

The Society

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# The Elgar Society Journal

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*Front Cover: Laurence Binyon, CH, a 1920 portrait by Francis Dodd (reproduced by kind  
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*Longer quotations* in a separate paragraph, *not* in italic, *not* in quotes; please leave a blank line before and after.

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Books: Author, *Title* (Place of publication: Publisher, year of publication), page[s]. Thus: Robert Anderson, *Elgar* (London: Dent, 1993), 199.

Periodicals: Author, 'Title of article', *Title of periodical*, issue number and date sufficient to identify, page[s]. Thus: Michael Allis, 'Elgar, Lytton, and the Piano Quintet, Op. 84', *Music & Letters*, 85 (May 2004), 198.

End a footnote with a full stop, please, and never put a comma before a parenthesis.

**Titles** that are 'generic' in Roman: e.g. Violin Concerto. Others in *italics* (e.g. *Sea Pictures*; the *Musical Times*). Units within a longer work in single quotes, e.g. 'Sanctus fortis' from *The Dream of Gerontius*.

# Editorial

This issue is, in many ways, a celebration of the work of what I might describe as the ‘Elgarian community’: those many people who have worked tirelessly over the years to ensure that the name of one of England’s greatest composers – and, of course, his music – continues to be known and celebrated throughout the world.

We have cause enough to be thankful to Elgar’s biographers, from Basil Maine in the 1930s (who somehow contrived to gain Elgar’s assistance in producing what could be described as a ghosted autobiography), through Percy Young in the ’50s and ’60s, to Jerrold Northrop Moore from the ’70s up to the present: but there are so many others – both individual and institutional – who work away for the cause that is Edward Elgar.

Andrew Neill’s comprehensive essay on Elgar and Binyon is, for example, the icing on the cake of a project conceived by Andrew with Siva Oke to record the complete Binyon settings of Elgar. Included on the CD is the first complete recording of Elgar’s score for *Arthur*, more than 90 years after it was written. That score was edited by its conductor, Ben Palmer, for the Elgar Complete Edition, and the recording funded by a whole host of people including the Binyon and Elgar families, the Elgar Foundation, and the Elgar Society itself with funds from the Kay Trust.

The other essay in this issue is a study of the magnificent Op.53 set of part songs. I thought I knew them pretty well – I can even claim to have conducted them at Covent Garden<sup>1</sup> – but this piece by George Parris reveals hidden depths in a familiar set. George is an exceedingly enterprising young musician: he organised an Elgar Festival while still at school; he formed his own professional chamber choir – the Carice Singers – to perform English choral music; he formed an orchestra and conducted Elgar’s First Symphony while an undergraduate at Cambridge; and, for which many thanks, he reviews the Complete Edition of the Part Songs in this issue. And, of course, that volume has been edited by someone with many decades of practical experience of conducting Elgar, Donald Hunt.

Three cheers for the Elgarian Community!

Martin Bird

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1     Sadly not in the Opera House but the fruit and veg market ...

# ‘As if it was England singing’: Edward Elgar & Laurence Binyon in war and peace

**Andrew Neill**

## *Foreword*

Laurence Binyon (1869-1943) was a man of many talents, his intellectual abilities channelled into writing poetry and plays and at length about painting. He was a translator (his Dante is especially revered) and was member of the staff of the British Museum, where he worked for over forty years. He became an acknowledged scholar and interpreter of oriental art, eventually rising to the position of Keeper of the Department of Prints and Drawings. However, it is Binyon’s relationship with Elgar that concerns us in this article even if the artistic fruits of their relationship were relatively modest. This was confined to three pieces: *The Spirit of England*, *With Proud Thanksgiving* and the incidental music to the play *Arthur*. It has to be recognised that the music of *Arthur* has never figured high in an assessment of Elgar’s work and *The Spirit of England* was but one of many pieces he composed during World War 1. Nevertheless, as many consider *The Spirit of England* the most significant of Elgar’s wartime compositions this article explores the relationship that developed between Binyon and Elgar in greater depth; one that became deeper and closer as the two men grew older.

During the first few months of the war Binyon wrote a number of poems considering the meaning of his new world: his country at war. In *To Goethe* he appealed to Germany’s greatest poet and in *Louvain* he views the destruction of the city and the likely death of his friend Bruno Destrée with dismay. A number of Binyon’s poems were published in *The Times* during the autumn of 1914 and, towards the end of the year he collected twelve for publication in a volume entitled *The Winnowing Fan*.

To many the relationship between a librettist and a composer is at best only of passing interest. This may be true in a number of instances but by citing a few examples, we can see that the librettist or author provides something critical in the development of the composer’s art. Da Ponte, Boito, von Hofmannsthal and Piper are but obvious examples. In Elgar’s case any such claim is unsustainable for the obvious reason he did not complete an opera and because, where he worked with

**Fig.1: The title page of the first edition of *The Winnowing Fan*.**



a writer such as Henry Acworth in the composition of *King Olaf* and *Caractacus*, this was a means to an end. I do not wish to imply that the relationship between Elgar and Binyon was anything like that of the examples given above, but what is now apparent is that once Elgar committed himself to setting Binyon's poetry a close relationship developed that lasted until Elgar's death. It was important artistically because, after the war, it enabled Elgar to compose the score for *Arthur* and inspired a retrospective poem by Binyon shortly before he died in 1943.

In composing the music for Binyon's three poems one serious difficulty arose that was never satisfactorily resolved. Shortly after 'For the Fallen' appeared in print for the first time the Cambridge composer Cyril Rootham (1877-1938) asked Binyon if he could set it. Binyon happily acceded to the request and sailed for the United States on a lecture tour. He returned in mid December shortly before his anthology *The Winnowing Fan* was published. A few weeks later on 10 January 1915 Sir Sidney Colvin urged Elgar to set 'For the Fallen'. This led to a bitter disagreement between Elgar and Rootham once Elgar was persuaded to complete his setting.

### **Prelude**

'Here is no bombast or waving of flags, but a tender humanity and gentle exaltation. When Elgar is reproached for the blatancy of his patriotic music it is overlooked that when national feeling was at its climax he gave voice to it with this quiet and wistful elegy.'<sup>1</sup> This comment by William McNaught from a short biography of Elgar refers to *The Spirit of England* and, in particular, 'For the Fallen'. McNaught shrewdly sums up Elgar's contribution to our culture as he identifies two-sides of Elgar's art: the composer of patriotic tunes and the man who could produce music of profound reflection. As it turned out Elgar managed this at a time when his country needed him as it had never needed him before. Unfortunately, the haphazard composition process of *The Spirit of England* did not help the incorporation of the score into the plans of the average choral society for it was not completed until late in the war.

Recently, the distinguished American conductor Andrew Litton called Elgar 'the most English of English composers'.<sup>2</sup> There, put succinctly, is a well-known conundrum for Litton goes someway to implying that Elgar defined Englishness in music. To an extent this became true once Elgar burst on the British musical consciousness. Elgar's uniqueness, through his auto-didacticism, his great intelligence and perception enabled him to create a style or form that has come to be self-defining. Of course Britten and Vaughan Williams both created a unique style and sound of their own: an 'English' sound, too, as the ubiquitous *The Lark Ascending* and the *Peter Grimes Sea Interludes* affirm. In 2014 it is clear that these pieces and their composers are as an important part of our national identity as is Elgar and his music. However, looking at the evidence of the last night of this year's promenade concert season with the multitude of different national flags waving before the cameras there may now be an audience that appreciates the universality of Elgar's famous march that suggests his great tune is now a property of anyone who wants to sing it. This can also be said of Parry's *Jerusalem*. Like it or not Elgar created a sound – a recognizable sound – that is associated in the minds of many as 'English' and it is to Elgar's music that many return more often than not when defining 'Englishness' in music. In a sense he 'got there first' and, although his

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1 William McNaught, *Elgar* (London: Novello & Company, 1947), 16. McNaught (1883-1953) was the son of William Gray McNaught and, like his father, worked all his life for Novello and became editor of *The Musical Times*.

2 BBC Radio 3, CD Review 8 September 2014.

musical roots may be German (and there is nothing wrong with that) he created his own world of sound and emotional style that somehow tells us, the listener, what we believe ourselves to be. This for Elgar led to an enormous responsibility; a responsibility he did not always fulfil, but which he came to master in what he gave his public during World War I.

When considering Elgar during the war it is worth reiterating the point that most of the music he composed was as a result of a commission or a suggestion from a third party. It is also easy to exaggerate the significance of this for, in examples such as *The Starlight Express*, Elgar needed no further encouragement to compose once the seed had been sown. The same can be said of *Carillon*, *Polonia*, *The Sanguine Fan* and *The Fringes of the Fleet*. The other point that is often made is that much of the music is escapist and charming. ‘So what’ we might say! This was more than justified in wartime as Elgar gave much of his audience what they wanted to hear as is evident in music such as the successful production of *The Fringes of the Fleet* and in the reaction to the music of *The Starlight Express*. It is unfortunate that the complexity of Blackwood’s conception and the failure of the production prevented the music enchanting a wider audience at the time. In both works, once heard it is very difficult to remove Elgar’s melodies from the mind as many at the time appreciated. Entertainment in wartime is a serious business but it is the serious music that Elgar produced between 1915 and 1917 that concerns us here, most significantly *The Spirit of England*.

\* \* \*

Robert Laurence Binyon was born on St Laurence Day, 10 August 1869, the second son of the vicar of Burton-in-Lonsdale in northeast Lancashire. In 1874 the family left Lancashire, moving to Burton and then to Chelmsford and finally to London when the Reverend Binyon took on parishes in Bryanston Square, Hammersmith and Fulham. In 1880 Binyon followed W.B. Yeats (four years his senior) into the Godolphin School in Hammersmith winning a scholarship to St. Paul’s School (then in Cathedral Churchyard) before it moved to Barnes in 1884. After a slow beginning Binyon, the natural scholar, emerged with an ability to learn ‘great swathes of Milton’<sup>3</sup>. His development as a poet also began at St. Paul’s where he was encouraged by his greatest friend at school, Manmohan Ghose, the son of an anglophile Bengali who had settled in Britain.

Binyon went on to study at Trinity College, Oxford, where he developed his poetic abilities. He was to write poetry for the remainder of his life; one of his last poems *The Burning of the Leaves* being considered one of his finest. Yeats included Binyon’s *Tristram’s End* in his edition of the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* in 1936. However, Binyon’s two substantial poems *The Sirens* and *The Idols* are less easily categorised, the former starting ‘with a hymn to the quest for adventure, exemplified in the exploits of Mallory and Irving and Alcock and Brown, and seen as part of the soul’s quest for transcendence. *The Idols* opposes the dogmas, institutions and habits that inhibit the soul’s contact with reality.’<sup>4</sup>

Long before his collaboration with Elgar Binyon worked with Sir Charles Stanford, who composed the incidental music for Binyon’s verse play *Attila*. This was part of the 1907 autumn season at His Majesty’s Theatre in London’s Haymarket. ‘Stanford ... composed an overture, entr’actes, dance and war chorus, with leitmotifs for the main protagonists, and conducted the first night performance.’<sup>5</sup> With sets designed by Charles Ricketts the production was something of a

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3 John Hatcher, *Laurence Binyon Poet, Scholar of East and West* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 5.

4 Edmund Gray, private paper, 1994.

5 Hatcher, 150.

sensation and pointed to Binyon's natural ability as a dramatist.<sup>6</sup>

### **Background**

During the course of 2014 the BBC attempted and largely succeeded in recognising the significance of World War 1. On television the Corporation broadcast one of the finest short series about the war (originally made for Channel 4) and Radio 3 not only broadcast (for the third time) a series about Elgar but devoted time to composers such as Cecil Coles (1888-1918) and Ivor Gurney (1890-1937), both of whom attempted to compose whilst on service on the Western Front. Consideration was also given to other composers who lost their lives in the war such as the George Butterworth (1885-1916) and Rudi Stephan (1887-1915). The music of Bliss and Vaughan Williams was also covered, giving the opportunity for the listener to reflect on the damage war can cause to those who suffer no physical damage from their experience.

What has not been attempted, as far as I am aware, is to consider more widely an artistic contribution made during the war that would inspire on the one hand and offer solace, hope and a vision of peace on the other. Of course popular music of the time provided entertainment and escapism for the average man and woman, through Music Halls and the increasingly popular gramophone. Nevertheless, at the time, only those who frequented the concert hall could hear Elgar's music. This may have been a small cross-section of society but he was the one composer who produced music that fulfilled the requirements I outline above.

We know Elgar contributed much during the war, conducting across Britain and composing popular music for the stage and through recordings; most notably in the music for *The Starlight Express* and *The Fringes of the Fleet*. Both of these works, however, are essentially escapist. It was his work with Laurence Binyon that eventually produced the one work of the war, *The Spirit of England*, that was not only a form of requiem for the dead to come but offered 'solace and hope' for the worried, bereaved and desolate. Elgar produced his last great choral work in these three settings as he and Binyon, two Victorians, co-operated on something unique. Obviously neither Binyon nor Elgar had any experience of war beyond what they had read in newspapers and books. Somehow Binyon had perceived the scale of what was to come and later in the conflict would discover first hand the worst man could do to man when nursing in France. Elgar matched Binyon, underpinning the nobility of the poet's vision.

That this succeeded is clear from the letter Mary Anderson de Navarro wrote to Elgar on 16 May 1916, after hearing 'To Women and 'For the Fallen' for the first time: 'The more I think of your work on Saturday the more I glory in it. Never in my life have I heard anything so marvellous as the passage about the starlight in "To the Fallen" [sic]. It fairly glittered and scintillated, and made me weep and laugh at the same time at the sheer beauty of it. But the whole work is so noble, so poetically patriotic and splendid that I have no words to tell you what I feel about it. And there it is, a living thing in my soul and mind, – and I just want to thank you. ... It is good sometimes to let oneself go, and I know you are so understanding that you will be glad I have told you a little of what I feel about your marvellous work. ... I felt so happy that the public should come for a whole week to hear that music of heaven itself – it speaks mighty well for the public taste [:] they do know

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6 Charles Ricketts (1866 – 1931) set and costume designer. Ricketts was also an illustrator and printer as well as typographer (Vale Press).

a great thing when they get it.’<sup>7</sup>

### 1901-1914

Edward and Alice Elgar met Laurence Binyon for the first time on 1 December 1901 at Ridgehurst, in Hertfordshire, the home of Edward and Marie Antonia (‘Tonia’) Speyer. It seems that Binyon got on very well with the Elgars, particularly Alice Elgar to whom he wrote on Christmas Day recalling their meeting earlier in the month. They had discussed a play of Binyon’s that he thought might be suitable for an operatic setting. He also emphasized his continued availability: ‘Please give my regards to Dr. Elgar: I am sorry we hadn’t more opportunity to talk. I’m always to be found at the British Museum, in the Print Room’.<sup>8</sup> Binyon wrote again the following February in reply to Alice’s response to his first letter. He says that he has ‘revised his little play’<sup>9</sup> asking advice on its suitability for a musical setting as well as advice on how copyright works!

The next available letter follows substantial changes to the lives of both the Binyons and Elgars. Edward’s knighthood had been announced on 24 June 1904 and in April Binyon had married Cicely Powell, the daughter of a successful Merchant Banker. He had to overcome a number of difficulties to obtain approval for his marriage, not the least being his small salary (£250 per annum) and his views on religion that were in contrast to Cicely’s deeply held Christian faith. From those first meetings Binyon seemed determined to achieve a working relationship with Elgar, as is clear from his letter to Lady Elgar of 11 July: ‘It was a disappointment that Sir Edward was not attracted to the subject, as it seemed to please him rather when we talked of it’.<sup>10</sup> He then introduced the idea he had for *The Madness of Merlin* and hoped to work with Elgar in developing the subject that he thought might become a ‘long poem (of the epic sort)’, which indeed it became when completed in 1941.

Binyon was not going to give up and on 4 June 1909 he wrote again to Elgar raising the idea of an operatic collaboration. This was for an eighth-century Chinese story ‘as famous in Asia as the tale of Antony & Cleopatra is with us’.<sup>11</sup> The letter would have greeted Elgar on his return home on 22 June from his extended trip to Italy and Garmisch where he met Richard Strauss once more. Elgar replied to Binyon on 25 June saying that the story ‘is not for my music’.<sup>12</sup> They met at Ridgehurst in November and again at the beginning of June 1911, an event that seems to have inspired Binyon to follow up on a conversation with Elgar when he wrote about a missing manuscript and asked what Elgar thought about his verse play *King Horn*.<sup>13</sup> By 1912 the Binyons were becoming part of the Elgar’s circle and Alice Elgar’s tea-party on 12 May included them along with Leopold Stokowski and his wife. Both couples met again at Ridgehurst for luncheon on Sunday 13 July 1913 where Binyon played ‘much tennis’<sup>14</sup> with Carice.

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7 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar Letters of Lifetime* (Rickmansworth: Elgar Works, 2012) 337.

8 Elgar Birthplace Museum (EB) letter 2257

9 EB letter 2239

10 EB letter 2312

11 EB letter 2300

12 Percy M. Young, *Letters of Edward Elgar* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956), 190.

13 Hatcher, 152.

14 This and other quotations from the Elgar family diaries are taken from the transcription by Martin Bird.

## 1915-1918

On Monday 25 January 1915 Alice Elgar recorded the ‘success’ of the Dogger Bank engagement in the North Sea and a meeting at the British Museum with Richard Streatfeild (1866-1919) and Binyon. Streatfeild had become a friend of the Elgars in 1912 and in 1915 was instrumental in persuading Elgar to join the Hampstead Volunteer Reserve. He had befriended Binyon when the latter began working at the British Museum where he was an Assistant Keeper in the Department of Printed Books (1898-1919). He was a Handel scholar, music critic of the *Daily Graphic* and had an interest in ‘the delights of ... 1890’s subculture, the music hall and ballet’.<sup>15</sup> He had hoped to interest Elgar in setting his adaptation of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and his sudden death in 1919 was a shock to the Elgars and his many friends.<sup>16</sup>

Critical to this story is the strength of feeling expressed by Sir Sidney and Lady Colvin over the matter of Elgar’s setting of ‘For the Fallen’. Both Colvins would become the dedicatees of Elgar’s Cello Concerto. From 1884 Sir Sidney (1845-1927) had been Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, a post he held until his retirement in 1912. He became a great supporter of Binyon once the latter moved to his department and supported him as his replacement, without success. In 1903 Colvin married Frances Sitwell (née Fetherstonhaugh, 1839-1924), a former intimate of Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894). The Colvins were a couple of great intelligence with a wide circle of artistic and literary friends, a world into which the Elgars happily moved. It was Colvin who wrote to Elgar in January 1915: ‘Why don’t you do a wonderful Requiem for the slain – something in the Spirit of Binyon’s For the Fallen ...’. From *The Winnowing Fan* had Elgar chosen three poems, published in *The Times*, as follows: *The Fourth of August* (11 August), *To Women* (20 August) and *For the Fallen* (21 September, although written at the beginning of the month after the retreat from Mons).

On 5 April Streatfeild joined the Elgars and Alice recorded his distress at Elgar’s giving ‘up Binyon’s poems – because he had so generously retired in favour of Wrootham [sic]’. During the war, when in London, Alice Elgar usually attended Mass or early Communion at St James’s Roman Catholic Church, opposite Spanish Place: that left much of Saturday and Sunday free for entertaining. Six days after the tea with Streatfeild, Colvin visited and Alice noted he was: ‘overwhelming in his attack on E. to go on with L. Binyon’s Poems – E. a little moved I thought.’ Elgar was indeed moving back to ‘For the Fallen’ and on Tuesday 14 April Alice records ‘E. turned to his beautiful music again’. On 25 April Elgar was able to play some of his music to the Binyons, Streatfeild and Tita Brand-Cammaerts.<sup>17</sup> What would become *The Spirit of England* was



**Fig.2: Richard Streatfeild pictured in 1913.**

15 Hatcher, 43.

16 Christopher Grogan: ‘Elgar, Streatfeild and The Pilgrim’s Progress’ in Raymond Monk (editor), *Edward Elgar: Music and Literature*, (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993), 140 & 149.

17 Tita Brand Cammaerts (1879 – 1964), wife of the poet Emile Cammaerts and daughter of Marie Brema, the first Angel in *The Dream of Gerontius*.

now gaining a wider interest as he played it through to the conductor Landon Ronald, the tenor John Coates and the Conquest family<sup>18</sup>

By June 1915 the Binyon's were concerned at the lack of news of Cicely's brother, Richard Powell who, as it later turned out, had been killed on 9 May during the Second Battle of Ypres in the failed attack on Aubers Ridge. It was at this time that Elgar asked for an additional verse for 'For the Fallen' which Binyon supplied on 14 June. This verse (the fourth in Elgar's setting) is, perhaps, the weakest of the poem. Five days later Elgar was orchestrating 'For the Fallen' and on 20 June, at another meeting at Severn House, Alice noted that Landon Ronald 'loved the Binyon music, said there had been nothing like it since the 2<sup>nd</sup> Symphony'. The new music must have come as a relief to Ronald, the dedicatee of *Falstaff*, about which he said he could 'never make head or tale'.

That autumn Elgar was diverted by the composition of *The Starlight Express* and did not complete the orchestration of 'To Women and 'For the Fallen' until 26 February 1916. At Severn House, on 19 March, a distinguished audience heard Elgar's setting of Binyon's poems for the first time. Present were Algernon Blackwood, Mary de Navarro, her son Alma (Toti), the Belgian pianist Arthur de Greef, the violinist Max Mossel, the music publisher William Elkin and his wife Rosie, the contralto Muriel Foster and her husband Ludovic Goetz. 'It was very wonderful to watch the 3 faces of Mr. Blackwood, Maime de N & Muriel – all wrapt & emotionalized'.

Binyon's thrill at hearing his verses set by the man he had been gently pursuing for fifteen years is palpable in the letter he wrote to Lady Colvin on 10 May after both had heard the first London performance of 'To Women' and 'For the Fallen' on 8 May in the Queen's Hall. The Leeds Choral Union, directed by Henry Coward had already performed the works twice (in Leeds and Bradford) the previous week. Both settings preceded *The Dream of Gerontius*. John Booth sang the solo part in 'Two Women' and Agnes Nicholls sang in 'For the Fallen. Elgar conducted the Leeds, Bradford and all six London performances.

Dear Lady Colvin

It was very nice of you to write. Thank you for all you say. It was very wonderful, wasn't it? I felt my words transfigured and enlarged, streaming out on those glorious Yorkshire voices. I remembered how I wrote them – just after Mons – on a little cliff in Cornwall and wondered if they were any good at all and then to hear that music – as if England were singing – it was intensely moving. We are going again.

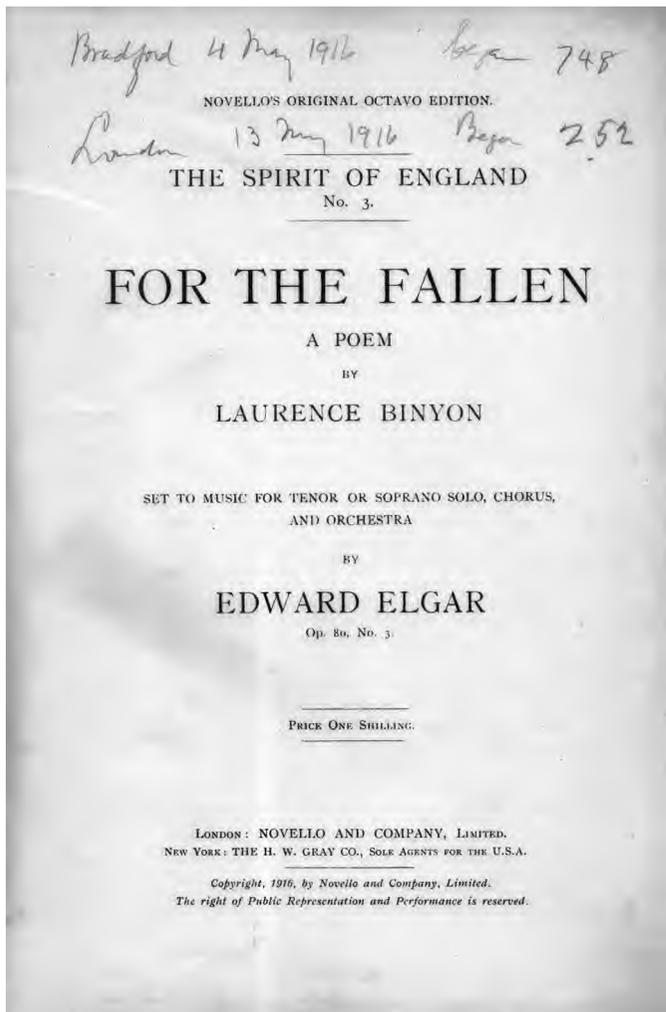
Yours affectionately  
Laurence Binyon<sup>19</sup>

Binyon and Elgar were now firm friends, Binyon attending Elgar's concerts when he was able to do so, and Alice notes that they lunched together on 2 November. The success of the May performances had clearly inspired him to try and deepen his relationship with the composer and he sent Elgar the words for a projected fourth part for *The Spirit of England* on 10 December 1916, sending an alternative first verse a week later. Nothing came of this and, anyway, Elgar was now concentrating on the need to complete 'The Fourth of August', which he told Binyon he had at last sent to Novello on 12 April 1917. By then Binyon was thinking of what would become his 'Peace Ode'.

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18 The Conquests were friends of Rosamund Acworth, daughter of the librettist of Caractacus. She married Robert Folger Conquest in September 1915.

19 Letter in the possession of, and transcribed by, Ceri Fagg.



**Fig.3:** The title page of a proof copy of 'For the Fallen'. The pencilled comments show the actual start times of the performances in Bradford on 4 May (the second performance of the work) and in London's Queen's Hall on 13 May (at the end of Clara Butt's week of performances of *Gerontius*, 'To Women' and 'For the Fallen'). (Martin Bird collection)

The first complete performance of *The Spirit of England* took place in Birmingham on 4 October 1917, preceding the first London performance by more than seven weeks. Alice Elgar's diary records that those in the box of the Albert Hall on 24 November were Lady [Evelyne] Horridge, Sir Sidney and Lady Colvin, Mrs. Ernest Thesiger, Carice Elgar, Miss Evans,<sup>20</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Binyon and Lady Alice Stuart of Wortley. 'To Albert Hall at 3. Wonderful music & most impressive performance. Large audience who seemed held – A. Nicholls gave a beautiful rendering of "For the Fallen". All 3 parts are great, great music.'

In July 1915 Binyon 'took his annual leave and went to France as a Red Cross volunteer

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20 Gweneth Margaret Evans (1893-1983), sister of Carice's friend Captain Mansfield Evans.

‘ambulancier’ and orderly assigned to the hospital in Arc-en-Barrois’.<sup>21</sup> Typically, he threw himself into the work with enthusiasm as he confronted the worst aspects of a military hospital. He returned to Arc-en-Barrois the following year and in 1917 was sent on a long reconnaissance of the French held Western Front. He was back in France in 1918, this time lecturing to British and American soldiers. His work in France had shown him the worst of war: he never forgot the experience and it was to imbue much of his poetry at this time. By 1918 ‘For the Fallen’ had become an universal source of comfort to many, Kipling even suggesting its most famous verse be inscribed on the Cenotaph in Whitehall. When, at last, they met, Kipling told Binyon ‘that when a soldier at the Front sent him the poem shortly after his son’s death in 1915, it had “cut him to the heart”’.<sup>22</sup>

The next communication is that of 5 November 1918 when, in the dying days of the war, Elgar wrote in response to Binyon’s *Peace Ode*. ‘... I think your poem beautiful exceedingly – but – I do not feel drawn to write peace music somehow ...’.<sup>23</sup> However, he soon had second thoughts, as is clear from a letter of 19 November to Binyon: ‘I sent you a telegram about your wonderful “Peace Ode” which several friends have cut from The Observer & commended to me. I hope you have not yet given permission for a musical setting: I should dearly love to reconsider it. Let me know how you are fixed & if you wd. still like me to attempt it – if I can find music good enough.’<sup>24</sup> Binyon was, naturally, delighted and replied the following day: ‘Of course I am only too glad if you take my poem & glorify it with music & if anyone else should want to set it I shall say it is engaged. Indeed I hope very much that you will find the music coming.’<sup>25</sup> Binyon’s biographer makes the point that “Peace” falls far short of “For the Fallen”, lacking its tragic dimension, the elegiac lyricism with Elgar, who now distilled it in chamber music and his Cello Concerto. [Edmund] Gosse spoke for many when he told Binyon that during the war he had “been the real national Laureate” but if so he was the Laureate of the nation’s grief, not its peace.’<sup>26</sup> The same could be said of Elgar.

By July 1919 (after the Treaty of Versailles) Elgar was finding the climate moving against his style: ‘I am holding over your (Observer) Ode as I fear the commercial side, which alas! requires consideration, may be difficult to arrange.’<sup>27</sup>

### 1919-1921

In November 1919 Binyon was closely involved in his production of *Sakuntala* (from a minor story in the *Mahabharata*), but in January 1920 he was writing again to Elgar about a possible setting of a poem by Arthur Fox-Strangways to which Binyon proposed adding three more poems ‘to make a set’.<sup>28</sup> Elgar was not attracted to the idea and hinted at Alice Elgar’s frailty in his response to Binyon on 14 January 1920.<sup>29</sup> The Binyons continued to socialize with the Elgars and it is inevitable they would have discussed the shortening of ‘For the Fallen’ into what became *With*

21 Hatcher, 198.

22 Hatcher, 211.

23 Jerrold Northrop Moore: *Edward Elgar: Letters of a lifetime* (Rickmansworth: Elgar Works, 2012), 361.

24 Percy M. Young, *Letters of Edward Elgar* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956), 248.

25 Worcestershire Record Office, microfilm BA5184, Parcel 1 (ii)

26 Hatcher, 211.

27 Percy M. Young, *Letters of Edward Elgar* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956), 252.

28 EB letter 6000

29 Percy M. Young, *Letters of Edward Elgar* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956), 259.

*Proud Thanksgiving.* On 26 February Elgar wrote to Binyon:

Novellos [sic] are proceeding with the shortened version of “For the Fallen” for the Cenotaph affair & wish to avoid confusion of the arrgt. with the original composition by adopting another title: they suggest “With proud thanksgiving” or “England mourns” – something from the poem. I said I wd. ask you about it: will you very kindly let me know your views. If you could come up on Sunday we cd. talk of it then.

Would you object to an asterisk to England & a note at the bottom simply giving the possible variant – thus:-

Britain  
The Empire etc.<sup>30</sup>

The following Sunday (29 February) Binyon joined another group at Severn House when he would have heard Elgar’s Violin Sonata played by Ethel Hobday. Alice Elgar’s enjoyment of the occasion and pride in her husband’s music is as strong as ever, but this could well have been last occasion when the Binyons attended one of her afternoon tea parties before her death on 7 April. On 10 April Binyon wrote to Elgar expressing his sympathy and shock at the news of her death:

It was only yesterday that with a great shock I came on the paragraph in The Times which told me of your loss. Of what are words at this time? Yet I cannot help writing just a line to say how sincerely & deeply I grieve for you. It seems only a day or two ago that we had a letter of kindness from Lady Elgar about our little girl’s operation, & we both looked forward to seeing her soon again. With heartfelt sympathy from us both.

## 1922

There is no further correspondence extant before Binyon’s letter of 16 May 1922 to Elgar when he says that he hoped to attend a performance of *The Apostles*: ‘I should be interested to know about your conception of “Judas”.’<sup>31</sup> The letter may have also referred to his play, *Arthur*: ‘Don’t bother to bring back the play, unless you are coming up to the Museum: but if you do I hope you will come to tea.’

By Christmas Elgar was turning his mind to music for the play, as is clear from a letter to Carice Elgar on 14 December: ‘I am thinking of writing a few bars for that lamb (Binyon), he has a new play at the Old Vic.’<sup>32</sup>

## 1923

Binyon’s interest in writing a play based on the last days of King Arthur was stimulated in 1912 and he worked on it from time to time during the war. A grand production for the Covent Garden Opera House was planned for December 1919 but the illness of one of the leading actors, Robert

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30 Percy M. Young, *Letters of Edward Elgar* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956), 260-261.

31 EB letter 6233

32 EB letter 224

Lorraine (Launcelot),<sup>33</sup> led to its cancellation. Although disappointed, Binyon realised that a more modest production would be in keeping with the rhetoric of *Arthur*.<sup>34</sup> After several failed attempts to stage the play 'it found its predestined home in the theatre at the opposite end of the spectrum from the splendours of Covent Garden, Lilian Baylis's Old Vic among the pubs, cafés and cheap boarding houses of the Waterloo Road.'<sup>35</sup>

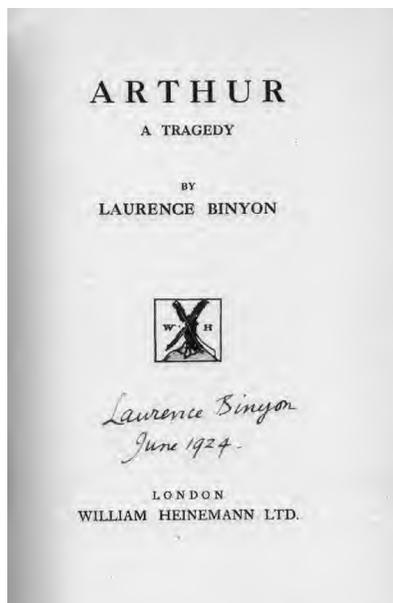
Elgar seems to have accepted with equanimity the necessary compromises whenever he composed for the theatre. The Old Vic's orchestra was even smaller than that available to him for his previous works such as for *The Fringes of the Fleet*. For *Arthur* he composed for a pit band augmented by some extra instrumentalists engaged by the theatre at his request.

On 24 January 1923 Binyon was quietly pushing Elgar further in the direction he wanted: 'My dear Elgar, Just a line to say that I have seen Miss Baylis<sup>36</sup> to-night. I told her you wanted to know what resources she could provide, & she offered to write direct to you. I think she would do all she could to meet your wishes, as she realises what a distinction it would be for the Old Vic.'<sup>37</sup> Elgar had arranged to see the stage manager of the Old Vic, Alexander Atkins (1888-1972) on 29 January. Atkins would produce *Arthur*.

The day before Elgar had written to Carice asking if he could stay with her at her husband's farm near Chilworth in Surrey where he could work in peace at their piano. He realized this would be something of an imposition: 'I have half-promised ... to write some incidental music for Binyon's play to be produced in March ... NOW this is the point: if I do it can I come to you for (say) a week & work on the piano score in your drawing room every morning? I can't do it in the flat ... Will you send me a wire as soon as you can on receipt of this just saying "Yes dearest father" – "No, you drivelling old blighter" ...'<sup>38</sup>. Of course Carice said yes.

Elgar replied to Binyon on 31 January: 'I have seen Mr. Atkins & compared notes – there is not much difference btn. your views & his – the scenes (save perhaps in one case) must be "linked" with music – two minutes sort of thing but no formal break. Now: the position, or rather

**Fig.4: The title page of *Arthur*. The copy is inscribed to Oliver Brett, 3<sup>rd</sup> Viscount Esher. (Martin Bird collection)**



33 Robert Lorraine (1876-1935) actor-manager, soldier, pioneer aviator, R.F.C. pilot and close friend of George Bernard Shaw.

34 The Covent Garden production had already spent £1,600 on costumes when it was withdrawn. The total cost of the later production at the Old Vic was £15.10s.

35 Hatcher, 223.

36 Lilian Baylis (1874-1937) Manager of the Old Vic 1912-1937.

37 EB letter 6314

38 EB letter 244

my position is this: I want to do it but since my dear wife's death I have done nothing & fear my music has vanished. I am going to my daughter's tomorrow & shall be quiet & things arranged for me as of old: my wife loved your things & it may be that I can furnish (quite inadequate) music for "Arthur" – Can you give me three days more to try?<sup>39</sup>

Two days later Carice Elgar recorded in her diary: 'Father arrived about 4 in Lansdowne car, unpacked etc gramophone – to write music for King Arthur Binyon.' The next day Binyon wrote to Elgar: 'I simply can't thank you enough. Even should you find that the spirit does not move you, I shall always prize the recollection of your wish to do this music for my play. But I can't help hoping.'<sup>40</sup> By mid February all was complete, despite diversions to examine pond life under the microscope, and Binyon was able to write on 19<sup>th</sup>: 'I can never thank you enough for this great honour of giving your music to my play.'<sup>41</sup> Two days later Elgar was able to write to Carice telling her: 'I have seen the Old Vic people today ... & been thro' the music – it is good – old fashioned o'course. It's all about Astolat which, after I left you, I find is Guildford so K. Arthur his Knights & their Megs – I mean dogs! – must have wandered down your valleyable valley very often.'<sup>42</sup>

The score was delivered to the Old Vic on 26 February in time for the first play through on 2 March. By now the press had heard about the project and Elgar met with Hannen Swaffer<sup>43</sup> of the *Sunday Times*, who wrote about his experience on 4 March: 'It is seldom you see Sir Edward Elgar in the theatre, but last Friday's scene at the Old Vic, with only two lights lessening the darkness, would have fascinated Degas. Sir Edward sat at Charles Corri's conductor's seat,<sup>44</sup> had spent hours in teaching the music he had specially written for Laurence Binyon's "Arthur" which is to be staged there next week. Fancy the greatest composer in England conducting ten musicians in the Waterloo Road! This is the sort of enthusiasm that no other theatre in England ever awakens.'<sup>45</sup>

Elgar invited Carice to the rehearsal of the play on 6 March, writing the day before: 'Rehearsal last Friday – such a funny noise with about six players (lambs)'.<sup>46</sup> He was wondering whether he should conduct on the first night (12 March) which Carice did not attend. Her father wrote to her enthusiastically having, after all, conducted: '... the play went well &, except for two or three slips in the orch, the music also.'<sup>47</sup> Carice came up to London on 15 March and found her father writing an extra piece of music for *Arthur* and she came again for the final two performances, both of which Elgar conducted.

After the first performance Binyon gave an inscribed copy of the play to Elgar: 'in affectionate admiration and regard from his grateful L.B.' Elgar replied in writing on 18 March: 'Very many thanks for the copy of "Arthur" & your inscription which includes more than I deserve. It was the greatest pleasure to be associated with you in the manner of production & I hope you are pleased with the reception of your work. This is not the day I fear for big things but there are some still left amongst theatre people who can see & feel great stuff. The end of a play which depends upon two

39 Jerrold Northrop Moore: *Edward Elgar: Letters of a lifetime* (Rickmansworth: Elgar Works, 2012), 415.

40 EB letter 6315

41 EB letter 6317

42 EB letter 240

43 Frederick Charles Hannen Swaffer (1879-1962).

44 Charles Corri (1861-1941) Music Director of the Old Vic 1898-1941.

45 *Sunday Times* 4 March 1923

46 EB letter 246

47 EB letter 242

persons or one only is always risky: for theatrical purposes I shd have liked Arthur & all his train to march mistily past, seen through a window on the stage R. — however you know best.<sup>48</sup>

### 1924

In April Binyon sought Elgar's advice about some verses he was 'being bothered to write ... for the Empire Pageant at Wembley ...'<sup>49</sup>. If Elgar replied, his response is lost.

### 1927

In February Binyon attended a performance of *The Dream of Gerontius*<sup>50</sup> and sent Elgar a copy his *The Sirens* for which Elgar sent his thanks on 2 March.

### 1931

Although they met rarely, the mutual respect composer and poet had for each other continued to grow, with Binyon sending Elgar his latest work. The warmth of their relationship is clear from Elgar's letter from Marl Bank on 31 December: 'My very dear Binyon, Your note gave me the greatest happiness, it was indeed good of you to write with your own hand. At Croydon the choir sang "For the Fallen" splendidly ... All good wishes for 1932 & my love to Mrs Binyon & those of the younger ones who remember me & to those who do not also of course.'<sup>51</sup>

### 1932

Binyon would celebrate his 64<sup>th</sup> birthday in August. His forty years service at the British Museum and exceptional contribution to British cultural life was, at last, recognised. He had been appointed a Companion of Honour in the New Year and would be recognised by both Cambridge and Oxford Universities. At last he became Keeper of the Department of Prints and Drawings at the Museum on the retirement in July of Sir Sydney Colvin's successor, Campbell Dodgson.

Elgar wrote to congratulate him, Binyon replying on 13 June: 'Thank you so much for your congratulations, which gave me great pleasure. It was good of you to write. ... I wish we saw you sometimes. Couldn't you come in to lunch one day when you are in town? But I know how full your time always is.'<sup>52</sup>

The BBC had adopted the practice of broadcasting *The Spirit of England* on Armistice Day and on the following Tuesday Elgar wrote to Binyon from Marl Bank:

I wish you had been in the BBC Studios on Friday & heard "For the Fallen": the effect was marvellous & made a feeling of the right sort for the anniversary. Thank you for letting me set those wonderful words.

I hope you are all right, with my love to you all.

Yrs. ever

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48 Percy M. Young, *Letters of Edward Elgar* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956), 280.

49 EB letter 5890

50 26 February 1927, excerpts of which were subsequently issued by HMV.

51 Percy M. Young, *Letters of Edward Elgar* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956), 308

52 EB letter 7974

Edward Elgar<sup>53</sup>

16 November 1932 (from the British Museum)

My dear Elgar

I wish indeed I had been in the studio on the 11<sup>th</sup>. I think the BBC might have asked me: but they didn't. Many people have told me how much they were moved. ... We are just buying a cottage on the Berkshire Downs. I am going to retire next September – 40 years in the Museum is quite enough – & want to write a long poem. Cicely joins me in affectionate good wishes & gratitude for the music.<sup>54</sup>

### 1933

Elgar's last extant letter to Binyon is dated 19 June:

The announcement of your retiring from the B.M. gave me a wrench – you are so inevitably connected in my mind with that place. I hope Mrs. Binyon & you will be happy in the new surroundings – I know you will find more to do than you have accomplished ever when in harness & we shall be gainers. I hope, however, the U. S. will not annex you. It has been one of the pleasures & satisfactions – of these I have had very few – of my life to have been associated with you in some musical settings: For the Fallen will, I think & hope, be remembered as the best poem inspired by the war & I am grateful to you for allowing me to 'set' it.

My love to you both now & ever

Your affectionate friend  
Edward Elgar<sup>55</sup>

In his reply of 5 July, Binyon tells of his forthcoming move to Streatley on the Berkshire Downs after his retirement on 9 September.

On 30<sup>th</sup> we sail, Cicely, & I, for Boston: but we hope to be back at the end of May, & then – back to poetry. ... what with this & all the preparations for the move, & the voyage, & my lectures, & the usual crowd of engagements, we shall be pretty busy.

I am always so proud to have been associated with you in your music, and to be your friend. We miss you.

Cicely sends her love: & we hope that we can meet somehow on our return from the States.

Ever yours affectionately  
Laurence Binyon<sup>56</sup>

On 5 October Binyon, on board the Cunard liner R.M.S. *Scythia*, wrote to Elgar for the last time:

53 Percy M. Young, *Letters of Edward Elgar* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956), 312. Elgar conducted with Elsie Suddaby as the soloist – see Ronald Taylor 'Music in the Air: Elgar and the BBC' in Raymond Monk (editor), *Edward Elgar: Music and Literature*, (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993), 334. Suddaby is the soloist in the recording from 1938 directed by Sir Adrian Boult (Elgar Editions EECD003-5).

54 EB letter 4554

55 Percy M. Young, *Letters of Edward Elgar* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956), 320.

56 EB letter 621

How can I thank you & my other old friends for this dazzling present which I received just before sailing? Never did I dream that I would possess a Turner, & this is a lovely one.<sup>57</sup> It is too good of you all. This will be my greatest treasure in the little house we have returned to on the Berkshire Downs. We hope to be back there in May & look forward to that immensely, though I hope we shall enjoy Harvard too. So far the voyage has been the smoothest I ever knew. Thank you again. You know how much I prize your friendship.

Always yours  
Laurence Binyon<sup>58</sup>

### ***Binyon and other composers***

Other settings of Binyon existed before the war, and his words have been set from time to time to the present day. In 1898, in one of the earliest settings of Binyon's poetry, Sir Arthur Somervell composed his *Ode to the Sea* for soprano solo, chorus and orchestra. Other composers have not forgotten Binyon even if his most famous verse is perhaps the most popular setting (as 'For the Fallen') such as by our Society's former Chairman Douglas Guest (1916-1996), and Mike Sammes (1928-2001), a one-time doyen of the BBC Light programme. In 1919 Martin Shaw (1875-1958) set, for voice and piano, Binyon's charming poem *Bablock-Hythe* and in 1933 received a major commission for the 1933 Three Choirs Festival and set Binyon's Whitmanesque *Sursum Corda* for tenor solo, chorus and orchestra:

Wake, O awaken, Soul that goest  
Drowsed and dark thro' cloudy vales!

More recently composers such as Edward Gregson (b. 1945), David Terry (b. 1975), Sir John Tavener (1944-2013) the American Samuel H. Adler (b. 1928) have set Binyon's poetry as did the Australian Samuel Liddle (1868-1935) a composer from Binyon's generation.

### ***The Music***

#### ***The Spirit of England***

In *The Spirit of England* Binyon's verses take us back to a different time: a Victorian world of self-sacrifice and honour; a time of order and patriotism. 'We were all delighted when war broke out on August 4<sup>th</sup> ... A lot of boys from the village were with me and although we were all sleeping in ditches at Harwich, wrapped in our greatcoats, we were bursting with happiness. ... We were all damned glad to have got off the farms. ... We were all so patriotic then and had been taught to love England in a fierce kind of way. The village wasn't England; England was something better than the village.'<sup>59</sup>

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57 Elgar had contributed towards a retirement gift of a Turner watercolour, which Binyon told Walter de la Mare, would be his 'most precious & cherished possession'.

58 EB letter 595

59 Leonard Thompson, farm worker, from Robert Blythe's *Akenfield*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 41-42.

Today the sentiments expressed in August 1914 may seem naïve in their courageous honesty but it is these sentiments that imbue Binyon's poems and what, by and large, the public wanted then. The critic Ernest Newman wrote: 'As Mr. Binyon sings: "They laughed, they sang their melodies of England, They fell open-eyed and unafraid." It is love and gratitude and pride and sorrow for these children of England and their self-sacrifice, ... that Elgar sings in such noble accents in the third of these new works of his.'<sup>60</sup> Binyon's words were written during the first months of a war that 'would be over by Christmas'. Lines such as 'They went with songs to the battle, they were young, straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow' were neither anachronistic nor even mawkish in 1914, for they expressed a general optimism and confidence that England was worth defending, as the farm hand quoted above makes clear. This is not all, however, for what is also noteworthy about Binyon's verse is his perception that the war would be long and hard ('the hope that's never done, the seed that's in the Spring returning ...') and that despite its military weakness a nation had perceived that she had to fight 'the barren creed of blood and iron'.

'For the Fallen', in particular, offered consolation and hope to those who listened. Frances Colvin wrote to Elgar in May 1916 after the London premiere of the first two settings of 'how deeply moved we both were – it is all quite wonderful & just what one wants at this time – & at all times – it will live always – "For the Fallen" especially will always be the one great inspiration of the War.'<sup>61</sup> Ernest Newman echoed this when he wrote: "'For the Fallen" is as moving a piece of music as Elgar has ever given us – a work of passionate sincerity and a beauty that is by turns touching, thrilling, and consoling ... It takes a lifetime of incessant practice to attain a touch at once so light and so sure as this.'<sup>62</sup>

Elgar's provided a three-movement structure reflecting the varied emotions of the time. 'The Fourth of August' is a reminder to Britain of its duty, its place in the world, the need to bear the hardship of war and to anticipate the moral transfiguration that will result. Binyon also looks beyond the 'days of sour division' (Ireland, strikes and political polarisation). In 'To Women' Binyon considers the stoicism of the mothers, wives and daughters left at home to endure the suffering to come, while in 'For the Fallen' it is the common soldier who is remembered as, in the summer and autumn of 1914, Britain's 'contemptible little army' died in the fields of Belgium and northern France as it slowed the advance of the invading German forces. Somehow, almost before the British army had fired a shot, Binyon anticipated that these men would be 'staunch to the end against odds uncounted' as indeed they were.

The G major opening of 'The Fourth of August' treads an effective path between urgency and melancholy. The octave rise for the soloist on 'Spirit of England, ardent eyed' matches Binyon's world of heroic sacrifice, a sentiment that returns towards the end with Elgar's treatment of 'Endure, O Earth!'. There is a brief excursion into A flat for the words 'we step into the grandeur of our fate' occurs before the return to the home key at 'Among the nations noblest chartered'. There is an ambivalence in his instruction in the final bars: *più lento*: 'ardent-eyed' but wide-eyed too.

'To Women', in A flat, is a meditation on domestic sacrifice as Elgar varies the pace from verse to verse most notably in the striking 'Swift, swifter than those hawks of war'. He even represents aeroplanes in his orchestra as the chorus sings 'those threatening wings that pulse the air'. The movement ends with Elgar recalling 'The Fourth of August' in support of the last line and looks

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60 From Ernest Newman's programme notes for the first London performances of 'To Women' and 'For the Fallen', 8-13 May 1916.

61 Jerrold Northrop Moore: *Edward Elgar: Letters of a lifetime* (Rickmansworth: Elgar Works, 2012), 335.

62 *Birmingham Post*, 9 May 1916.

forward to 'For the Fallen' in the chorus.

A semitone higher in A minor, 'For the Fallen' opens with a slow, plodding *solemn* march of death, a counterpoint to the words: 'With Proud Thanksgiving'. In a programme note, Benjamin Britten wrote that it 'has always seemed to me to have in its opening bars a personal tenderness and grief, in the grotesque march, an agony of distortion, and in the final sequences a ring of genuine splendour'.<sup>63</sup> The tone changes as Elgar *nobilmente* pierces the heart at 'Death august and royal'. After the chorus reflects on these sentiments the tempo changes to a march as the innocent go to war but slackens again for Binyon's now immortal verse that at the time had yet to achieve its modern status. Elgar changed the order of words in the first line to 'They shall not grow old' from Binyon's more resonant 'They shall grow not old'. Binyon does not seem to have objected.

The emotional temperature increases as the music moves, *crescendo poco a poco*, towards the climax *fff grandioso* and the stillness that follows as the chorus intones the final bars. We have arrived at an English Valhalla of exceptional sweetness populated anew but remaining known 'to the innermost heart of their own land'. In a few minutes Binyon and Elgar created a profound meditation on war, death and hope. There is, despite Arras, the Somme and Passchendaele, 'music in the midst of desolation'.

### ***With Proud Thanksgiving***

In 1919 a temporary cenotaph was erected in Whitehall for the Peace Day events of July. This was at the request of the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, freshly returned to London after the signing of the Peace of Versailles on 28 June. Designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, it was constructed from wood and plaster but, such was the enthusiasm for his design, that the Government agreed to erect a permanent structure that would be unveiled by King George V on the second anniversary of the Armistice on 11 November. This would be part of a short ceremony prior to the main event of the day: the solemn service of interment in Westminster Abbey for the body of the Unknown Warrior that had been brought from Boulogne to Dover the previous day aboard the destroyer HMS *Verdun*. The coffin was taken to London by train where it lay guarded overnight alongside platform eight of Victoria Station.

The following morning, through one of the largest crowds to throng the capital, the body travelled on a gun-carriage via Hyde Park Corner, the Mall and Whitehall before coming to rest in front of the Cenotaph. In the event little music was played during the short ceremony which began at 10.40 a.m. as the King faced the Cenotaph. Behind him stood his sons in uniform, politicians and representatives of the Empire. The gun – carriage came to rest and the King placed a wreath on the coffin. The choir and band sang and played the Hymn *O God our help in ages past* and the Archbishop of Canterbury led the Lord's Prayer. At 11 a.m. Big Ben began to strike the hour and on the last note the King pressed the button that released the flags covering the Cenotaph. At the end of two minutes silence the King laid a wreath at the foot of the Cenotaph. The Princes, politicians and dignitaries then placed their wreaths and fell in behind the gun-carriage as it moved off to Westminster Abbey to the sound of Chopin's 'Funeral March' for the service of interment which would take place at 11.20 a.m.

Towards the end of 1919 Elgar had been commissioned by The League of Arts (to which the work is dedicated) to provide a choral work for the unveiling ceremony. On 5 May 1920 the *Worcester Herald* reported the commission and added that: 'it is hoped that on the occasion of the

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63 Michael Kennedy: *Britten* (London: J.M. Dent, 1981), 279.



**Fig.5: A National Service of Remembrance at the Cenotaph in the 1920s.**

unveiling every Choir in London – both Church and Secular – will take part in the ceremony ...’. Elgar turned to his setting of ‘For the Fallen’ as the basis of his material, shortening Binyon’s poem to almost half its length by omitting verses 3, 4 and 6. He also changed the first word of verse 7 from ‘But’ to ‘For’.

It is clear that he was thinking about his setting early in 1920 as a diary entry of 13 January shows: ‘Worked on Cenotaph stuff’. However, it was obvious that an orchestral accompaniment would not be possible for an out-door ceremony and Frank Winterbottom (1861-1929), a Professor of Instrumentation at the Royal School of Military Music at Kneller Hall in South-West London, made an arrangement of Elgar’s score for Military Band. Prior to his appointment to Kneller Hall in 1910, Winterbottom was a bandmaster with the Plymouth Division of the Royal Marines.

So Elgar’s music was not required for what turned out to be a simple ceremony that was a prelude to the main event of the day, the burial of the Unknown Warrior: a moment of national catharsis. In March 1921 Elgar heard from his publishers (Novello & Co.) that *With Proud Thanksgiving* was required, after all. It would be performed as part of a Royal Choral Society concert to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Royal Albert Hall, and it would ‘have to be scored for an ordinary Orchestra’. It was this version, therefore, that was premièred on 7 May 1921.

Using much of the material from ‘For the Fallen’, which was largely composed in the minor, Elgar reworks this into the major in *With Proud Thanksgiving*. Listeners familiar with ‘For the Fallen’ are drawn into a different world, as a consequence. Elgar’s use of timpani, as the work opens, is immediately arresting and it seems clear that he had re-thought the sound for *With Proud Thanksgiving* which is markedly different to that of ‘For the Fallen’. This is not just down to the use of the major key, for no doubt his use of the military band influenced the new version which in turn would have been determined by the need for an out-door performance. This is far removed from the stately march of sorrow that begins ‘For the Fallen’ which may be ‘the spirit, not of England, but of Elgar ... offering a work conceived and sketched at a time when all thoughts were of victory, not compassion ... offering instead a much nobler sentiment, sincere and enduring’<sup>64</sup>.

If these sentiments are compromised in *With Proud Thanksgiving* the work, nevertheless, has a sincerity that is immediately appealing even as we miss the spaciousness of the profound meditation that Elgar created in ‘For the Fallen’. Composed largely in the minor ‘For the Fallen’ managed a balance between solace and anger whilst *With Proud Thanksgiving*, reworked into the major, is less subtle and lacks the profundity of the earlier work. Nevertheless, Elgar changes key to E major for the third verse thereby adding to the poignancy of the words. *With Proud Thanksgiving* is the forgotten offspring of *The Spirit of England*: ignored at birth and rarely performed since; although the BBC broadcast it on occasions between the two World Wars. However, with Elgar introducing some new music at the beginning and notably at the words: ‘But where our desires are and our hopes profound ...’ he offered, albeit briefly, something new to a nation grieving still.

### *Arthur, A Tragedy*

As we have seen Binyon attempted to interest Elgar in setting other works of his, most notably his *Peace Ode* of 1918. However, it was the appeal of the story of King Arthur which eventually stimulated the composer’s interest. The tale, as told by Sir Thomas Malory in his *Le Morte*

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64 John Norris, ‘The Spirit of Elgar’ in Lewis Foreman (editor), *Oh My Horses! Elgar and the Great War*, (Rickmansworth: Elgar Enterprises, 2001), 262.

*d'Arthur* six hundred years ago, has at its heart characters who reflect the best and worst of the human condition. Much of what is good is turned to dust as flawed heroes and a villain in Mordred circle around the King and either die or are banished. Binyon draws on Malory's tales (largely the final two parts) and paints an austere, subtly shaded world drained of colour: the consequences of passion already played out. Guenevere and Launcelot may embrace but they do not seem to touch; their physical relationship is in the past even though it is their adultery that destroys Arthur and his kingdom.<sup>65</sup>

Malory juggles time, distance and place and Binyon in his adaptation does too, replacing the stylized rituals of the court with his version of the story. In so doing he creates a pervading atmosphere of sadness that is only alleviated twice; first by the coarse attempt of Mordred to expose Guenevere and Launcelot and then through the battle before Joyous Gard.

Binyon's *Arthur* seemed to be a genuine stimulus as a steady if small stream of works subsequently emerged from Elgar's pen as he moved towards the attempt at large-scale composition once more. Anthony Payne, in his performing version of Elgar's third symphony, incorporated some of the music from *Arthur* in the second and fourth movements, in accordance with Elgar's intentions. In his music for *Arthur* Elgar rekindled the 'heroic melancholy' of *Grania and Diarmid* from 1901 as he writes for a lost England; the reality of the loss heightened by the thousands that had died in the mud of Flanders five or more years before. Elgar's music is more melancholic than heroic and matches the mood of the play as conveyed by Guenevere in her last speech mourning the King and the passing of his world:

They are fallen, those famous ones  
Who made this kingdom glorious, they are fallen  
About their King, they have yielded up their strength  
And beauty and valour.

Binyon also acknowledges a world still vivid in the final scene:

Cloister and ante-chapel both are filled;  
And still they bring them in, the dying and dead.  
Never was seen such slaughter in the world.

As far as we know the orchestra consisted of thirteen or fourteen players: Flute (doubling piccolo), Clarinet in B flat, two Cornets in B flat (doubling Trumpet in B flat), Trombone, Percussion (Elgar wrote 'Drums etc': Timpani, Triangle, Side Drum, Cymbal, Bass Drum, Tambourine, Gong, Bell in E), Harp, Two First Violins, One Second Violin and one each Viola, Cello Bass and piano. Ben Palmer, who has edited the score, advises that 'the piano part is never independent and may well have been used to 'cue in' instruments missing from certain performances. From the markings Elgar added to the manuscript (he conducted the performances from this score). It looks likely that not all the musicians were present for all the performances of the music for eight of the nine scenes.' Binyon dedicated *Arthur* to the actor-manager Sir John Martin-Harvey and his wife.

As the play ends, the King's body lies awaiting the 'three sad Queens [that] should fetch King Arthur home across the water of Avalon to his rest.' As the convent bell tolls, Guenevere reflects on the consequences of her actions. Lynned, a nun, sends Arthur's body on its way as darkness envelops the stage. 'After a pause the gloom melts, gradually revealing a wide distance of moonlit

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65 Binyon's spelling of the names of characters in *Arthur* is maintained in these notes.

water over which glides a barge, bearing King Arthur, and the three Queens sorrowing over him, to the island of Avalon.’ For us the myth of King Arthur still resonates: his name embedded in the English imagination; a name that is almost redolent of a time when a leader would make all well, a time when black was black and white was white. It would be a time when a *once and future king* might emerge and secure a golden future: a better time. As the tolling bell accompanies the solemn procession to Avalon, Elgar’s music suggests that hope for an Arthurian resurrection is slim indeed.

### *Carillon*

Towards the end of 1914 Elgar set the poem *Carillon* by the Belgian émigré poet Emile Cammaerts (1876–1953) that commemorated the fate of Belgium through the metaphor of the destroyed bell towers of Flanders. In 1942, during another war, Laurence Binyon contemplated the silencing of the church bells that would be rung again when peace was declared. Set within Elgar’s 1914 composition, Binyon obtained Cammaerts’s consent to publish a new version of *Carillon* to which Elgar’s publisher Elkin and Co. also assented. Binyon avoids the passion, grief and anger that inhabits Cammaerts’s poem and, instead, offers a reflection on his country and his longing for peace: a peace when the bells would ring again; a peace he would not live to see.

Over all this home-land of our fathers  
The bells are dumb.  
Far down the years, far down forgotten centuries  
Their floating echoes come, –  
Voices that mingled with the unresting roar  
Of cities, and from vale and upland called.  
By meadow and sea shore,  
Far and familiar, old and new,  
Where hamlets nest about an ancient tower  
And generations sleep beneath the yew.

They failed not, sure as to the seasons true  
The springing and the falling of the leaf, –  
Peal of joy, toll of grief.  
But now the belfry must forgo its chime;  
The bells are vowed to silence. For this time  
They wait their hour.

No more with dancing clamour on the air  
The chimes resound and ring.  
Like those who sleep, the silent bells are there,  
Like those who sleep, like those who dream.  
Sand only dreams of memory can bring  
The old sound near,  
The tossing music and the ordered swing  
To fancy’s ear.

Over all the land the bells are waiting  
The longed for day  
When the vow shall be accomplished and the darkness be turned away –  
The day of the deliverance of the nations,

Loosening those tongues of bronze  
To shake the air with jubilant vibrations  
From coast to coast in chiming antiphons,  
When city and hamlet hear from throbbing towers  
The silence burst and blossom in festal flowers  
Of sound, of sound that swells  
Triumphant into torrents of thanksgiving  
Released at last, the living,  
Exulting resurrection of the bells.

Triumphant into torrents of thanksgiving  
Released at last, the living,  
Exulting resurrection of the bells.

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It is difficult to understand why Binyon's poetry has disappeared almost completely from view. In his time he was a considerable figure; his death being announced by the BBC as part of its 9 p.m. news bulletin. It is true that long, discursive poems are unfashionable nowadays but that should not obscure his other work. Perhaps it was the later awfulness of World War II and its legacy that helped consign Binyon's writing into obscurity. The poems that form *The Winnowing Fan* with their patrician view of suffering and certainty of the struggle to come no doubt failed to be in sympathy with the world of Labour's Britain in 1945 and beyond. Nevertheless, Binyon's poetry has clung on through one verse; but that is hardly helped by the annual Festival of Remembrance held in the Royal Albert Hall. Binyon's poem is now subjected to the sort of forgettable arrangement that suits the heavily 'miked' singing of the likes of Katherine Jenkins. Now, or at least for 2018, would not *With Proud Thanksgiving* be the ideal music for the event?

Perhaps *The Spirit of England* lacks the universality of Elgar's other works and, certainly, its title discourages international performances. However, although offering support to the reader and listener it is also about England in 1914: her innocence, responsibilities and hopes for the future. Binyon's words refer only obliquely to the enemy and this means his verse could be for any enemy at any time. It is only at the long-delayed setting of verse six in 'The Fourth of August' that Elgar allows his anger to show through. This implied universality is maintained with no references to religion or appeal to 'God' that He takes sides. This detachment turned out to be in tune with the post-war views of those who would wish to commemorate the dead.

If 'For the Fallen' is the finest wartime setting of a poem it also looked forward to the work of the composers and poets who would try and express their wartime experiences after the war ended. The fact that it reflects a different world does not diminish its impact or its importance. That the setting eclipsed Rootham's (as he feared) does not detract from its achievement notwithstanding any feelings Rootham may have carried thereafter. We, those who listen, are the richer, as Elgar wrote music that is neither sentimental nor pathetic. In so doing he became, briefly, the musical 'laureate of the nation's grief', as Binyon surely recognised when he heard Elgar's music joined to his words for the first time: he felt 'as if it was England singing'. For those who could listen to 'For the Fallen' in 1916 they would have realised that for a moment at a time of greatest need a poet and a composer had made this possible.

### *Acknowledgements*

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