc, is well attested, and perhaps no more so than in the case of *The Apostles*, which has at its heading "In Longdon Marsh, 1902-3": This low-lying area lying south-east of Malvern was often flooded, and abounded in wildlife. This, and its remoteness, attracted Elgar. As W H Reed later wrote: "He loved it because it was off the main roads and very unfrequented...He told me...he had to go there more than once to think out those climaxes in the Ascension".²¹

The solemnity of what they saw as their calling meant that in their religious work, both Hunt and Elgar were intent on absolute accuracy and faithfulness to detail.²² This was the reason for Hunt's visits to the Holy Land, mentioned earlier. He was determined to paint the actual locations and to use only Semitic models for the purposes of accuracy; but initially he met with opposition, hostility even, from both Jews and Muslims, who were scandalised by the notion of breaking the Second Commandment so flagrantly. His first picture - with no human content - *The Scapegoat*, dates from 1854-5 and is based on a passage from Leviticus 16. He painted it against a background of the Dead Sea.

On that same visit he began *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, the story of the twelve-year-old Jesus staying behind in Jerusalem (Luke 2: 41-51). On 10 July 1854 he wrote to his patron Thomas Combe: "For three or more weeks work I have made but little progress but then I have read and learned a great deal about the design of the temple and also about the ceremony with which the event is connected [the Passover] and now I feel nearly prepared".²³ The reading included the Talmud (also used by Elgar in *The Apostles*), and Josephus, as well as the Bible. Elgar approached literary subjects in a similar fashion, as he told his earliest biographer: "When I propose such a work as this [*The Apostles*] I first of all read everything I can lay my hands on which bears on the subject

²⁰ *The Pre-Raphaelites and their world* (Folio Society, 1995) pp 39, 44

²¹ Reed, W H : *Elgar as I knew him* (Gollancz, 1936) p 99

²² This link was first recognised by Dr Percy Young (Elgar O.M., p 307-8). Strangely enough, in *The Light of the World*, his most famous painting, Hunt actually departs from the principle of 'truth to nature' and produces a picture based on allegory and symbolism.

²³ Quoted in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, op cit, p 158

directly or indirectly, meditating on all that I have sifted out as likely to serve my purpose, and blending it with my musical conceptions".²⁴

Like most of Hunt's biblical pictures, *The Finding of the Saviour*.. is full of imagery. The blind beggar on the right balances the old Pharisee on the left, who is also blind spiritually. At the far right a group of masons are looking quizzically at a large piece of stone; the rejection of Jesus by the Jews is picked up in Psalm 118:22, "The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner", a verse which Elgar set to music in *The Kingdom*.

Hunt's second visit in 1869 produced *The Shadow of Death*. It shows Christ in the carpenter's shop stretching from tiredness at the end of a day. The setting sun throws the shadow of his head and arms onto a cross beam on the wall, thus prefiguring the Crucifixion. The subject, although realistically portrayed, is not based on a biblical incident, unlike its predecessor. Hunt had read Renan's scandalous book *La Vie de Jésus*, published in 1863, which repudiated the supernatural aspects of Christ's life and presented him as a charming and amiable Galilean preacher. Although it did not undermine Hunt's belief, it strengthened his resolve to show religious subjects in a new way, as he said: "With my particular picture and old religious priest teaching I see nothing at all in common, and I should think that so far from any ecclesiological school being pleased with it, that it is more fitted by itself for the Renan class of thinkers who have been studying the life of Christ as one particular branch of history - ...my picture is strictly - as the temple picture was - *historic* with not a single fact of any kind in it of a supernatural nature, and in this I contend it is different for [*sic*] all previous work in religious art".²⁵

It is interesting to note that in Elgar's notes on *The Apostles*, one of the "books referred to" is Renan's book, *The Apostles*. However this later book in fact begins only *after* Jesus' death - it is a sequel to *La Vie de Jésus* - and mostly deals with the development of the early church, i.e. the passages treated by Elgar not in *The Apostles*, but in *The Kingdom*. Whether Elgar read Renan's *Life of Jesus* we do not know, but it seems likely in view of its notoriety and the fact that it was written by a former Catholic.

Hunt's last major Biblical painting is *The Triumph of the Innocents*, which caused him much trouble and for various reasons took him more than ten years to complete. It is atypical of his work in many ways, being much influenced by Italian art and sculpture. The subject is the Flight into Egypt (Matthew 2:13-18), and once again Hunt was anxious to be authentic in his portrayal. He used a Mecca donkey; and painted the background landscape at Gaza where he found "a handsome group of trees over a water-wheel" at a distance of about thirty miles from the Holy Family's point of departure at Bethlehem.

²⁴ Buckley, Robert J : *Sir Edward Elgar* (John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1904) p 75.

²⁵ Letter of 30 October 1872 to an unidentified correspondent (Bodleian Library, quoted in *The Pre-Raphaelites*, op cit, p 221). As adults, both Elgar and Hunt eschewed links with formal Christianity.

This same concern for conveying certain biblical scenes accurately can be found throughout *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*. The description of the dawn and the singing of the Morning Psalm in the Temple Elgar found in a book by Franz Delitzsch entitled *Jewish Artisan Life in the Time of Christ*. He also wanted to use authentic music for the psalm, and consulted a friend of the critic Alfred Kalisch, Rabbi F L Cohen, who provided him with Pauer's book *Traditional Hebrew Melodies*.²⁶ Other tunes from this book found their way into parts of *The Kingdom*, notably 'The sun goeth down'.

As already noted, Elgar's choice of texts was greatly influenced by the vast background reading he had undertaken, indicated by the large number of theological books in his library. On 15 January 1906, when composing *The Kingdom*, he wrote to Canon Gorton: "I wd. rather have done without the late Hellenism 'Lord Jesus' but I could not help it & Luke uses it early in Acts although it is, I suppose, a much later expression". The phrase appears twice in the first scene, 'In the Upper Room', quoting from Acts 1:21 and 20:35. The expression occurs ten times altogether in Acts, but Luke was writing at a much later date (probably between 60 and 75 AD), and some commentators believe that it would not have been used in the early church in Jerusalem, which was entirely Jewish. It is surely amazing that Elgar, already way behind schedule on *The Kingdom*, was taking such trouble over a minor point which would anyway have gone unnoticed by the vast majority of his listeners.

Parallels can be drawn between Elgar and the Pre-Raphaelites in their subject matter. The theme of his first major work - the overture *Froissart* of 1890, with its motto from Keats "When Chivalry lifted up its lance on high" - would have been thoroughly acceptable to the young idealists in 1848. Their list of 'Immortals' coincided with Elgar's in many respects. Elgar loved Shelley, and set to music *O wild west wind* as a part-song, and *In moonlight* as a solo song to the tune of the 'Canto popolare' from *In the south*; while lines from Shelley's poem *Song* are found at the head of the Second Symphony. Poetry from the Pre-Raphaelite circle was also set: Coventry Patmore (*Evening scene*), Philip Bourke Marston (*After*), and Christina Rossetti (*A song of flight*). What is generally regarded as Elgar's greatest part-song *Go, song of mine* is set to words by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, a translation of the Italian poet Cavalcanti (from Rossetti's book of translations *The early Italian poets*, published in 1861). And from William Morris (although Elgar as a Conservative would have deplored his political ideas!) came the epigraph written at the end of *The Apostles*: "To what a heaven the earth might grow, if fear beneath the earth were laid, if hope failed not, nor love

²⁶ Elgar's copy of Pauer's book can be found in British Library Add MS 49974B fos. 37-57

decayed". As Brian Trowell has pointed out,²⁷ these words from *The Earthly Paradise* are in a pagan context, but there is no reason to doubt that Elgar applied them in a spiritual sense here.

At first there seems little similarity between Elgar and Rossetti. They were both fascinated by Italy, from where Rossetti's father had fled as a political refugee in the 1820s. As already mentioned, Dante features prominently in Rossetti's work in the 1850s; and many of his later portraits of women were given Italian or Latin titles. His translations of early Italian poets furnished Elgar with words for *Go, song of mine*. Yet Rossetti never visited Italy, whereas the Elgars went there on several occasions. Both men were inspired by heroic and chivalric episodes from the past; Elgar wrote incidental music for Binyon's play *Arthur* in 1923, and Rossetti produced a number of watercolours on this theme. The legend of St George also found expression in the works of both men - Elgar's *Banner of St George* (1897), Rossetti's *Wedding of St George and the Princess Sabra* (1857), a further watercolour in 1862, and a series of six cartoons for stained glass for William Morris. Like Rossetti, Elgar idealised women, although the expression of this is less obvious perhaps in music than in the visual arts. Both of them were sensitive to criticism. Elgar always said that he never read the critics after 1900, presumably as a reaction to the poor performance of the premiere of *The Dream of Gerontius* (although as we now know, the critics generally were very impressed with the work itself, and said so). It has often been alleged that Rossetti never exhibited after 1850; this is in fact not so, but he was certainly very circumspect, especially when exhibitions of his work were given without his permission. He had originally planned to complete a triptych on the Virgin Mary with a third painting dealing with her death, but this was almost certainly abandoned after adverse criticism of *Ecce Ancilla Domini*. And of course the notorious attack by Robert Buchanan on his poetry in the article, "The Fleshly School of Poetry", in the *Contemporary Review* in 1871, wounded him deeply.

Millais, the most naturally talented of the artists in the Brotherhood, painted some of the finest and best-known Pre-Raphaelite pictures during the early 1850s, such as *Ophelia* and *Autumn Leaves*. However, he found the Pre-Raphaelite insistence on detail very laborious, and it slowed up the rate at which he could produce paintings. By the late 1850s he and Effie had a growing family, and he claimed they needed the money which a greater output would bring, describing 'truth to nature' in a letter to Hunt as "disgustingly laborious and unremunerative". He moved to a looser style; turned to more popular and sentimental subjects (such as *The Order of Release* and *The Black Brunswicker*, and later *Cherry Ripe* and *Bubbles*); and spent his last years largely doing portraits of the great and good. This brought in a vast income, and he lived in great style and was the first English artist to become a baronet.

Millais' first Pre-Raphaelite picture was begun in the autumn of 1848. Entitled *Isabella*, it was based on Keats' poem of that name, taken from a story by Boccaccio. (Hunt introduced Millais to Keats' work; his own painting from this story is usually known by the poem's subtitle - *The Pot of Basil*,

²⁷ 'Elgar's use of literature', in Monk, Raymond (ed): *Edward Elgar : Music and Literature* (Scholar Press, 1993) pp 237-8



Isabella, by Sir John Everett Millais. Reproduced by permission of the Board of Trustees of the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool)

and dates from 1868). The poem tells of the love of Isabella for Lorenzo, an employee in her brothers' business. The brothers are angry as they hope to make a profitable marriage for her. They murder Lorenzo, bury him in a forest and tell Isabella that he has been sent away urgently on business. In a dream Lorenzo's ghost tells her what really happened, and the whereabouts of the body. Isabella exhumes the body, cuts off the head, and conceals it in a garden pot covered with basil, so that she can have her loved one's remains near to her always. The brothers discover it, steal it and flee; Isabella dies brokenhearted. Millais' painting is based on the early part of the poem : the 1849 Royal Academy exhibition catalogue quoted an extract from the poem, including the lines, "They could not sit at meals but feel how well/It soothed each to be the other by". But there is foreboding everywhere. The lovers share a blood orange, and the plate on the table in front of them shows a beheading scene. On the balcony behind are two passion flowers and an ominous pot. The hawk to the left tearing at a feather is an image of the brothers, described by Keats as "the hawks of ship-mast forests". One brother holds up a glass of wine - to ascertain its quality, or to allow him to better see what the lovers are doing? The other brother, while cracking a nut, is vindictively kicking Isabella's dog.

The picture was well-received, some critics commenting on the early Italian style. The technique is excellent, and there is strong characterisation in the figures. Yet there is (deliberately?) a poorly developed sense of perspective, and a rather 'stagy', mannered feel to the picture; as someone has pointed out, thirteen figures round a table is a Last Supper.

One of Elgar's closest friends and a major source of inspiration was Alice Stuart Wortley (1862-1936), to whom he gave the name 'Windflower'. She was the third daughter of the marriage between Millais and Euphemia (Effie) Ruskin (*nee* Gray). In 1904 after the performance of *Gerontius* at the Covent Garden Elgar Festival, Alice sent Elgar an engraving of her father's portrait of Cardinal Newman of 1881. He wrote to thank her : "Your lovely present came just as we were in the midst of tearful adieux... Nothing could have given us more real pleasure than the possession of the portrait & we value it the more as it comes from you"²⁸. Whilst in Liverpool in December 1910 to conduct the Violin Concerto for Kreisler on New Year's Eve he went to the Walker Art Gallery especially to see *Isabella* (also known as *Lorenzo and Isabella*). On 6 January 1911 he wrote to Alice : "I love Lorenzo & Isabella - wonderful"²⁹. His own Alice wrote in her diary : "E. at Liverpool. Saw Art Gallery & his favourite picture of the Pot of Basil Millais"³⁰. When in Manchester in November 1911 Elgar visited the Pre-Raphaelite Exhibition which contained *Isabella*. In March 1914 the Elgars went to the Isle of Man where Edward was adjudicating at a competition festival. Before sailing, he went to see the painting again, as he wrote to the 'Windflower' from Douglas on 31 March : "At Liverpool I ran in to see the dear, dear Lorenzo & thought of you - it is hidden away for fear of Suffragettes - but I got in by persuasion & a card : bless you for having such a father & bless him

²⁸ Moore, Jerrold Northrop : *Edward Elgar - the Windflower Letters* (Clarendon Press, 1989) p 16

²⁹ Moore, *op cit*, p 71

³⁰ 31 December 1910

doubly for having such a daughter".³¹ In early 1916 Elgar undertook a short tour of northern England with the LSO, and before he left he wrote to the 'Windflower': "...I shall go to see Lorenzo at Liverpool but I fear it is hidden away in these troublous times"³²

Of course, a predilection for a work of art is a very personal thing, and it is possible, indeed likely, that his attachment to the painting was strengthened by his deep feelings for Alice Stuart Wortley. But it seems rather strange that Elgar was so taken with *Isabella* that his wife referred to it as his "favourite". Though as already stated it was well conceived and executed technically, it is in many ways a disturbing painting, with its latent menace and hints of impending disaster. One can appreciate its considerable merits, certainly; but why his "favourite"? There were certainly more uplifting paintings he could have seen while at the Walker - Rossetti's *Dante's Dream*, Ford Madox Brown's *Coat of Many Colours*, Holman Hunt's *Triumph of the Innocents*, and Millais' own *The Good Resolve* (though this last was probably a little pious for Elgar's taste); to say nothing of paintings by the great masters. Was there something in the tragedy of *Isabella* that affected him and appealed to him on a deeper, possibly unconscious, level?

Rossetti's brother William was the model for Lorenzo, but looking at him carefully, with his long thin face, deep-set and piercing eyes and strong nose, he is not too dissimilar to photos of the young Elgar. If Elgar *did* identify, even subliminally, with Lorenzo (and notice that that is how he often referred to the painting, though *Isabella* was the correct and more usual title), where does this take us? Clearly and very definitely into the realms of conjecture; nevertheless, we come up against a theme which recurs throughout Elgar, especially in his word settings - young love, true love which is never, or at best briefly, fulfilled³³. From what we now know of Elgar's relationship with Helen Weaver in the 1880s, it is clear that their parting was deeply painful to him, and something which continued to influence him. He used the closing notes of one of her polkas, *Helcia*, from 1883, to begin the song 'Sabbath Morning at Sea' from *Sea Pictures*, a work written sixteen years later, and long after he was married. Mrs Browning's poem deals with the pain of parting caused by a sea voyage - Helen Weaver emigrated to New Zealand in 1885. The cause of the breakup of Elgar's engagement to Helen is not known. It has been suggested that there were family objections due to religious differences - the Weavers were Unitarians - but we just don't know. However, it is worth mentioning that Helen Weaver, like *Isabella*, had two brothers.

³¹ Moore, op cit, p 131

³² Moore, op cit, p 162. The Liverpool concert took place on 1 March.

³³ The theme of marriage - or intended marriage - across barriers of wealth, religion, class or ancestral enmity is a common one in Pre-Raphaelite works, eg. *The Death of Romeo and Juliet*, *The Eve of St Agnes*, *The Long Engagement*, *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*, *A Huguenot*, etc.

Among Elgar's closest friends of his later years was Sir Sidney Colvin (1845-1927), the dedicatee, with his wife Frances, of the Cello Concerto. Colvin had been Slade Professor of Art at the University of Cambridge, and later Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum. He was a friend of Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Ruskin, Robert Louis Stevenson, and many others. Elgar read Colvin's book *Memories and Notes of Persons and Places 1852-1912* when it was published in 1921 and wrote to say how delightful it was to read of "men about whom & about whose works we talked over".³⁴ So far as we know Elgar never met any of the Pre-Raphaelites; Rossetti and Millais died before he became famous, and Hunt, though he lived until 1910, was very much a recluse in his final years. Elgar had much in common with them, not least the fact that they were all largely self-taught so far as general education was concerned, as William Rossetti later wrote :

All the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood belonged to the middle or lower-middle class of society. Not one (if I except my brother and myself) had had that sort of liberal education which comprises Latin and Greek, nor did any of them - not even Millais, though connected with Jersey - read or speak French. Faults of speech and of spelling occurred among them *passim*. Of any access to 'the upper classes' through family ties there was not a trace.³⁵

This would have increased their appeal so far as Elgar was concerned; as he said at Birmingham :

The commonplace mind can never be anything but commonplace, and no amount of education, no polish of a University, can eradicate the stain from the low type of mind which is the English commonplace. This applies to other arts besides music.³⁶

Though they left no disciples and founded no school,³⁷ Elgar and the Pre-Raphaelites were gifted and original artists who raised the profile of their particular art. As we celebrate the sesquicentenary of the foundation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and approach the centenaries of the two works which established Elgar's greatness, we can be grateful that the seminal role played by these four men in British culture is increasingly recognised and accepted.

³⁴ Moore : *Letters of a Lifetime*, op cit, p 358

³⁵ Quoted in *The Pre-Raphaelites and their world*, op cit, p 44

³⁶ *A Future for English music*, op cit, p 49

³⁷ Excepting Rossetti in his post-PRB phase.

Whilst researching the above article Raymond Monk kindly lent me a large account book in which the Elgars listed the prints of famous paintings which they collected. This book also contains pencil notes by Carice of reminiscences, conversations with Hubert Leicester, etc (Moore refers to the volume in *A Creative Life* as 'Blake MS'). However, it also contains a few jottings by Elgar himself, which have not found their way into the literature. Most of them refer to various themes in Ben Jonson's *The Silent Woman* - 'love', 'noise', 'trumpets', and so on - which presumably Elgar was considering including in *The Spanish Lady*.

But the most fascinating of all is a small note on page 128 :

"Bramo assai, poco spero, nulla chieggio" Tasso
see 'Sir Rich Grenville' 15 —
Mrs Browning

"Bramo assai, poco spero, nulla chieggio"
Tasso.
see 'Sir Rich Grenville' 15 —
Mrs Browning

The quote appears at the end of the manuscript full score of the *Enigma Variations*, and Elgar here repeats the misquote which he wrote then and of which he was aware ("sic 1595"). A close look at his writing might suggest that he began to write "chiede" rather than "chieggio"; the first "g" looks like an afterthought. Sir Richard Grenville was of course the naval hero of the *Revenge* episode, which took place in 1591. This makes him and Tasso contemporaries, but as the latter was heavily involved in the Counter-Reformation, it was not easy to spot an obvious link between the two. There was of course Tennyson's poem *The Revenge*, presumably known to Elgar, and set to music by Stanford (Elgar played in the Three Choirs performance of the work in 1887). I consulted various books on Elizabeth Barrett Browning, but found nothing on Grenville there, certainly no title as the quotation marks would suggest. However I did find that her 1826 collection entitled *An Essay on Mind, with other Poems* begins with the same quote from Tasso that Elgar used. Yet Mrs Browning has kept to the original - in fact she has added the conjunction "e" before the last phrase: "Bramo assai, poco spera, e nulla chiede". I found no mention of Grenville, and no other reference to Tasso anywhere else in her writings, except in an early letter to her from Browning.

The story of the *Revenge* is notable for the bravery of Grenville against overwhelming odds; this has a link with 'EDU', which Elgar described as "bold and vigorous", to show what he "intended to do". I went back to Professor Brian Trowell's article 'Elgar's Use of Literature' in *Edward Elgar: Music and Literature*, where he deals at length with the Tasso quote and suggests that it means; "his ambition was great, but he had few illusions about his chances and meant to ask no favours" (p 215). I sent my findings to the Professor, and a few weeks later received the following reply.

A MINOR ELGARIAN ENIGMA SOLVED

On 28 August this year Geoffrey Hodgkins very kindly sent me word of his discovery relating to Elgar's (mis)quotation of Tasso at the end of the autograph full score of the 'Enigma' Variations. He made a number of shrewd comments, and had followed up the clue of 'Mrs Browning' to establish that in 1826 the young Elizabeth Barrett, as she then was, had placed the quotation as an epigraph on the title-page of her second published collection of verse, *An Essay on Mind, with other Poems* (London: James Duncan). It there appears in its correct, third-person form, as :

"BRAMA ASSAI, POCO SPERA, E NULLA CHIEDE." TASSO

This translates as "He desires much, hopes for little, and asks for nothing". Elgar's version puts the famous line into the first person and omits the 'e' ('and'); he appended '(sic, 1595)', showing that he knew that this was not the correct version of the words and that he had taken them in this form from a source much later than the original poem, the *Gerusalemme Liberata* (*Jerusalem Delivered*), which was completed in 1575 and published in 1580-1. Later on, in a different ink, he added the poet's name, rather puzzlingly placed in square brackets: '[Tasso]'. On the next page he copied an inaccurate English translation: 'I essay much, I hope little, I ask nothing'. I discussed the mystery, showing how the rhythm of the Italian words fits the beginning of the 'Enigma' theme, in my essay 'Elgar's use of literature' in *Edward Elgar: Music and Literature*, ed. Raymond Monk (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993: see pp. 213ff.). And there, until Mr Hodgkins' sharp eye noticed the annotations in the 'Blake MS', the matter has rested.

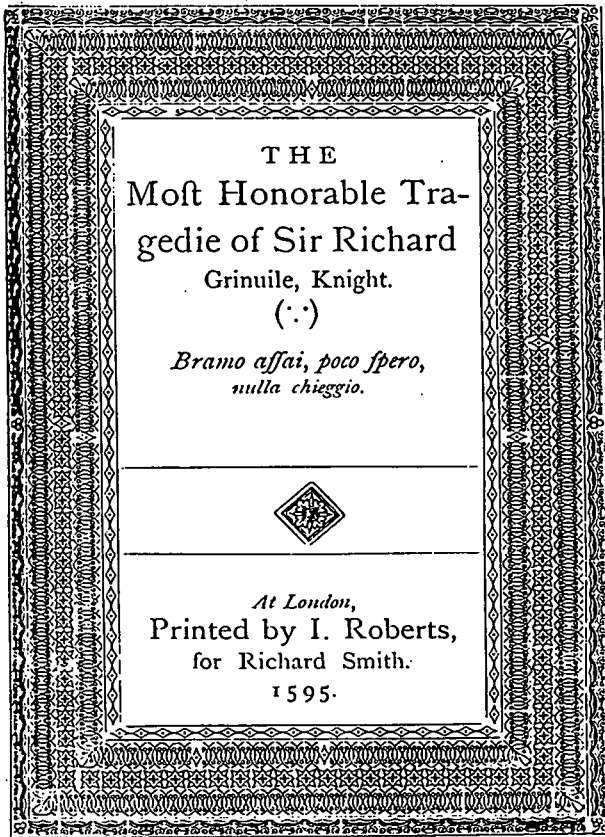
On checking out the connection with 'Mrs Browning', I was surprised to find that she too, like Elgar, had originally used the Tasso quotation in its first-person form. After her *Essay on Mind* had gone to press, her mother, Mary Moulton-Barrett, must have seen a proof or a manuscript mock-up of the title-page, for on 30 December 1825 she wrote to her daughter about the epigraph that she had chosen: 'First, let me tell you, how much I like your motto: it is selected not only with "modesty", but with much good taste.' (*The Brownings' Correspondence*, ed. P. Kelley & R. Hudson, Winfield, Kansas : Wedgestone Press, vol. I, 1984, p. 229). Elizabeth's side of this exchange has not survived, but it is clear that she must have asked her mother to check up on her quotation in its source, the *Gerusalemme Liberata*; for Mary's next letter of 8 January 1826 begins by setting out the whole stanza from which the line is taken, the sixteenth of the second canto. But she underlines the final vowels of the three verbs, duly rendered into italics by the editors as '*brama*', '*spera*' and '*chiede*', saying : 'I should really be sorry if you see it necessary to abandon your pretty motto, & hope you will agree with me, that it may serve as well in the 3d. as first person, tho' of that you will best judge - I am glad however that you used the precaution of referring to the line, much as the commodities in that well filled *store house* of yours [Elizabeth's brain] may be depended upon to be of sterling value' (*Ibid.*, p. 232). The editors make no comment on this, though three autograph manuscripts of the poem, which might cast light on the change, survive in the Texas State University Library. The collection containing it had been submitted unsuccessfully to the publisher Charles Knight by August 1825; it was eventually accepted by James Duncan at some time before 23 November 1825 (*Ibid.*, pp. 138, 221f., 224).

In later life Elizabeth came to dislike her poem, with its vastly ambitious theme and elaborate parade of knowledge, surprising though it was in a girl of nineteen. Tasso is duly if lamely admired at one point, but nothing more is made, there or elsewhere, of the quotation on the title-page. A search of bibliographies and concordances shows that she wrote nothing else about Tasso, or about Sir Richard Grenville. All that we can say is that she must originally have come across the Tasso quotation not in its authentic home, but in the form of an epigraph or citation of just this one line in first-person form, presumably in the place where Elgar was later to find it.

Our other line of enquiry is 'Sir Rich Grenville', a name which Elgar placed within quotation marks as if it were the title of a literary work. He added what appears to be a date, or rather a century, '15—': this may imply that he first came across the motto in some intervening source which did not specify the more exact date that he later appended, 1595. Sir Richard Grenville, Grenvil, Grinvile or Greenfield, is known to us all as the famous piratical sea-dog whose heroic folly in single-handedly taking on a whole Spanish fleet off the Azores in 1591 ended with his glorious but inevitable surrender and death. His equally famous ship, the *Revenge*, which in 1588 had served as Drake's flagship in the defeat of the Armada, gave its name to Grenville's best-known memorial in the title of Tennyson's ballad about him, once hugely popular with choral societies in Stanford's setting of 1886. Grenville had also figured prominently in earlier Victorian literature in Charles Kingsley's *Westward Ho* of 1855, and in the historian J A Froude's essay '*England's Forgotten Worthies*', published in the *Westminster Review* for July 1852 and repeated in his book *Short Studies on Great Subjects*. Elgar would have read the former and perhaps the latter, though it would have taken all his sense of patriotism to enable him to persist in the face of the strongly anti-Catholic tone of both. None of these three writers, however, mentions or quotes from Tasso.

Tennyson's *The Revenge* is closely based on Sir Walter Raleigh's contemporary account of his fellow-Westcountryman's last battle, published in 1591, which painted the disaster as a triumph (though it failed to convert Elizabeth I to that view). Looking for it in the Bodleian Library catalogues, my antennae were alerted by discovering that it had been republished in 1871¹ by Edward Arber in his excellent and popular series *English Reprints*, which offered to Victorian readers, at a low price, a wide variety of forgotten literary and historical material. He preserved the quaint old spellings and added learned introductions with all kinds of out-of-the-way information of the sort Elgar loved to dabble in: it was in an Arber reprint of Caxton that Elgar found the names 'Reynart' and 'Firapeel', under which he pursued his correspondence with Ivor Atkins (E Wulstan Atkins, *The Elgar-Atkins Friendship*, Newton Abbot, etc., David & Charles, 1984, p. 64). My excitement increased when I found that in reprinting Raleigh's tract Arber had included two other accounts of the battle, one of which, Gervase Markham's *The Most Honorable Tragedie of Sir Richard Grinvile, Knight*, had been published in the year appended to the quotation in the 'Enigma' score, 1595.

¹ [There was a later (identical) reprint in 1895 - much nearer the 'Enigma' date, of course. -



I called up both the Arber edition and the rare copy of Markham's original, formerly owned by the great literary historians Warton and Malone, which is also in Bodley. Sure enough, on the title-page (which Arber faithfully reproduces) stands the Tasso quotation exactly as Elgar copied it, in the first person, and without the 'e': '*Bramo assai, poco spero, nulla chieggio*'. It is unattributed, and that explains why Elgar, who adored the trappings of scholarly exactitude, was so meticulous as to place the name 'Tasso' in square brackets, traditionally used to indicate an omission in the source which the editor has made good. These details, with the date, make it certain that Elgar took his line of Tasso from Markham's title-page. It is possible, of course, that Markham himself had found it elsewhere, but he was apparently a capable linguist who might easily have altered the person of the verbs; the form 'chieggio', however, is chosen in preference to the more Tassonian alternative 'chiedo'.

The poem - for his 'Tragedie' is not a play, though he later wrote two dramas - imitates Tasso in its eight-line stanza-form and rhyme-scheme, its language, its epic 'machinery' and in its foreshadowing of baroque excess - and this was five years before Fairfax produced the first complete English translation of the Italian epic. Gervase or Jervis Markham was then only about twenty-seven years old. In his own words, 'a piece of my life was Schollar, a piece Soldiour, and all Horseman'; in later life he might have added 'Farmer'; he wrote copiously about all his interests, including husbandry, and in his earlier career was patronized by the circle around the Earls of Essex and

Southampton. Though it contains some fine passages, his poem on Sir Richard Grenville is essentially a piece of virulent anti-Catholic propaganda against 'Spain then enamour'd with the Romane trull' - on the face of it, an unlikely place for the Catholic Elgar to go looking for an epigraph. But it is equally ironic that Markham chose his motto - even while understandably omitting Tasso's name - from an epic by the leading poetic apologist of the Counter-Reformation (though perhaps we should remember that Fairfax, in his translation, was to alter the slant of the poem so as to celebrate the Protestant Elizabeth). In quoting Tasso Markham may have intended, like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, that the reader should apply the epigraph to his own situation as a young unknown poet determined to make a name against all the odds. There is however a passage in his poem which seems to echo Tasso's line and apply it to Grenville: Middleton, the captain of a companion vessel, tries to dissuade his superior from engaging, but finds that his 'hie reuolue' (noble intention) is 'Past hope, past thought, past reach of all aspire'.

Either application of the motto might have appealed to Elgar, or both. He must have known that the Variations, even though they were his Op.36, were his first really individual work of genius, taking him into fields and comparisons previously unimagined, and of uncertain success. Yet his was no vague 'desire': he had produced a work of art, the necessary evidence, which is perhaps why in rendering his motto into English he mistranslated 'bramo assai' as 'I essay much' instead of 'I desire much' - the memory of Mrs Browning's title, *An Essay on Mind*, may possibly help to explain this. He may also have thought that his own situation at the time reflected something of Grenville's heroism. Fancifully, no doubt; but he felt a certain paranoia all through his life, and often imagined that everything was against him, that he battled against overwhelming disadvantages; and in 1898-9 he was still an outsider. If the Variations were his first true challenge to the world of music, he may also have seen them as his last desperate throw, his final attempt to show his 'friends pictured within', who had been 'generally discouraging', that they were wrong (his 'Revenge' on them, though a genial one?). Fortunately he soon had a triumph on his hands, not a Grenvillean defeat, however magnificent. One wonders whether his eye had lit on the admiring words that Markham places in the mouth of the Spanish admiral, Don Alfonso, who stands amazed at Grenville's obstinacy (though the poet seems to have omitted the word 'neither' after 'forces'):

Fie, that the spyrit of a single man,
Should contradict innumerable wills,
Fie, that infinitiues of forces can,
Nor may effect what one conceit fulfills...

As an afterthought it is pleasing to note that Markham's publisher, Richard Smith, also had a device and motto apt to the present occasion. On a page of 'Faults escaped in the printing' appended to the Bodleian copy of the poem (but not in Arber), there is a roundel showing old Father Time with his scythe watching at the mouth of a cave, from which a comely naked woman is emerging into the daylight. It bears the legend 'Tempore patet occulta veritas': 'In time the hidden truth appears' - just in time, indeed, to help us celebrate the forthcoming centenary of the 'Enigma' Variations.

Brian Trowell

THOUGHTS FROM THE THREE CHOIRS FESTIVAL - WORCESTER 1929

Percy M Young

[The following is an essay written when Dr Young was a 17-year-old schoolboy at Christ's Hospital. He received 9½ out of ten, and his teacher commented : "Some of the description is a little too self conscious. The opening paragraphs are rather laborious". Yet it shows remarkable astuteness and describes the Three Choirs' atmosphere so vividly. We are grateful for Dr Young allowing us to publish it, and to Mrs Renee Young for transcribing it. Incidentally, on 19 June last Dr Young was made an Honorary Fellow of Selwyn College, Cambridge, where he became Organ Scholar the year after this essay was written. - Ed.]

Each English cathedral possesses an especial charm of its own, but there is none to my mind that combines beauty with dignity more than does Worcester. A magnificent picture presents itself as we gaze from the banks of the Severn to a steep rise covered by lovely trees, from the trees to the west front of the Cathedral which surmounts the rise, and from the west front our eyes travel along the roof till we reach the lofty tower. From the cathedral our eyes return to the river and we conjure up visions of the monks who chose such a perfect spot on which to build their monastery, and we can almost see them in hoods and cowls taking their daily walk along the river bank or fishing or tilling the fields or performing a hundred and one little acts which formed part of their daily life.

Each fresh view reveals new beauties and the cloisters, with stained glass windows which dim the strong light of the sun, with its stone flagged floors and its old grey walls, leave an impression of quiet ease not quickly forgotten. But the culminating point comes when we enter the building. A writer once remarked that Architecture was frozen music and the interior of Worcester Cathedral bears this out, the slender Early English pillars, surrounded by clusters of black marble shafts, the thin lancet windows, and the lofty vaulted roof harmonising most perfectly.

Such a building is, then, pre-eminently suited to entertain representatives of the sister art of Music and it is fitting that it should be one of the homes of the Three Choirs Festival.

For just this one week, every third year, Worcester emerges from that calm ecclesiastical atmosphere that is peculiar to all cathedral towns and puts on a garb which befits the occasion. The guild hall is deprived of its usual sombre appearance by the addition of flowers, the streets are bedecked with bunting, the boatmen renew the paint on their craft, and the lawns beside the Cathedral are especially carefully mown, so that not even Canterbury in its festival garb can outdo the streets of Worcester.

Inside the cathedral, too, may be seen a picture which is characterised by dignity and reverence. A procession, well able to compare with one of medieval times, of bishops, deans, canons, and other ecclesiastical dignitaries, proceeds each oratorio and the reverence of the assembled audience, or perhaps congregation would be better, is made manifest during the opening prayers. The clatter of footsteps on the stone floor ceases, the squeaking of unoiled hinges stops for a moment, the subdued murmurs of whispering voices is stilled, and all, save the voice of the dean, is quiet. Then, after the introductory prayers are said, there is a calm, similar to that which precedes a storm, until the orchestra break into the opening bars of *The Kingdom*.

Then was Worcester's proudest moment. Sir Edward Elgar, the city's greatest man and England's foremost musician, was in the place of honour, conducting the assembled forces. Then were we forgetful of earthly things, time gave way, for a while, to eternity, and we listened eagerly to every note that was sung.

Only in a large cathedral can such music be heard and appreciated. Only then can we realise what sincerity and what amazing beauty there is in the harmonies as they fade away and are lost in the vaults of the roof. All the glamour and commonplaceness of the concert hall is gone, there is no applause to break into our thought, all is beauty - beautiful architecture, beautiful music, and a beautiful interpretation.

As we heard work after work by great composers, the men themselves appeared before our eyes. In the awe-inspiring sounds of the *Saint John Passion* we saw Sebastian Bach at his organ, stern and strict, yet with a great sense of humour, and above all supremely religious. We passed through the ages, through Beethoven, Brahms and Verdi until we actually could see in flesh and blood Sir Edward Elgar, Dr Vaughan Williams, Sir Ivor Atkins, and a host of musicians, more than we could otherwise see in a lifetime.

And as we came out of the building, through the ancient cloisters, we are gradually brought back to this world and reality, we come to the College Green and see motorcars, we go through the quiet streets to the busier thoroughfares and our ears again become accustomed to the din of modern life, yet there is always some strain that remains in the midst of it all to remind us of the Three Choirs Festival.



The Guildhall, Worcester (photo: Gordon Lee)

OBITUARY - ANTHONY LEIGHTON THOMAS

Anthony Leighton Thomas was born 28 April 1927 in Whitchurch, Glamorgan. He married Sheila Dumayne and they had a daughter, Fiona. He went from Ellesmere College to New College, Oxford.

After a period as organist and choirmaster in Burry Port, he took up a similar position at All Saints, Llanelli, in 1971.

A member of the Royal Musical Association, the Church Music Society, the Elgar Society (Vice-chairman of the South Wales Branch from its foundation in 1983 and Chairman from 1986), and an enthusiastic contributor to many musical journals, he will be well remembered for his painstaking and conscientious editing of *The Music Review*, which he took over in 1974.

Anthony was a most effective secretary of the Guild for the Promotion of Welsh Music at a particularly important time from 1964 to '68, after which he became editor for four years of its magazine, *Welsh Music*. Thus he was at the centre of the Guild's activities which included the prestigious Competition for Violinists in 1966, for which Menuhin was engaged as chief adjudicator. Later he was made a vice-president.

I shall remember A.F.L.T (as we knew him) for his many kindnesses and warm hospitality, his enjoyment of music which involved writing reviews of living composers' latest works; and his love of musical puzzles, with which he would often tease his friends. It was always a joy to meet and talk, there being something 'old world', almost Edwardian, about him, with his genial smile, bowler hat and pipe; a loveable unhurried character, whose like we shall not see again in today's bustle. He died peacefully on 27 September, 1998, aged 71.

Ian Parrott

MORE ON ELGAR/PAYNE 3

Critical acclaim for the Elgar/Payne no 3 has continued ever since the première on 15 February. David Cairns, reviewing the recording in *The Sunday Times* on the day of the concert, began by quoting Elgar's remarks to his doctor that "... somebody will complete it... in 50 or 500 years". Cairns continued: "Prophetic words that, if it were needed, could serve as moral justification for overriding his apparently final wishes. But none is needed. This is the exception to the rule. All scruples and reservations, moral and practical, are swept aside by the magnificent, and magnificently Elgarian, score that Payne has produced. His patient, brilliant reconstruction has saved a great work from oblivion... Maybe the charming, whimsical intermezzo... is a bit of a letdown after the brazen

grandeur of the opening movement. But the more I have listened, the more authentic the work as a whole has seemed. The first movement and the Adagio have the sweep and searching power of his finest music. I had to keep reminding myself that this is Elgar/Payne, not pure Elgar, so masterly is Payne's combination of inspired guesswork, intuition and creative empathy. He has understood". The Adagio came in for special mention : "[It] is Elgar on the heights of inspiration and in the depths of tragic desolation, Parsifal-like music that reaches out into harmonic territory unexplored by him before, and that Payne's contributions superbly sustain". Cairns concluded : "The Elgar Trustees... have been rewarded with a treasure they can hardly have bargained for. [Payne] has placed them, and all those who love Elgar, immeasurably in his debt".

Andrew Porter, writing in *The Times Literary Supplement*, asserts that "'Elgar's Third Symphony' does not, cannot exist. But Payne, as he assembled and composed felt 'as if I was being impelled by forces outside myself', giving shape to, bringing to birth, a work 'different in its sheer breadth of emotion from any of Elgar's other symphonic works'... It is impossible to imagine an 'elaboration' of [the sketches] more ardently Elgarian than Payne's. Any page of his score looks and sounds thoroughly 'convincing'. When doubts creep in, they concern transitions, structure, the placing of the climaxes. The symphony, Elgar said, was to be shorter than its predecessors, but Payne's symphony is longer... And there are a few passages, especially in the finale, for which - well, if 'pastiche' is too strong a word, call it too eager a capitulation to Elgar's fondness for sequences, the same short theme over and over and over again. Yet oddly enough, the passages that seem most noodling often prove to have precedent in the sketches themselves, to be 'real Elgar'". On this point, Porter notes that "condensation and cutting sometimes took place when Elgar moved from sketch to full score", and quotes Robert Anderson, who in *Elgar in Manuscript*, wrote that the sketches for the First Symphony "represent sometimes only a vague *aide-memoire* of what was already crystal clear in Elgar's mind".

One of the objections to the "realisation" has been that the lack of material in the sketches, particularly in the outer movements, proves that Elgar was far from completing the work. Cairns has a helpful comment here when he writes : "Elgar's habit in the late stages of creating an important work was - as it seemed to those observing him - suddenly to gather up the scattered fragments, plus the passages he had in his head but had not noted down, and in a burst of concentrated energy compose straight on to full score. He did this with the Second Symphony, and he must have been very near it with the Third, when cancer was diagnosed and he went rapidly downhill".

This would seem to answer a point raised by Robert Matthew-Walker writing in *Musical Opinion*. "...If the sketches that were published by Reed... and those that have come to light since were all that Elgar left of the work, we may wonder how on earth he gave this performance at the keyboard : in short, what did he play from? We shall never know, but this fact, and others, has always led some Elgarians to question whether there were further sketches which, for whatever reason, have not survived, and whether, in fact, the work was considerably more advanced than has come down to us." However, Matthew-Walker finds the work convincing : "...So completely has [Payne] sublimated his own creative

personality in entering that of Elgar's that it is impossible for anyone, without a detailed knowledge of those sketches, to state categorically where Elgar stopped and where Payne began. The result is a Symphony that may not be by Elgar but *is* Elgar's Third Symphony, of that we can be sure. The heart of the work, the realisation of those sketches and what Elgar was so confidently trying to express, is contained within this score... It is quite clearly a post-Cello Concerto work and perhaps the gossamer Scherzo shows that most of all. It is valedictory, as is the Cello Concerto and also the Second Symphony but without the underlying sense of regret that seems to inform the heart of both these scores. Elgar's Third would seem to have come to terms with mortality and the transience of life, as one might always hope in the art of old men. It ends with an acceptance of things, and this we know is Payne's music alone at the end : but such is the skill in which he has entered Elgar's creative consciousness that we accept what we hear as being that which Elgar himself would have written... One may argue over this or that point in his realisation, or suggest a different orchestration of such and such a passage, but there can be no disagreement as to the artistic validity of his achievement."

'TMM' writing in the Autumn edition of the *FRMS Bulletin* opined that "... this was no tinkering but an inspired tribute by one of today's leading British composers to the greatness of another. It matters not whether listeners decide that the Symphony no 3 is by Elgar/Payne or Payne/Elgar for the work is a perfect musical example of two great minds thinking alike". London Branch member Nalen Anthoni was also impressed. Writing the review in the June issue of *Hi-Fi News* he said that "...few would question the fine taste with which this symphony has been completed". He also has high praise for Davis, "an Elgarian of excellence", who is "uncommonly responsive to the yielding introspection that is... germane to the work". But he ends with a question : "Is the work now longer than Elgar expected it to be? During his [pre-concert] talk, Payne drew a distinction between 'clock time' (the duration as originally envisaged by any composer) and 'felt time', presumably the period instinctively taken to express a series of thoughts. The two don't always coincide".

Another Society member, Ian Lace, reviewed the recording in the May/June edition of the American publication *Fanfare*. He wrote : "... Payne's work is excellent. He has captured the essence and spirit of Elgar extremely well : you recognise all the Elgarian harmonies, density of textures, dynamics, rhythmic patterns, turns of phrase, and orchestrations. Payne has imposed his own creations intuitively, sensitively, unobtrusively and, above all, most appositely". Lace found the finest music in the Adagio : "... The material of the second subject [is] introspective and full of regret and nostalgia, [and] rises to an impassioned and anguished climax that is almost harrowing... The quieter second subject, like its similar counterpart in the opening movement, is beautifully developed, at one point, into a quasi pastoral evocation that reminds one of the sort of music associated with 'something heard down by the river'. But the prevailing atmosphere is chilly, deeply unsettled, and disturbing".

Lace concludes : "Many will argue that this is an impressive and significant composition in its own right. There is no denying that it has merit. But how close is it to how Elgar

would have really wanted it? Clearly, we shall never know... Although there is much to admire in Payne's realisation, that divine spark, which touches the heart and spirit in Elgar's earlier masterworks, is absent for me".

The following issue of the journal, July/August, contained a "Fanfare Forum", in response to "the immense interest shown in the recording by many of *Fanfare's* other critics", and four of them contributed lengthy notices.

First, Bernard Jacobson began by considering the whole question of "the dying wishes of a creative artist" in relation to the Aeneid, Dante's *Commedia*, Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and Berlioz's *Les Troyens*. Considering Elgar as "greater in my personal view than Mahler, and comparable to Strauss", he goes on to ask two questions: "How strong and characteristic was the aging Elgar's inspiration?... And how well has Payne realised the sketches for performance?"

"As to the first of those questions, I defy anyone, after once experiencing the lyrical subordinate theme of the first movement, with its yearning upward seventh leaps cunningly varied in their rhythmic position, or the profoundly tragic accents of the slow movement, or the finale's subordinate theme, rising in noble aspiration and then turning inward on itself with an utterly Elgarian sense of the mortality lying in wait for all human endeavour, to come to any other conclusion than that this is the real thing.

"And for Anthony Payne no praise can be too high... [He] has done his work with a nice and very commendable balance between humility in the face of the conundrums Elgar left behind, and proper professional confidence in his own capacity to solve them. His formal decisions have been made on the basis of an evidently encyclopaedic knowledge of Elgar's output, but he has not allowed himself to be rendered impotent by seeking a precedent for every procedure: this, after all, is not an existing Elgar work, but a new one, and it is right that it should sound like that. If you conclude, then, that Elgar's Third is not much like either of its predecessors, the feeling is a healthy one, since the First and Second are totally unlike each other anyway."

Jacobson noticed "a more frequent use of muted trumpets than I could recall from Elgar's other orchestral works. I called Payne... and asked whether the usage here was suggested by Elgar's instrumental indications. No, he explained, the decision stemmed from his own apprehension of the more saturnine nature of this Adagio solenne - at times almost spectral in its contemplation of the void - in comparison with other Elgar slow movements.

"In the outcome, Payne's choice, like every other decision he has made, carries complete conviction... [The recording] is a triumph, revealing a work that is not merely a genuine symphony but a great symphony, worthy of Elgar. It will be a priceless accession to the heritage he left us".

Lawrence A Johnson describes himself as "an unabashed and enthusiastic Elgarian... one who believes Elgar's two marvellous symphonies remain greatly underrated and scandalously underplayed these days"; and he therefore "looked forward with great interest" to hearing Payne's "elaboration".

"The first movement opens with a somewhat characteristic striding Allegro, though considerably more dogged and heavy-footed than music heard in either of the two "real" Elgar symphonies. The lyrical second theme is undeniably Elgarian, lilting in its lyrical sweetness. But what follows is nothing less than an abomination. Try as he might - and there is some artful musicological stitch work here - the fitful quality of Payne's completion cannot conceal the makeshift nature and fragmentary essence of Elgar's unrealised sketches. Where is the nervous energy and surging forward momentum that accompanies the development in all of Elgar's opening movements? The repetitious alternation of this material and development - if one can call it that - is wholly predictable and unimaginative, the first violin writing at times verging on banal. Even that attractive lyrical theme begins to sound insipid at its fourth or fifth appearance, and at over 16 minutes, this movement seemed interminable. The final repeated chords are vulgar in the extreme".

In the second movement, "... despite the promising material, nothing much interesting happens here as the music proceeds, ambling along on its aimless way.

"The Adagio again sounds like a musical template with the outlines of a vaguely Elgar-like slow movement extant and the rest of the picture unsuccessfully filled in - pallid, long-breathed paragraphs in an unsuccessful search for a recognisable melody and convincing development. This is a muddle, meandering and shapeless, with a lumbering, would-be Elgarian climax superimposed on music that doesn't rise convincingly to deserve it.

"Of the bombastic finale, the less said the better. Again it's like trying to peer through an aural haze - on occasion one can briefly glimpse a familiar detail of the dignified mustachioed figure, but just as the outline begins to firm up and the face starts to come into focus, there is a modulation, a weak bit of scoring, a non-Elgarian passage that makes the figure disappear once again into the mist. The dull orchestral writing is one of the most telling bits of non-authenticity, as Elgar was one of the most underrated orchestrators of all time, and of his felicitous instrumental handling there is no evidence.

"No doubt Payne did what he could with love and care, but due to the fragmentary nature of these sketches... this was a largely conjectural exercise from the get-go, and bad conjecture at that".

Johnson concludes : "For me.. the key question I have is, what was the bad drug that was slipped into the Earl Grey of the British critics who greeted this unconvincing mishmash with such enthusiastic rapture?"

Peter Rabinowitz also begins by dealing with the problem of uncompleted works by other composers. He continues : "One can make a case that it was simply Elgar's death that kept him from finishing it. But there's also evidence... that being 'unfinished' was essential, not accidental, to the music. In other words, one can argue that, like Elgar's oratorio *The Last Judgment*... and his Piano Concerto, the Third Symphony was subject to forces besides

failing health that kept the composer from finishing it". He quotes Gaisberg, who said, "I think he misses the inspiration and driving force of Lady Elgar".

Rabinowitz goes on : "From this perspective, then, Payne's work is not a hypothesis about the symphony that Elgar would have written if he had lived longer, but rather a suggestion about the symphony that he might have written had he been, psychologically, a different person in 1932-33 : had he not been artistically silenced by the ravages of the First World War, the rise of Nazism, and - most of all - the death of his wife. To put it in different terms : The very qualities that make Payne's work so poignant... are also what make it problematic. For what's most striking about this piece is that, despite its emotional darkness, it displays a compositional self-confidence that the Elgar of the Third Symphony (as opposed to the Elgar of the Second) appears not to have had... In a sense, then, this is more of an homage or an idealisation than a reconstruction or a completion. Still, in the end... there is little doubt that it is a glorious collection of sounds, that producing it was an act of love on Payne's part, and that listening to it will grip all those who share Payne's admiration for Elgar". He concludes : "While I have not been able, intellectually, to sort out the complex ethical issues involved (in part because I'm not sure what, if any, ethical obligations we have toward people who are dead), as I listen, the absolute devotion of Payne's efforts and the incomparable beauty of the results seem to make those ethical issues seem beside the point. To my ears, the first movement (with the typically Elgarian bittersweet striving of its second subject) and the paradoxically gorgeous pain of the Adagio strike more deeply than the balletic Allegretto (*Enigma's* 'Dorabella' may come to mind) and the blustery finale (although in part because of the fuller orchestration, the music borrowed from *King Arthur* [sic] makes a stronger impact here than it does in its original form as incidental music). But once having heard it, I find that I can't forget it, especially given the superlative performance - the most committed playing I've ever heard from Andrew Davis".

The final contributor, Walter Simmons, also begins by dealing with the pros and cons of completion. He then moves on to "the quality or potential quality of the sketches themselves... Do they represent", he asks, "as some have suggested, the half-hearted groping of an exhausted creative talent, or are they, as Anthony Payne asserts, truly inspired germinal ideas whose fulfilment required more strength than Elgar could bring to bear at the time?"

"What makes the case of the 'Elgar/Payne Symphony no 3' especially illuminating is that Elgar's actual sketches *have* been published and recorded, and that even Payne's thoughts and processes have also been made available to the public... What we are hearing in the finished product is quite substantially Elgar's own music. On the other hand, Anthony Payne has done an extraordinarily skilful and sensitive job in capturing Elgar's language and style, maintaining a consistently plausible tone throughout. In fact, at first hearing the listener may note musical ideas that seem somewhat outside the composer's customary usage : the parallel fifths that figure prominently in the work's opening theme, for example, and a sequence of parallel seventh chords in the finale. Yet both ideas are found in Elgar's own sketches.

"So what is the resulting piece of music like and how satisfying is it as a listening experience? First, I must say that the process of becoming acquainted with the sketches and with Payne's elaboration of them... has been intensely pleasurable and compelling, seducing me into spending far more time with it than I had originally intended, and leaving me enormously fond of much of it... It is the third and fourth movements.. that I have really grown to love. The slow movement is a beautiful and deeply moving elegy, with some surprisingly chromatic harmonic twists that move it almost in the direction of, say, *Verklärte Nacht*. Its tone of noble solemnity also calls Bruckner to mind, eventually reaching Mahlerian depths of despair, without ever relinquishing its English dignity and propriety. Although given short shrift by some commentators, the Finale is for me the most interesting movement of the symphony". He applauds Payne's decision ("brilliantly inspired... bold and startling") to end the symphony with the *Wagon Passes* idea, "bringing the work to a mysterious end, like a journey of Elgar's symphonic ego into the unknown.

"I am sure that reactions to this symphonic stepchild will differ widely. But I am equally sure that no Elgarian will fail to be fascinated by it".

BOOK REVIEWS

Conducting Elgar, by Norman Del Mar (completed and edited by Jonathan Del Mar).

O.U.P., 1998. £40, hardback; £17.99 paperback.

When Norman Del Mar died in 1994, Edward Greenfield wrote : "If [he]... never became a great international conductor, few who knew him or his work would deny that he was cruelly robbed of that status. Here was one of the most searching of British musicians, not just as a conductor, but as a scholar".

In his last years Del Mar published a series of works analysing the problems of conducting the music of the great composers. When he died he was still working on the Elgar volume, the last part of which - a study of conducting *The Dream of Gerontius* - has been completed by his son, Jonathan. In this book the author brings his vast experience to bear on the problems of all the major orchestral works of the composer, as well as *Sea Pictures*, *The Music Makers* and *The Dream*...

Del Mar clearly knew and loved his Elgar. An instinctive understanding of Elgar's complex scores is obvious from the beginning. Each work has a short introduction describing the place of the piece in the Elgar canon, and then we go into a detailed account of the music from the point of view of the conductor and the player. Like Elgar Del Mar had been an orchestral musician - he was a distinguished horn player - so he knew the problems from both ends of the baton!

As one reads through this book fascination grows, and non-musicians will realise how much planning goes into a performance. But this is no technical manual, though it should

be used as such with advantage. Even those who do not know their crotchets from their quavers will gain a remarkable insight into conducting Elgar. The analysis of *Gerontius* alone would make the book worthwhile. His understanding is shown in this passage about the work : "The work is in two parts... the first takes rather less than 40 minutes while Part Two lasts the full hour, and despite Elgar's instructions 'a short pause should be made between the Parts' it has unfortunately become usual to have an interval. This can only destroy the intensely rapt atmosphere of timelessness, and should be firmly resisted". Would that more concert promoters would heed that good advice.

There are references throughout to Elgar's own performances, and Del Mar obviously spent much time listening to recordings from his own extensive record library, as well as studying his equally extensive collection of scores. This is a remarkable work, both for the scholar and for the Elgar enthusiast. Amateur, and budding professional, musicians should make it one of their major text-books. If the hardback is beyond your means, then buy the paperback now. It is an investment you will not regret.

Ronald Taylor

Elgar's Third Symphony : the Story of the Reconstruction, by Anthony Payne.

Faber and Faber Ltd, paperback. 120 pp. £9.99

Payne is right. The classic example of posthumous collaboration is Mozart's Requiem, commissioned by Count Walsegg in February 1791. Ten months later Mozart was dead and only the Introitus had been fully scored; nine movements had been sketched but there was no music at all for the last four. Süssmayer's completion was the first, and has become widely accepted. Few today bat an eyelid when it is regularly performed and recorded.

The task facing Payne was similar and this book (divided into two parts, *A History and The Music*) is a conspectus of the vicissitudes and pleasures that awaited him when "the significance of some pages which I had been dismissing for years suddenly revealed itself to me, leading me to believe that perhaps I could do what I had always thought impossible: make a performing version of the whole work". The story of his progress is now well-known in broad outline. The details are fascinating and one, in particular, is worth stating here because it may explain a dichotomy; why Elgar first barred anyone from toying with the music and later said, 'If I can't complete the Third symphony, somebody will complete it - or write a better one - in 50 or 500 years'. Payne discloses that Eric Fenby, Delius's amanuensis, had heard of Elgar's illness and had offered his services in a similar capacity. Elgar had rejected the offer, just days before he collapsed and haltingly told Billy Reed, 'Don't let anyone tinker with it'. Fenby came to believe that his well-meaning gesture had caused the embargo. Seemingly, Elgar had feared Fenby's involvement in his work.

How Elgar would have viewed Payne's involvement is, of course, a matter for conjecture. Needless conjecture too because those fateful words, resonating across a period of over 60 years, may reasonably be laid to rest. Not by any stretch of the imagination has Payne

tinkered with Elgar. On the contrary, his is a deeply considered creative effort, his working methods (lucidly described, with examples, within the constraints of this small volume) a testimony to thoroughness and dedication spanning a period of over two decades. Constanza Mozart didn't have that kind of time. Though Süßmayer and Freystadler were allowed to complete the Kyrie, her first choice for the rest was Eybler. But he finished the Confutatis and lost his nerve. Süßmayer was recalled and he reworked everything himself. The completed piece delivered to Walsegg (who for years had been passing off the music of other composers as his own) would no doubt have eased Constanza's dire financial position.

Elgar had financial worries too but they were probably mild in comparison and, unlike Mozart, he hadn't been successfully sued by an aristocrat for non-payment of a debt. There is also the delicate matter of the Requiem itself. It bears numerous similarities to one composed by Michael Haydn twenty years previously. That raises many questions, none of which apply to Elgar. His ideas for his Third symphony belonged to him alone. Commendably too he had made arrangements to return the money paid him should he be unable to complete the work - which makes you wonder why Richard Morrison of *The Times* chose to attack Elgar for accepting 'a handsome advance for a new symphony' and then 'kidding the BBC, his friends and perhaps even himself that it was practically complete'. It is but an example of the sort of oafish criticism that both Payne and the Elgar family attracted, illogical too when you realise that since Süßmayer, six other editions of the Requiem have appeared without adverse comment. Perhaps in the next 200 years there will be more attempts to assemble Elgar's sketches. Right now, Payne's realisation forms a weighty contribution to the symphonic canon.

Nalen Anthoni

Vaughan Williams in Perspective, edited by Lewis Foreman.

Albion Press, for the Vaughan Williams Society, 1998. 228 pp. £25

The fledgling Vaughan Williams Society, only a few years old, has spread its wings to great effect in setting up a publishing company, Albion Music Ltd, and this book is the result. It comprises ten essays, which began life as presentations at the Vaughan Williams Symposium at Reigate in 1996, and which cover a variety of subjects including the composer's use of modality (by Anthony Payne); his film music (all too brief, this one); and his earliest efforts at folk-song collecting (as an Essex man I enjoyed seeing the county on the cultural map for a change!). Two works by VW are dealt with in detail: first, *A London Symphony*, a masterly account by Stephen Lloyd of the different versions, and the early performances and recordings; and Duncan Hinnell's massive (46 pages) overview of the Piano Concerto, its place in the canon, and changing attitudes to the work over the years which reflect the wider musical scene and the cultural world in general. This essay may well be hard going for the amateur music-lover in places, with its rather mannered use of academe-speak - "pitch-class set theory and post-Schenkerian concepts of prolongation" sent me scurrying to my New Grove, and I'm not sure I was all that wiser afterwards - but overall a stimulating piece which raises some important issues. Other

highlights include Stephen Banfield's account of the friendship between VW and Finzi; Jennifer Doctor on his impact as a teacher on three women composers - Elizabeth Maconchy, Grace Williams, and Ina Boyle; and the short score of 'The Steersman', a movement written for the *Sea Symphony* but which was later dropped and has never been published before, and reproduced here by kind permission of Ursula Vaughan Williams.

There are rather too many annoying errata, but this should not deter anyone from buying the book. A feast of good things, to be referred to again and again.

The Editor

RECORD REVIEWS

Elgar's Interpreters on Record, Volume 2 : Vocal, Choral and Orchestral Music.

Various artists. Dutton Laboratories for the Elgar Society CDAX 8020

In July 1997 I reviewed Volume 1 of these compilations and expressed the hope that Volume 2 would follow in due time. Well, here it is, and there are some treasures among the contents. As in the first CD a number are freshly transferred from items which appeared in the Society's 1980 LP but thanks to the skills of Dutton Laboratories they are given a new life and sound. Indeed, the 1909 recording of part of the *In the South* overture sounds quite remarkable for the period. Recorded in Milan, and conducted by Carlo Sabajno, what could be more logical than that an Italian orchestra should play Elgar's Italian overture? But I have jumped the opening piece. This is Andrew Black, the creator of Caractacus, singing the Sword Song from that work, recorded in 1906. The technique may sound rather foreign to our ears today, but remember this is how Elgar would have heard it. One of the first Elgar choral works to have been recorded was in 1912 when members of the Westminster Cathedral Choir, under Sir Richard Terry, recorded the *O Salutaris Hostia* (1880). I have the original 78 of this, and was amazed at the quality of sound which Mike Dutton has produced from the original. The voices stand out with remarkable clarity, compared to the sound which can be obtained when playing the old recording.

Two songs by that fine tenor, John Coates, 'Chanter John' as Elgar dubbed him, are included - the first, an HMV recording of 1915, of *In the Dawn*; the second a Vocalion recording of ten years later of *Speak Music*. The first was not, in my opinion, representative of the best of HMV recording - the singer seems somehow remote from the recording horn - but the Vocalion record is really excellent, and gives us a true picture of Coates' voice. Another singer, much involved with the role of Gerontius, was Gervase Elwes. Unfortunately he made no recordings of Elgar's music, but he did record several pieces by Vaughan Williams, and here we have a first-class transfer of his 1916 performance of *The Roadside Fire*. Dame Clara Butt cannot be left out of any survey of Elgar's interpreters, and here she is in fine voice in *Where Corals Lie*, recorded by Columbia in 1920, with an orchestra conducted by Sir Hamilton Harty. The New Zealand soprano Rosina Buckman, who had a short, but distinguished, operatic career, is heard

here in one of Elgar's best songs, *Pleading*. Buckman had a 'natural' voice and is the ideal interpreter for this song, again in excellent sound. George Baker was another 'natural', and in his long career made many recordings. His 1924 performance of *The Pipes of Pan* shows him in full vigour, and it has the benefit of the orchestral accompaniment, conducted on this occasion by HMV's house conductor G W Byng. I always feel that a piano-accompanied version of this song sounds weak in comparison.

Until Sir Adrian Boult revived the *Empire March* of 1924, in the LP era, the only recording ever made of this work was by Percy Pitt conducting the BBC Wireless Symphony Orchestra (the forerunner of the BBC Symphony Orchestra). This was made in the year of the first performance and is therefore something of an historic document. For some reason it was not released until 1925, and was almost immediately followed by the advent of electric recording. Many records therefore had a short life in the catalogue, and the original Columbia record is now something of a rarity.

Now we come to what I believe is the treasure I wrote of earlier : a performance of the *Sea Pictures*, sung by Muriel Brunskill, with an anonymous house orchestra of the Columbia studio, with no conductor mentioned. As Andrew Neill remarks in his preface to the record notes, we believe that this was Clarence Raybould. *The Gramophone* magazine, when reviewing this recording in 1927, took the company to task for not revealing the conductor's name, for as they pointed out, orchestra and soloist play almost equal parts in this song cycle. They did, however, miss an important point. This was that it had not previously been recorded by the electrical process (Elgar's own 1922-23 version with Leila Megane was of course acoustic). It would be encouraging to say that the records sold well, but this was not the case and regrettably the set disappeared within a year or two. Brunskill is in fine voice, and her rich contralto is particularly strong in the lower register. The orchestra plays well, and this is a performance to return to again and again. Elgar songs constitute the next three items, the first of which appeared on the Society LP in 1980. This is the Baraldi Trio (a soprano and two mezzos), with two violins and piano accompaniment. They sing *The Snow and Fly*, *Singing Bird*, the three voices sounding surprisingly effective, especially in the first song. That excellent baritone Keith Falkner performs two of the *Fringes of the Fleet* songs, 'Fate's Discourtesy' and 'The Sweepers'. It makes one wish he had recorded the entire group of songs. Perhaps he did, and they languish in some hidden vault? Finally in this group, John McCormack sings *Is she not passing fair?*, sung as only McCormack could. One can give no higher praise - it was a unique voice.

Two items remain; one of Elgar's early salon pieces, *Serenade Mauresque*, played by HMV's New Light Symphony Orchestra, conducted by J Ainslie Murray. An attractive performance, but does anyone know anything of Murray? I seem to have seen his name in very old issues of the *Radio Times*, and he made several records. But who was he, apart from the obvious Scottish name, and where did he usually conduct? Answers would be welcome. Finally, a Second World War recording, issued as a morale booster no doubt, of the opera singer Dennis Noble, supported by a chorus and the Band of the Coldstream Guards. The piece was *Song of Liberty*, a hybrid from the fourth *Pomp & Circumstance*

March, with "new words" (it had earlier been set by Alice Elgar as *The King's Way*) by A P Herbert. It must be said that this was not the best inspiration of that prolific writer, but in 1940, when this record appeared, anything that raised the spirits was welcomed. So, another historic document, even if the words do not fit too easily with Elgar's splendid march.

To sum up, another excellent selection of Elgar Interpreters, finely transferred by Dutton Laboratories, and an informative booklet to accompany the CD. Now, members should go out and buy it. You will not be disappointed, for the Elgar archive is a rich one and there are gems still to be found.

Ronald Taylor

Enigma Variations, Op 36. With : Barber - Symphony no 1.

Virginia Symphony Orchestra conducted by JoAnn Falletta

Symphony no 1 in A \flat , Op 55. Cockaigne Overture, Op 40.

*Thüringen Philharmonie Suhl conducted by Stephen Somary
Claves CD 50-9813*

Symphony no 1 in A \flat , Op 55. With : Musgrave - Horn Concerto.

*National Youth Orchestra of Scotland conducted by Bramwell Tovey
NYOS 004*

Over the years recordings of Elgar by non-English forces have been few and far between. We were told his music did not "travel well", indeed we were often rather snooty and possessive about him. At a meeting soon after I joined the Society nearly thirty years ago, I was in conversation with an Elgarian elder statesmen (now no longer with us), and I happened to mention that I had just bought the LP of the String Quartet by the Claremont Quartet on the Nonesuch label. His reaction was as if he had just encountered a bad smell. "How could four Americans possibly know anything about playing Elgar?" he asked incredulously. I remember being puzzled by such an attitude, given that music is an international language. Fortunately in the years since then our experience of Elgar has been enhanced and challenged possibly by the likes of Solti, Barenboim, Slatkin, Zinman, Otaka, as well as many singers and instrumentalists of world renown. Now here are three Elgar recordings by non-English forces. It would be nice to think that this signifies increasing interest in Elgar in the wider world.

The disc by the Virginia Symphony is taken from their live debut performance at Carnegie Hall, New York on 15 April 1997; yet it sounds like a studio recording. The balance and ambience are near perfect, and the audience outstandingly silent. The performances are remarkably free from the 'glitches' which often accompany live recordings, and clearly the Virginia Symphony is an ensemble to be reckoned with. The string tone is rich and clear, the brass powerful when need be, in fact the overall effect is immensely satisfying, especially as they play with such passion and commitment. Possibly a little too much in 'R.B.T' and 'Dorabella', where the latter in particular is a bit too business-like! Yet elsewhere there is

plenty of subtlety and finely-drawn characterisation in this account which has obviously been carefully prepared; 'W.N' is beautifully warm, with excellent woodwind playing. Clearly JoAnn Falletta is an inspirational and gifted musician, and if this disc is anything to go by, here is an American conductor whose Elgar can bear comparison with the best of British. The striking and likeable First Symphony of Samuel Barber completes the disc, which has no catalogue number and is not available in this country, so far as I am aware. However, the booklet contains details of the orchestra, who can be contacted at PO Box 26, Norfolk, VA 23501, USA (phone 757 623-8590; fax 757 623-7068).

It has been heartening to see the increase of interest in Elgar (and British music generally) in Germany, and we now have the first recording of an Elgar symphony by a German orchestra, albeit conducted by an American, Stephen Somary. When I discovered that he had served as assistant to Bernstein I was not surprised to find that the length of the symphony placed it in the same league as Sinopoli and Thomson; at 56½ minutes it is almost ten minutes longer than Elgar's own recording. It appears that from playing Elgar in this rather drawn-out way, that increasingly conductors are seeing a link between Elgar and his great Austrian contemporary, Mahler. Yet to me there is an essential difference in that with Mahler, even in his great emotional outpourings and ländler-like scherzos, there is a sense of inevitability, and the music is unhurried, even if the tempo is fast. Although there is often anguish and turmoil in the music of both men, Mahler (it seems to me, anyway) seems resigned to his fate. But to adopt a similar approach to an Elgar symphony (as Somary does) is to remove the nervous tension, the "pushing forward" nature of the music, which is so essential to a successful performance. It *must* be there, in my opinion, even where the basic pulse is slow; Barbirolli is able to do it (though I know that some disagree). Somary takes almost 4 minutes over the opening statement (almost a minute longer than Elgar), and the succeeding Allegro (minim = 104) is more of a *moderato* (minim = 92), sounding rather laboured and turgid. Little if anything is made of the *stringendo* and *poco animato* after fig 26, and the Coda is painfully slow, especially after fig 43. The central movements are the most successful : the Scherzo is fine, and the Adagio, though slow, is very expressively done, especially the ending. However the Finale is again very pedestrian; the *cantabile* version of the 'march' theme at fig 130 is drained of all its passion. I would love to have given this disc a warm welcome, but whilst containing some nice touches, it is ultimately disappointing. *Cockaigne* is perhaps predictably slow (more than 16½ minutes), but is redeemed by a glorious *maestoso* Coda, with organ in full flow.

It was only relatively recently (March 1996) that I reviewed a recording of this symphony by the Chetham's (School) Symphony Orchestra (Olympia OCD 278). Now the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland have bravely tackled it. The Manchester band's recording was taken from a live performance at London's Barbican Hall, whereas the Scottish disc was made by Andrew Keener in Glasgow's City Hall. As with the German orchestra, the first movement is not a success, struggling with slow(ish) tempi, but the reading of the work generally is more convincing, certainly more rhythmic. The young string players are cruelly exposed at times, but not often, and they attack the daunting Scherzo with real Scottish bravery. The work improves as it proceeds and the ending is blazingly triumphant. Thea Musgrave's Horn Concerto is quite a contrast.

The Editor

Cello Concerto, Op 85. Violin Concerto, Op 61.

Pablo Casals (cello), BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Adrian Boult
Albert Sammons (violin), New Queen's Hall Orchestra conducted by Sir Henry Wood
Avid Master Series AMSC 587

These performances should be well enough known by now, having been resurrected more than once from their original '78' form as both vinyl and CD releases. If "vintage" readings of the two concertos were to be paired for reissue a more appropriate partner for the Sammons performance of the Violin Concerto might perhaps have been Squire with Harty - its nearer contemporary in origin of recording - and they were in fact at one time available so coupled on a Novello CD (NVLCD 901). This was however dismissed in a JOURNAL review of January 1990 as a "dim, disappointing transfer" and is, in any case, no longer available.

The Casals performance of the Cello Concerto, conducted by Sir Adrian Boult, always seems to have divided critical opinion. When Boult performed the work with Casals in the thirties some critics claimed it was "not English enough". Now, in the euphoria of the end of the war (presumably) it seemed to receive widespread - though still not universal - acclaim. Such criticism as persisted principally concerned over-indulgence by the soloist. The engineers apparently complained that the microphone was picking up grunts from Casals as he played, to which the response was, "Well, you can charge double for the records!", and the grunts are still there for all to hear! For all its vagaries, however, this is a performance I would not wish to be without - not least for its commemoration of Sir Adrian Boult conducting his own BBC Symphony Orchestra in EMI's Abbey Road studio shortly after return from their wartime exile in Bedford.

If Casals might have been considered over-indulgent, no such claim can be levelled at Albert Sammons' performance of the Violin Concerto which is most self-assured and wonderfully spirited throughout. One feels that he and Wood - old comrades on this ground - are completely at one in this respect. Elgar is said to have stated that nobody seemed to get to the heart of the concerto as Sammons did, and after one performance Sir John Barbirolli declared to him, "We all felt privileged to be associated with you in the performance of the Elgar which will live long in our memories". The same may be said of the performance on this disc.

This release, promised last year, is understood to have been initially withdrawn due to technical problems. However, if the copy I have been sent for review is meant to be an improved version, then I am sorry to say that to my ears (and those of others to whom I have played it) the result still leaves much to be desired. True, the 78 sides have been edited together well enough, but in their attempt to make the recordings "a pleasure to listen to" Avid's "panel of experts" and "specialist team of audio restoration engineers" (I quote from their blurb) seem to have overlaid the sound with a patina of rather intrusive surface noise which I found to distract from the pleasure of the performances rather than enhance it as I am sure they intended. Sadly therefore I find it hard to recommend this disc though I yield to none in my admiration of the renderings it contains. As with all out-of-

copyright recordings there have been other contenders for the reissue of these two and doubtless there will be more to come (let us hope!). For the Casals the best bet would most likely be the EMI coupling with the Dvořák concerto and Bruch's *Kol Nidrei* on CDH 63498-2 which has been around since about mid-1990. A more recent emanation from Biddulph (LAB 144) coupled the concerto with the same Bruch but offered the Boccherini B♭ concerto and a previously unissued Haydn Concerto in place of the Dvořák. Enquiry at EMI's Oxford Street store, however, gives me to understand that their recent repeat orders for this disc have been unsuccessful and its deletion must be presumed. For the Sammons there is the Pearl transfer on GEMMCD 9496 which couples the Violin Concerto with the Violin Sonata (Sammons and William Murdoch). This enjoys better sound than the issue under review even if some surface noise persists. As a last resort (if you are prepared to demean yourself with vinyl) there remains Anthony Griffith's EMI transfer on World Records (SH 288 if you can find it). Meanwhile we still await the butter in a lordly dish. Perhaps Mr Dutton...?

David Michell

Introduction and Allegro, Op 47. Serenade for Strings, Op 20. Cockaigne, Op 40.

(with Vaughan Williams Sinfonia Antartica etc)

Hallè Orchestra conducted by Sir John Barbirolli

2 EMI CDS CMS 566543-2

"What a multitude of streams contribute to personal appreciation of a recording; out of what an unaccountable eddy a critical opinion flows!" is how H.F. opened his review of Barbirolli's first recording of *Cockaigne* in the August 1951 edition of *The Gramophone*. Reviewing styles have changed somewhat in the last half-century! He goes on to compare the newcomer with a set conducted by van Beinum which Decca had issued a year earlier. I guess that such sentiments as "... Barbirolli's London is much more English, therefore much more Elgar's, than van Beinum's..." would go down less well today but it does cast an interesting light on Elgarian opinion of the day. Suffice it to say that this is a lively, enthusiastic and sensitive account that is a worthy memento of the Barbirolli/Hallè partnership in its heyday. The documentation in the booklet is usefully detailed but the first published 1954 for this item must be a mistake. (This is not incidentally the same recording as the one which appeared on an HMV 10" LP in 1955 and which reappeared on an EMI CD recently with Barbirolli's celebrated 1954 account of the Second Symphony.)

Barbirolli's was only the second recording of the Serenade, appearing just 15 year's after the composer's own. At the time, it cost less than Elgar's as it was accommodated on two 10" discs on the cheaper plum label. 'L.S.' in *The Gramophone* of July 1949 thought that the recording presented "an indifferent balance, and woolly, plummy tone in general; the string basses are badly out of focus, especially in the first movement." In his very informative notes, Michael Kennedy tells us that it was a very early example of recording on magnetic tape and it certainly transfers very satisfactorily to CD. The Larghetto is taken at a flowing pace but as might be expected is very warm-hearted.

By 1953, Barbirolli was on to his third recording of the Introduction and Allegro. His first, made in 1927 for Compton Mackenzie's National Gramophonic Society, was the work's gramophone première - it was, of course, the only major Elgar orchestral work not recorded by the composer. A set was sent to Elgar for his comments and his letter sent in reply to Mackenzie is included in Dr Moore's *Elgar on Record* (p. 84). Elgar writes that "Mr Barbirolli is an extremely able youth and, very properly, has ideas of his own, added to which he is a remarkably able conductor". Two years later, he recorded the work again, this time for HMV, and this was available for a short while on a Barbirolli Society LP. This is a first reissue for his third account which appeared on a 10" HMV LP in June 1957, the Elgar Centenary month. I have very much enjoyed hearing it for the first time. It is a big, bold and confident performance that sounds entirely idiomatic and natural.

Sandwiched between the 78 era and the arrival of stereo, many of the recordings made during the decade after the War have been somewhat overlooked. None of these Elgar performances has ever been reissued before. The sound is more than acceptable and with their very valuable Vaughan Williams' companions (including the first recording of *Sinfonia Antartica*, which Barbirolli and the Hallé had premièred six months earlier) make a very attractive double CD pack. Perhaps too, these urgent performances are more typical of Barbirolli's Elgar than the more familiar ones made later in his life when he had perhaps grown to love the music just a little too much?

John Knowles

CD Round-up

Over the last few years there have been many records on the lines of the Last Night of the Proms. I took an interest in this one because it was conducted by Paul Daniel, one of the rising stars of the British musical firmament, and because it contained Parry's *Jerusalem*, which I hoped would be in Elgar's orchestration (sadly, it isn't). This Naxos disc (8.553981), recorded in Leeds Town Hall with the English Northern Philharmonia and the Leeds Festival Chorus, but without an audience, lacks the "feel" of a real Last Night; but this is more than made up by the opportunity to hear such things as Henry Wood's *Fantasia on British Sea Songs* without irritating audience contributions. Walton's two coronation marches are nicely played, as are 'Nimrod' and the inevitable *Pomp & Circumstance no 1. I was glad* and Arnold's overture *Tam O'Shanter* complete the disc.

The British baritone Philip Rock is an experienced opera singer with a pleasing voice. Accompanied on the piano by Nina Walker, he has brought out a disc entitled 'Passion and Romance in English Song', twenty-three tracks comprising such favourites as *Linden Lea*, *Drake's Drum*, *Sea Fever*, and many more. Elgar's *After* and *Was it some golden star?* are given thoughtful performances, perhaps lacking that final edge of characterisation. Rock is more at home with the three *Songs of Travel* items and Britten's folk song arrangements. But a very pleasant disc and, especially for those unfamiliar with this branch of English music, a good introduction to the repertoire. The words of the songs are not given, but the

diction is so clear it scarcely matters; and the notes on the songs are contained as the final track on the disc itself. The disc is on the Voce Viventi label (VVR002) and available from VVR Distribution Ltd, PO Box 18717, London E6 5GS, at a special price to Society members of £10 (incl p + p).

Some discs are reissued amazingly quickly these days. It was only just over four years ago that I reviewed a disc of English music for strings by the City of London Sinfonia conducted by Richard Hickox, featuring a breezy and convincing account of the Introduction & Allegro, plus Vaughan Williams' *Tallis Fantasia* and Walton's *Sonata for Strings*. It can be safely recommended, and if you missed it first time, here it is at mid-price (CDM 566761-2). Also from Hickox and the CLS comes another disc of string music originally released on LP in 1984, and transferred to CD five years later. It contains Parry's delightful *Lady Radnor's Suite* and the posthumous *English Suite*; and Elgar's *Elegy for Strings*, *Sospiri*, and the Serenade for Strings. The playing is superb, the performances warm and satisfying, Hickox allowing just the right amount of expansiveness to bring out all the emotional yearning. This version of the Serenade in particular must be one of the finest available. For some reason this has not been reviewed in the JOURNAL before, but do get it; it is a recording to treasure (CDM 566541-2).

A recording that has taken a long time to get on to CD is Sir Charles Groves' premier recording of *Caractacus*, dating from 1977 (when as its tribute to the Queen's Silver Jubilee, EMI's June releases were all of British music). It received mixed notices at the time, Andrew Neill in the NEWSLETTER speaking of his "deep disappointment" at the lack of "conviction and style" the recording showed. To be fair, he reserved his major criticism for Peter Glossop in the title role, who, it must be admitted, had by then rather ceased to be 'flavour of the month' so far as the world's opera houses were concerned. Glossop certainly fails to project adequately the confidence and regal bearing of the tribal chieftain, and I find him most convincing in 'O my warriors', where his tone of dejected nobility is just about right. Ironically, this is the passage singled out for criticism by Andrew in his original review!

Since then we have had a second recording, from Hickox and the London Symphony forces on Chandos, and although it was enthusiastically received by many, including John Knowles (JOURNAL May 1993) who said that Groves' version was "now entirely eclipsed by this newcomer", I feel that that recording too is wanting in certain respects. Sir Charles is well served by his other soloists, with Sheila Armstrong and Robert Tear in good voice as the young lovers, and Brian Rayner Cook a powerful Arch-Druid. Choir and orchestra give solid support, and I enjoyed listening to it again after a break of some years. The last two scenes are on the second disc of this mid-price set, along with the *Imperial* and *Coronation Marches*, and the *Enigma Variations*. This last dates from 1978 and this is its first manifestation since then. During the previous three years several notable versions had appeared - by Del Mar, Andrew Davis, Solti, Barenboim, Jochum, Stokowski and Haitink; in the light of this it is perhaps scarcely surprising that Groves' account was almost overlooked when it appeared. It is lovingly played, but is certainly not as incisive or characterful as the finest versions. Nevertheless an appealing set overall, especially to Sir Charles' many followers, and good value with 2½ hours music (CMS 763807-2). Sir Adrian Boult's recordings of *The Music Makers* and *The Dream of Gerontius* are

available on a 2 CD set, but a review (if any recommendation is needed!) must wait till next time (CMS 566540-2).

I have received notice of several CDs and include them here for your interest, though I have not heard them myself. First, a recording of two 1959 broadcasts by Pierre Fournier, of Elgar's Cello Concerto (with the Munich PO conducted by Kletzki), and of Walton's Concerto with the RPO conducted by the composer (of particular interest as Walton never recorded the concerto commercially). The disc is Arlecchino ARLA 66.

Then a two-disc set from Rondo (RONCD 225) which contains the Cello Concerto played by Andr  Navarra and the 'Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra conducted by Michael Guderian', the latter apparently being a well-known and loved Anglo-Italian conductor who was based in Manchester for many years (no prizes for the solution), and who also conducts the First Symphony. Both works are from the 1957 Pye recording (and the names are presumably changed for copyright reasons). The discs also include *Cockaigne* and *Pomp & Circumstance no 1* played by the RPO under Groves; and the Serenade for Strings, 'Nimrod', and *Chanson de Matin* by the Orion Orchestra conducted by Stuart Wright. This set first appeared in this format in 1995, and from what I can discover, Rondo is no longer marketing as a company, though of course you may still be able to pick up a copy.

Finally, from Guild Records (GMCD 7124) a recording of the Violin Sonata by Oliver Lewis accompanied by Jeremy Filsell, together with the Sonata and some smaller works by Eugene Goossens. The disc was generally well received in a review in the *Strad*.

The Editor

LETTERS

From: Neil Mantle

I was interested to read the letter from J H Roberts in which he talks about percussion deficiencies in Elgar's own recordings.

Much of the problem stems from mechanical not musical considerations and what could be accommodated in the soundtrack of the records. Before issue, all new recordings had to pass the "wear test": this consisted of repeated playings at the factory in Hayes, and the number of playings before signs of wear appeared carefully noted. If this number fell below an acceptable level, the record was rejected.

The bass drum apparently caused the primitive and inflexible needle great difficulty on reproduction and so was omitted : you will listen for it in vain on any of Elgar's recordings.

*As regards cutting down of players, there is an interesting reference to this problem in Jerrold Northrop Moore's endlessly fascinating book *Elgar on Record* (OUP, 1974) pp 194-5, where producer Rex Palmer asks Elgar in a letter about the impending recordings of *Cockaigne* : "Do you think that tymps and four percussion will be sufficient for this*

overture : anything heavier in the percussion line might be difficult to record from a technical point of view?"

From: Denis Bloodworth

Having attended the first performance of Elgar/Payne Symphony no 3, and having studied the recording, the score and Anthony Payne's book *The Story of the Reconstruction* I have nothing but praise, and thanks, for the Symphony. However one observation on the orchestration intrigues me. The timpani part clearly needs pedal timpani and as far as I know Elgar never used these (not even in *Falstaff*). There is no reason why he should not have done so, as the classic design was by Pittrich of Dresden in 1872 (chromatic drums of an earlier design date back to the 1840s and are said to have been still in use in the Munich Opera House in the 1960s). I feel sure Elgar knew of them and I wonder why he never used them?

From: John Lloyd-Jones

I was pleased to read in the July edition of the Elgar Society NEWS that Newport enjoys one distinction at least, that of having the greatest number of roads named after Elgar. You may be interested to know that the Elgar addresses are situated in the Alway area, a large council house estate started pre-war and completed in the post-war years. (Unfortunately these streets were in urgent need of refurbishment when I last saw them when I retired from general practice four years ago.) Apart from a few "topographically" named roads, all the other roads are named after British composers, conductors or instrumentalists so that for instance Elgar Ave is a road off Vaughan Williams Drive, and Elgar Circle joins Walford Davies Drive.

The contiguous council estate area known as Ringland was built post-war and again, the roads apart from the odd one or two with local names, are similarly named so that Butterworth Close and Warlock Close are off Edward German Crescent. (I have in the past wondered how this area came to contain "Sims" Close?)

When I first came to work in Newport as a GP in the days before easily obtainable street maps I found that the policy of the town fathers of the day in naming the streets in a given area after writers, artists and eminent scientists was very helpful to someone unfamiliar with the town. Thus if the call was to Lister Green, one knew that one had to make one's way to the scientists in the North West area of Malpas where Darwin Drive was the key road to Whittle Drive, Haldane Close, etc etc. Similarly Shakespeare Drive gave access to roads like Sheridan Close, Pepys Grove, etc. In another area, Landseer Close, Cotman Close and Munnings Drive are all situated in the "artists'" quarter of St Julians.

The list of music associated street names of the Alway and Ringland areas is as follows (excepting Elgar Avenue, Circle and Grove): Close: Arne, Bantock, Barbirolli, Brain,

Britten, Butterworth, Byrd, Delius, Dowland, Eric Coates, Gilbert, Gibbons, Goossens, Halle, Handel, Henry Wood, Holst, John Bull, John Field, John Ireland, Linley, Malcolm Sargent, Myra Hess, Newman, Patti, Quilter, Stanford, Tallis, Tippett, Walton, Warlock. **Drive:** Parry, Vaughan Williams, Walford Davies. **Road:** Arthur Bliss, Balfe, Cecil Sharp, Sterndale Bennett. **Crescent:** Edward German, Moore, Playford. Plus Adrian Boult Green, Beecham Street, Novello Walk, Purcell Square, Sullivan Circle, and finally, Mount Bax!

From : John Knowles

The August edition of BBC Music Magazine included a CD of the 1961 Last Night of the Proms. Both the CD booklet and the notes on p 42 of the magazine state clearly that Elgar's orchestration is used in Parry's Jerusalem. This is clearly not so. Where, just for example, are the swirling violin figurations at "Bring me my arrows of desire" ? I believe, therefore, that the labelling on the CD is incorrect and that what is heard is Parry's own orchestration. Sargent made a record of this version for HMV and it was included on an LP issued shortly after his death in 1967. However, the magazine tells us that Sargent introduced "Elgar's thrilling orchestration" to the Last Night in 1953. I have vague memories of someone telling me that Elgar's arrangement was for many years in private hands and that was why it was not performed. Elgar's version was certainly used by Colin Davis at the 1969 Last Night - I was there (!) and it can be heard on a Philips recording. I am wondering if perhaps this was in fact its first recording and that, in spite of my discography, neither the 1938 HMV version nor Kirsten Flagstad's 1957 Decca record utilised Elgar's orchestration. Can anyone shed any light on this?

From : Ronald Taylor

Reading through a 1903 issue of *The Playgoer* the other day, the name of Elgar caught my eye. The music critic of the magazine, one Malcolm Lawson, was writing in glowing terms of Dan Godfrey's work at Bournemouth, and in doing so indulged in this crushing criticism of English provincial festivals :

"We all know from bitter and excruciating experience of those dolorous doings called 'Festivals' at Gloucester, Hereford, Birmingham (where they couldn't even sing the notes of Elgar's great Gerontius correctly), of those at Bristol and Worcester and other ecclesiastical haunts where bloated emolument shakes hands with bad taste in smug congratulation at the rough and tumble performance of well-known works, and the careless and ruthless murder of the new ones. The lamentation has been loud and long, the remedies offered and advocated many and various".

So, it seems Shaw was not the only one to deplore the state of music in the country at large at the beginning of the century. I thought that such words of wisdom should be shared.

100 YEARS AGO...

The first performance of *Caractacus* at Leeds on 5 October 1898 was the most significant event in Elgar's career to date. The Leeds Festival was more prestigious than either the Three Choirs or the North Staffordshire, for whom he had written commissions two years earlier. The final London rehearsal for the work took place on 29 September at St James' Hall, after which E A Baughan wrote in the *Musical Standard* that "*Caractacus* ...is a composition which definitely determines Mr Elgar's position as the first of modern British composers ... there is just that real musical creation ...that is lacking so often in the work of the more pretentiously academic of our native composers". Elgar wrote to Troyte, promising to send a copy, adding that it was "the first to give me the place I've fought for". The following week, after the first performance, Baughan was more critical - of the libretto, and also Elgar's setting of it; he spoke of some of Elgar's themes as "facile" and "sentimental".

The performance itself was well received in general; "All went well & great success & immense impression", wrote Alice. But Baughan's was not the only equivocal response; Elgar's friend Nicholas Kilburn said that for him it did not have the same appeal as *Olaf*. These reactions, added to the usual feelings of deflation following the completion of a work, probably caused in Elgar a mood of depression. After leaving Leeds on 8 October, he and Alice spent ten days in London, during which time they heard the Triumphal March from *Caractacus* played on two consecutive days by Manns at the Crystal Palace. They also heard *The Sorcerer* and *Trial by Jury* at the Savoy. But another disappointment came from Novello. There had been talk of Elgar writing a work for the Birmingham Festival in 1900; the publishers suggested merely a short choral work along the lines of *The Banner of St George*. Back in Malvern on 19 October, Elgar poured out his feelings to Jaeger the following day: "I'm not happy at all in fact was never more miserable in my life : I don't see that I've done any good at all: if I write a tune you all say it's commonplace... now if I will write any easy, small choral-society work for Birmingham, using the fest. as an advt. your firm will be 'disposed to consider it' - but my own natural bent I must choke off. No thank you - no more music for me - at present..." The following day, Friday 21 October, he returned to teaching at the Mount. After dinner, tired and having lit a cigar, he sat at the piano and began to play, "fingers wandering idly", and Alice remarked on a "tune" he had played. From such unpromising beginnings came, as we all know, the *Enigma Variations*. (Jerrold Northrop Moore has correctly identified this date by a process of deduction and elimination. The following Monday (24 October) Elgar wrote to Jaeger : "Since I've been back I have sketched a set of Variations (orkestry) on an original theme..." He had returned to teaching only on the 21st, and of course the following two days were the weekend when there was no teaching).

The following week he played the new work to Rosa Burley, who felt that he enjoyed writing it more than any other work. "For once he was not writing on commission but for the pleasure of doing so. I doubt indeed if he foresaw at the beginning that he had begun an important work." Dorabella also heard it when she came for the next Worcestershire Philharmonic Society concert on 1 November. On 7 November Elgar met Charles Beale from the Birmingham Festival Committee and the commission for the 1900 Festival was confirmed.