

The Elgar Society JOURNAL



100 YEARS AGO...

MARCH 2000

Vol.11 No.4

KING OLAF TRYGGVASON AND SIR EDWARD ELGAR

Gillian Fellows-Jensen

[This paper is a slightly revised version of a talk given to the London Branch of the Elgar Society, and to the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters in Copenhagen, in November 1996. An edited version first appeared in *Manchester Memories, the Memoirs and Proceedings of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society*, vol 136, 1997-98, and is printed here by kind permission. Dr Fellows-Jensen is a member of the Institute of Name Research at the University of Copenhagen.]

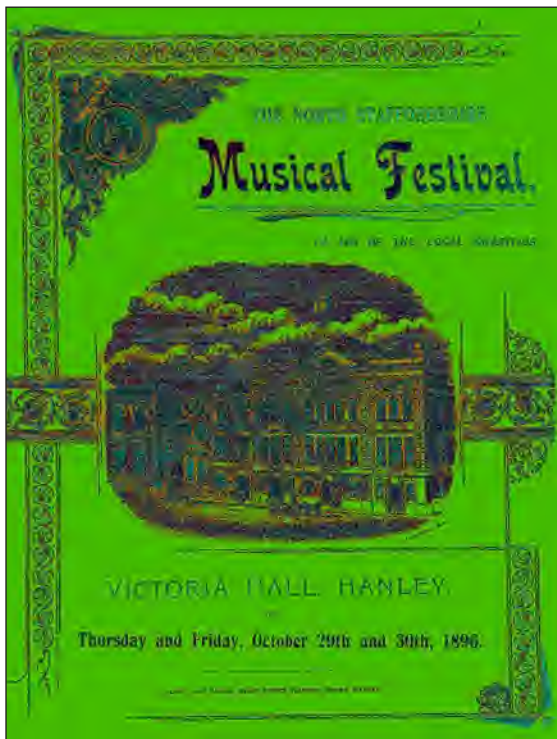
The first performance of Sir Edward Elgar's choral-cantata *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf* took place at the North Staffordshire Musical Festival in the Victoria Hall, Hanley, on the morning of Friday 30 October 1896, with the composer himself conducting the Festival Choir and Orchestra. On Saturday 2 November 1996 I had the privilege of attending the centenary memorial performance in the same hall, at which Donald Hunt conducted the BBC Philharmonic and the Ceramic City Choir and the Elgar Chorale of Worcester.

The first reaction of a Scandinavian, even of a Scandinavian by adoption like me, on learning that Sir Edward Elgar had written a cantata about King Olaf Tryggvason, the missionary king and Viking, was one of pride that a figure from the Scandinavian past should have been a source of inspiration for a great non-Scandinavian composer. On second thoughts, however, I began to wonder why the Viking period should have attracted an English composer in the reign of Queen Victoria. Today the Vikings are exceedingly popular abroad, thanks in large part to the many splendid exhibitions that have been held in Europe and North America since 1980, but they were not as familiar to the English in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

English students of Elgar's works seem also to have been puzzled at his selection of King Olaf as the subject of his first really long composition. Some of them, beginning with his first biographer Robert J Buckley in 1904, have gone so far as to suggest that he may at one time have believed his surname to be of Scandinavian origin and that this might have prompted him to select a Scandinavian theme.¹ As an outside observer, I would beg to differ on two grounds. I put forward my first objection with some diffidence, as I lack a thorough knowledge of the diaries and correspondence of Elgar and his contemporaries, but I do not feel that the remarks quoted in the biographies I have read point in this direction. My second reason I put forward with rather more confidence, since it is based on the name itself and I have spent a lifetime working on the forms taken by Scandinavian personal names in England.

Let us look first at Elgar's own comments. In a letter to Frank Webb dated 19 November 1889, in which he explained that he had felt it necessary to let his pianoforte piece *Salut d'Amour* be published with this French title to make it more acceptable to the international market, he commented: "I *don't like* doing it as my own name is so "peremptorily" English...but I can't afford to wait 'till the English is the universal language & *don't intend* to if I could".² In December 1905 Elgar's daughter Carice was to attend a fancy-dress ball and Elgar wrote to his patron Leo Frank Schuster that she "will personify her own name - Elgar - the fairy spear. Can I hire for her, *for little* price, a nice looking spear with an electric light at the end which she can put on & off?".³ Finally, in 1907 Elgar was in correspondence with the Malvern architect and designer Troyte Griffith about a gravestone for his parents and wrote: "As we bear an old

¹ Pope, Michael: 'King Olaf and the English Choral Tradition' in *Elgar Studies*, ed Raymond Monk (Aldershot, 1990) p 57



The programme of the first performance of Elgar's Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf at the Victoria Hall, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent on 30 October 1896 [The Elgar Birthplace Museum]



Saxon name wd. it be too fanciful, if practicable, to take some Saxon thing for a model or rather type?'.⁴ These three statements reveal clearly that Elgar believed his surname to be English or Saxon and to mean 'elf spear'.

As a professional name-scholar, I must stress here that it is extremely unwise to discuss the etymology of a modern English surname on the basis of its present form. Nothing can be said with certainty about the origin of a name unless it can be traced back through the centuries to the first bearer. This is, of course, a counsel of perfection and rarely possible to put into practice. The name *Elgar*, however, is a fairly straightforward case and it does not seem too irresponsible to me to assume that it goes back to a Germanic compound name whose first element was the word for 'elf' and the second the word for 'spear', as realised, of course, by Elgar himself. It was wrong, however, of Elgar to try to wrest a meaning from the compound. The Germanic peoples employed a limited number of elements in name-forming and played the changes on these, to express relationship among other things. A child called *Ælfgr-r*, for example, might have had a father called *Æðelgr-r* and a mother called *Ælfhild*. This kind of compound name was employed by all the Germanic peoples in the pre-Conquest period and in theory the name *Elgar* could be of Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian or Frankish origin, although the form it takes today suggests that it was in fact an Anglo-Saxon name. The spelling *Elgar* is recorded as a surname in Kent, the home of Elgar's forebears, and elsewhere in southern and western England. A London moneyer in the reign of Edward the Confessor was called ELFGAR and, according to Domesday Book, tenants holding land in Hereford and Suffolk in 1065 were named *Elgar*, spelt exactly as the modern surname.

Elgar's forename *Edward* is also a purely English formation, a compound name of the same type as Elgar. The two elements in Edward are *E-d-* meaning 'riches, prosperity' and *-ward* meaning 'keeper, protector'. Edward Elgar was thus one of the very few Englishmen in modern times to bear a name that was so genuinely Anglo-Saxon. Ironically enough, his middle name *William*, another of these Germanic compound names, made up of the elements *Will(i)o-* 'will' and *-helm* 'helmet', is a Frankish name that was first brought to England by the Normans and subsequently became one of the most popular of all names for boys, remaining almost constantly in the top ten in England until the present day. The introduction to England of Norman names like William sounded the death knell for the names introduced earlier by Anglo-Saxons and Vikings, with Edward, with its royal connections, being one of the very few Anglo-Saxon names to survive in use.

Elgar was not, of course, alone in the nineteenth century in deriving inspiration from the heroic literature of the North. His older contemporary in Germany, Richard Wagner (1813-83) had composed the tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen* between 1853 and 1874 to texts that he wrote himself, based on old Germanic myths. Elgar, who had longed in his youth to be able to study music in Leipzig, paid frequent visits to Germany when it became possible, the first time at the end of 1882, when he heard performances of *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin* and the *Parsifal* Prelude. From 1892 to 1895 Elgar and his wife Alice spent their summer holidays in Germany and each time Elgar attended as many performances of Wagner's operas as possible. He was observed to be taking copious notes of what he had heard and to be spending hours poring over these in his rooms. It seems certain that Wagner's Germanic operas were one of the sources of inspiration for *King Olaf*. It was at the period when Elgar was arranging the *Parsifal* 'Good Friday' music and rehearsing it with the choir of Worcester High School that the first intimation of

² Kennedy, Michael : *Portrait of Elgar* (Oxford, 1968) p 27

³ Anderson, Robert : *Elgar* (London, 1993) p 73

⁴ *Op cit.*, p 80

the composition of *King Olaf* appeared in Alice Elgar's diary, where she noted that "E. wrote Sagas all day".⁵

Wagner's immediate inspiration, however, had been the old Germanic myths from the Migration period, recorded in German, for example, in the heroic epic *Nibelungenlied*, composed about 1200, and first recorded in Old Norse in the Eddic poems and sagas such as *Völsunga saga* and *Thiðreks saga* in the course of the thirteenth century. It was the same body of material in Latin versions that had given the impulse to Thomas Gray's two Norse poems published in 1768: 'The Descent of Odin', based on the *Völuspá* or 'Sybil's prophecy', and 'The Fatal Sisters', a version of a poem about the Valkyries composed in praise of an unnamed young king and only surviving in *Njáls saga*, of which the earliest manuscript dates from about 1300.

Sir Walter Scott's knowledge of Norse literature was quite extensive and he even had some slight acquaintance with the Norse language.⁶ His library contained many books on Northern history as well as the Danish editions of Icelandic sagas that had been prepared by the Arnamagnæan Commission, the select body that was and is still responsible for the well-being and correct use of the Icelandic manuscripts belonging to the University of Copenhagen and of which I now have the honour to be a member. In 1814 Scott published an abstract of the *Eyrbyggja saga* 'The saga of the men of Eyrr', based on the edition produced for the Commission by Grímur Thorkelin in 1787. The compiler of this saga shows a particular interest in the supernatural and in antiquarian lore. It was incidents from *Eyrbyggja saga* whose influence on Scott can be seen in such works as his novel *The Pirate* from 1822 and his six-canto poem *Harold the Dauntless* from 1817. Neither of these works is among Scott's most successful ones or particularly familiar to modern readers but there are also traces of Scandinavian interest in one of Scott's most popular novels, *Ivanhoe*, from 1815, with its concentration on the struggle between traditionalism and new ways. In the light of our interest in *King Olaf*, it is worth noting that Scott's poem *Harold the Dauntless* is concerned with the battle between paganism and Christianity and its climax is a battle between Harold and a demon-Odin figure.

William Morris had a lively interest in Norse literature, among so many other subjects. By 1868, when he first met the Icelander Eiríkur Magnússon, he had acquired a fairly wide knowledge of Norse literature, having read Scott's abstract of *Eyrbyggja saga* among other things. Morris and Magnússon were to cooperate in the translation of many works. In 1890 they began on a major translation project, *The Saga Library*, which was to consist of 15 volumes, although only six were published. The translation of *Heimskringla* appeared in three parts in 1893, 1894 and 1895. Some of Morris's own work was also directly inspired by Norse literature, notably the epic *Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs* from 1876. Again it was the old Germanic myths that seem to have provided the greatest inspiration.

The Morris-Magnússon version of *Heimskringla* appeared too late for it to have been the inspiration for Elgar's *King Olaf*. In any case I am inclined to doubt whether Morris's language would have appealed to Elgar. The basic translation was provided by Magnússon and this was very heavily emended by Morris, often becoming much less comprehensible in the process of conversion into Morris's highly idiosyncratic representation of Norse idiom. Morris's archaic style has been much criticised but it has its defenders, who point out that he recognised that the sagas needed a language of their own to give them their own surroundings and life and that Morris was seeking to transmit to his readers his own experience of them

⁵ *Op cit.*, p 29

⁶ Ash, Marinell: "So much that was new to us": Scott in Shetland', in *Essays in Shetland History*, ed B E Crawford (Lerwick, 1984) pp 193-207

and that since he was a scholar and a poet, this experience was well-worth transmitting.⁷

The English translation of *Olafs saga Tryggvasonar* that Elgar might have seen and used was that in the three-volume translation of *Heimskringla* that was published by Dr Samuel Laing in 1844 and is the one to which Thomas Carlyle acknowledges indebtedness in his *Early Kings of Norway* from 1875. Laing was an Orcadian who had been an officer under Sir John Moore on his Spanish expedition but returned to England after the Battle of Corunna and devoted the rest of his life to antiquarian and social pursuits. His chief literary work was the translation of *Heimskringla*, which is considered to be fairly accurate and readable, although bearing the stamp of its period.⁸ The translation was published in a limited edition, however, and Elgar's *King Olaf* is only indebted to it indirectly, in so far as it was the source for Longfellow's *The Saga of King Olaf*.

The American scholar and poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-82) was one of Elgar's favourite authors. This literary taste had been cultivated and encouraged by his mother. Elgar recalled that it was from Longfellow's prose romance *Hyperion* that he gained his first impression of the great Germanic nations. Today, Longfellow is probably mainly known in England for his poem *Hiawatha* from 1855, which reproduces American Indian stories, but he was very influential in introducing the Americans to the Scandinavian past and Scandinavian antiquities through his poem *The Skeleton in Armor*, published in 1840. After his appointment to a post in Modern Languages at Harvard in 1834, Longfellow had been given permission to spend a year or eighteen months in Europe "for the purpose of a more perfect attainment of the German" and although a knowledge of Scandinavian languages and literatures was not required of him, he made plans to spend some months in Stockholm and Copenhagen. He arrived in Copenhagen on 17 June 1835. He found the city desolate and unattractive and "a feeling of gloom and loneliness" came over him as he looked at the grass growing between the paving-stones.⁹ The subsequent journey by sea to Gothenburg and onwards by coach to Stockholm was tiresome, and although Longfellow was fascinated by the long summer twilight, he found that the literary life of the city was at a low ebb in the summer and he was also worried about the health of his pregnant wife, not without cause, as she died in the following November. To one of his friends he wrote, "We have now been about two months in Sweden, and shall leave it without regret in about a fortnight, to return no more forever - I trust...The rain it raineth every day; and the air is like November".¹⁰ He had not met in Stockholm scholars who could initiate him into the exploration of Scandinavia's ancient history in old books and manuscripts. He did, however, acquire some knowledge of Swedish language and literature. The return to Copenhagen on 10 September marked a great improvement for him. His wife Mary noted in her diary that "coming from Sweden any place would be quite delightful". Longfellow himself attended a performance of Adam Oehlenschläger's historical tragedy *Erik og Abel* on the evening of his arrival and his own diary-entry for the day reads: "The Danes have risen fifty per cent in my esteem, there is a change in the spirit of our dream".¹¹ In Copenhagen Longfellow now at last found a group of scholars engaged in the study of the past. The city was at that time the great centre of research in Icelandic philology and literature. The Royal Library and the University Library, then housed in the loft of the church of the Holy Trinity, adjoining the famous Round Tower, contained the greatest collections of Icelandic manuscripts, including the Arnarnagnæan Collection, and scholars such as Rasmus Rask, Finnur Magnússon, Svend Grundtvig and Carl Christian Rafn had acquired a wide reputation for Danish philological research. Rafn gave Longfellow lessons in Icelandic in return for information about the North American Indians. In conversation with booksellers and librarians, Longfellow gained such an enthusiasm for Scandinavian literature that, in spite

⁷ Johnston, George: 'Translating the sagas into English', in *Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Studies 1972* (Copenhagen, 1973) pp 7-16. Quirk, Randolph: 'Dasent, Morris, and the problems of translation', in *Saga-Book of the Viking Society XIV* (1953-57) pp 64-77

⁸ Whaley, Diana: *Heimskringla. An Introduction* (London, 1991) p 49

⁹ Hilen, Andrew: *Longfellow and Scandinavia - a Study of the Poet's Relationship with the*

of his very superficial acquaintance with the various Northern languages, he began work on several translations. The first of these, made a few days after his arrival in Copenhagen, was of the Danish National Anthem 'Kong Christian stod ved højen Mast' (King Christian stood by the lofty mast). He also translated a ballad, 'Den udkaarne Ridder' (The elected knight), which referred to the first preaching of Christianity in the North. After only a fortnight in Copenhagen, however, Longfellow boarded a steamer for Kiel and thus concluded his one-hundred day stay in the North.

Longfellow never pretended to have become an expert on Scandinavian languages and literature. Towards the end of his life he wrote, "My knowledge of *Icelandic Literature* is limited to the two Eddas, the *Heimskringla* and some of the Sagas". He had quite an extensive Scandinavian library but it only included one work in the original Icelandic, *Heimskringla* or *Konunga-Sögur* in the Stockholm edition from 1816-29, and he had not even cut the pages of two of the three volumes.¹² His knowledge of Icelandic literature was acquired from translations into English, German, Swedish, and Danish. In 1838 he felt inspired to write a poem on the deeds of the First Viking to cross to America, a project that came to nothing, and in 1839 he sketched a major project for a poem to be called 'the Saga of Hakon Jarl', possibly inspired by Oehlenschläger's tragedy *Hakon Jarl* from 1808, certainly by Tegnér's *Frithiofs saga* from 1820-25.¹³ While working on Hakon Jarl, Longfellow consulted the first volume of the Swedish text of *Heimskringla* and read carefully *Håkon den Godes Saga*, *Harald Gråfälls och Håkon Jarls Saga* and *Olaf Tryggvason's Saga*. He noted down a tentative outline for the poem, which was never written, but the outline foreshadows the form and content of *The Saga of King Olaf*, in which the hero is characterised through a number of independent episodes, and one of the projected episodes, *Bonde Iron-beard*, was later incorporated into *King Olaf*.

Ten years later, in 1849, Longfellow composed 'The Challenge of Thor' as a prologue to the second part of a Christus trilogy that had been planned as early as 1841. It was the inspiration of "a very black and dismal day" in 1849 that led him to put Thor's challenge down in verse.¹⁴ This poem lay forgotten among his notes for ten years until, on 25 February 1859, the thought struck Longfellow that "a very good Poem might be written on the 'Saga of King Olaf, who converted the North to Christianity", with 'The Challenge of Thor' serving as a prelude. He then read *King Olaf Tryggvason's Saga* in Samuel Laing's translation of *Heimskringla* and began to meditate upon the composition of a "series of ballads". By March of the following year, he had arranged the titles of twenty of the poem's twenty-two cantos and in the following winter he completed most of the saga in less than a month of concentrated work. The lyric 'A Little Bird in the Air', was first composed in 1862. Laing was Longfellow's principal authority but he would also seem to have used other works and there are direct borrowings of refrains from well-known Danish ballads, notably "Dead rides Sir Morten of Fogelsang".

The Saga of King Olaf was published as the fifth story in Longfellow's *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, where it is narrated by the Musician, a character based on the famous Norwegian violinist, Ole Bull, who was a friend of Longfellow's.¹⁵ It is considered to be one of the more successful of Longfellow's poetic works, perhaps because the subject compelled this rather anaemic writer to make some show of force and violence. His portrait of Olaf, however, is sanitised and idealised. Olaf is "young and beautiful and tall" and the violence of his missionary activity is somewhat played down. The poem remains a series of ballads and is neither a drama nor an epic.

Northern Languages and Literature (Hamden, Connecticut, 1970; repr. from *Yale Studies in English* 107 (1947)) p 112

¹⁰ *Op cit.*, p 20

¹¹ *Op cit.*, p 139

¹² *Op cit.*, p 89

There are twenty-two cantos or episodes in Longfellow's *Saga* and although the poem seems to be very long, it is a considerably abbreviated version of the *Saga* in *Heimskringla* and in Laing's translation, where there are no fewer than 123 chapters. Longfellow tells us that the volume of sagas which was his source is called *Heimskringla*. This is a cycle of sixteen sagas telling the history of the kings of Norway from their mythical divine origins down to 1177. The general opinion until quite recently was that it was compiled by the great Icelandic author Snorri Sturluson, who died in 1241, murdered in his own cellar. Recent research, however, suggests that Snorri was not the author and that the compilation was made later in the thirteenth century.¹⁶ The title *Heimskringla* was given to the cycle at least as early as the seventeenth century from the first two words *Kringla heimsins* (the circle of the world) in the main manuscript at a time when the first leaf had already been lost. Only a single leaf now survives of this, the oldest known manuscript, which was probably written between 1250-70.¹⁷ The rest of this manuscript went up in flames in the Great Fire of Copenhagen in 1728, but its text survives in good transcripts in the Arnamagnæan collection. To judge from the length of the sagas of Olaf Trygvason, one might think that we have much reliable information about the life and exploits of the king, but this is unfortunately not the case.

The Olaf of the *Heimskringla* saga is an archetypal Viking prince, a man of royal blood who had been expelled from his kingdom by powerful rivals while still a baby, who acquired a reputation as a Viking by raiding far and wide, and finally returns to Norway to claim his kingdom. With the exception of some scaldic poems which may have some authority but are not very communicative, the Scandinavian sources for his life are all rather late sagas and many of the episodes in these sagas seem likely to have been borrowed from the lives of other heroes real or imaginary. Many of the episodes have features which immediately rouse the suspicions of anyone acquainted with saga literature. There is only space for me to cite a few examples here.

The saga states, for example, that Olaf was born after his father had been killed and while his mother was in hiding. It was the custom in ancient Scandinavia, however, for a son born after his father's death to be given his father's name but Olaf was in fact called after his father's father. One other source states that he was three years old when his mother fled with him after the murder of his father.

The saga tells that when Olaf was three years old, he was captured by Estonian pirates and given to an Estonian named *Klerkón*, who killed the boy's foster-father and sold him to another man called *Klerk*, in exchange for a goat. When Olaf is twelve years old, he comes across *Klerkón* by chance in Novgorod and kills him with his axe. He is subsequently made the leader of a band of Vikings and begins to ravage Europe. The names *Klerkón* and *Klerk* have an artificial ring about them and it seems likely that these characters were invented by the story-teller to liven up his narrative and present the hero as a man of superhuman strength.

There is an expansive account in the saga of Olaf's conversion to Christianity and his baptism in the Scilly Islands. This is mentioned briefly by Longfellow and Elgar. It has been pointed out that this story ultimately goes back to the account of the conversion of the Gothic king Totila by St Benedict of Nursia, as recorded in the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, and that a similar story is attached to Saint Olaf in the Legendary Saga of this king.

¹³ *Op cit.*, p 91

¹⁴ *Op cit.*, p 98

¹⁵ *Op cit.*, p 103

Olaf's relationships with women play a significant role in the sagas, the poem and the cantata. Two of his alliances are omitted by Longfellow and hence Elgar: an early, apparently happy but short-lived marriage to *Geira*, a daughter of the King of Wendland, and an English episode that bears all the marks of being legendary, in which *Gyða*, the sister (in reality the daughter) of the Irish king, Olaf Kváran, selects Olaf Tryggvason to be her champion in single combat against an importunate suitor from among a large number of well-dressed men, even though he is wearing his bad-weather clothes. The same story is told about Ingegerd, daughter of the King of Russia, and the legendary hero *Göngu-Hrólfr* in his saga.

The three remaining alliances are described by Longfellow and included by Elgar, although the composer changed the order of appearance of the two first, perhaps for structural reasons. Both the saga and Longfellow introduce Sigrid first. After being accepted as a Norwegian king in 995 on the death of Jarl Hakon, Olaf asked for the hand of Sigrid the Haughty, the widow and mother of Swedish kings, presumably to cement an alliance with Sweden. Sigrid, who was probably considerably older than Olaf, is a stereotype virago, and Olaf's suit was unavailing, for she was unwilling to renounce the heathen faith of her fathers and Olaf was unwilling to marry a heathen dog. Longfellow adds a jibe at her age: "A faded old woman, a heathenish jade", and Elgar's collaborator Acworth elaborates this to "Thou hast not beauty, thou hast not youth"; but in the medieval period kings seeking to strengthen their hold on the throne were no doubt prepared to accept an ageing queen as part of the bargain.

There are close parallels between this episode and that in the heroic cycle involving Sigurd/Siegfried and Brynhild, in which the disappointed Brynhild eggs on her husband Gunnar to kill Sigurd, just as Sigrid's rage at Olaf's treatment of her leads her to egg on her husband, the Danish king, and son, the Swedish king, to kill him. It is not, in fact, certain that Sigrid the Haughty ever existed. She is not mentioned in any sources earlier than about 1200 and she may simply have been drawn into the story of Olaf to explain the formation of the alliance between Swedes, Danes and Norwegians that leads to his fall.

The Gudrun episode follows on the death of her father, Iron-Beard. To strengthen his position in the Trondhjem area, Olaf offered compensation to Iron-Beard's relations and the settlement agreed upon involved Olaf's marriage to Iron-Beard's daughter Gudrun. If Olaf's Christianity had been less muscular and more literary, he might have recalled the apocryphal tale of Judith and Holofernes and been more wary of taking a woman of the enemy into his bed. To give him his due, however, he was at least sufficiently on his guard on his wedding-night to awake in time to disarm Gudrun before she could stab him.

Olaf's final alliance, with Thyri, sister of Svein Forkbeard, King of Denmark, also ended in tragedy. According to the saga, Thyri had been forced against her will to marry the King of Wendland, who was not only a heathen but also an old man. After seven days of married life, during which she took no food or drink, Thyri escaped from Wendland with a faithful servant and made her way to Norway, where she sought refuge with King Olaf. Thyri was quick of tongue and good-looking and Olaf married her. The marriage can hardly be called happy, however, for Thyri complained constantly to Olaf about the loss of

¹⁶ Berger, Alan J : 'Heimskringla and the Compilations', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 114 (1999), pp 5-15

¹⁷ Karlsson, Stefán : 'Kringum Kringlu', *Árbók Landsbókasafns* 1976 pp 5-25

¹⁸ Fidjestøl, Bjarne : 'Óláfr Tryggvason the missionary - a literary portrait from the Middle Ages', in *Selected Papers*, ed Odd Einar Haugen and Else Mundal, translated by Peter Foote (Odense,

the lands in Wendland that had been her dowry. One spring day Olaf sought to comfort her by a present of a bouquet of angelica stalks. These stalks are quite decorative in a prickly sort of way. Angelica is very aromatic and its oil is used for flavouring a very tasty aquavit, but in Iceland the plant is simply considered to be a vegetable. The gift was a nice, if rather clumsy gesture but it hardly offered sufficient compensation to an ambitious woman who felt herself cheated of lands that were hers by rights. Olaf ought to have realised that he was asking for trouble, although he can perhaps not be blamed for not realising that Thyri was inveigling him into a hopeless conflict with a united opposition consisting of the king of Denmark, the Swedish king and the Norwegian Jarl Eirik.

Although it is perhaps not so immediately obvious, Olaf's missionary activities were, like his marriages, elements in his plan to strengthen his kingdom. With these, too, he was not particularly successful. There are, of course, Norwegians who consider that Olaf Tryggvason converted Norway to Christianity, while others think this was done by St Olaf, another muscular Christian, who reigned from about 1015 until his death in 1030 and had the good fortune to be proclaimed saint and to give his name to a ship in the DFDS fleet early in the twentieth century, to several streets in Norway and even to a hair-stylist and a pub. The Norwegian scholar Bjarne Fidjestøl, however, pointed out semi-seriously in a lecture that there are those who do not believe that either Olaf Tryggvason or St Olaf converted the Norwegians but would accord that honour to Hans Nielsen Hauge instead.¹⁸ Hauge was a revivalist lay preacher who died in 1824!

Any discussion of the conversion of Norway needs to take into account the chaotic political situation of that country towards the end of the tenth century. On his return to Norway in 995, Olaf did not only have to face attacks by organised armies but also the constant danger of ignominious death at the hand of a sniper. On re-reading his saga a year or two ago, I was struck by the similarity of the situation with that in the former Yugoslavia at the present time, a parallel that has also recently been noted by the Norwegian historian Kåre Lunden.¹⁹ He points out that nationalistic strife with a religious dimension is playing the role in ex-Yugoslavia that was played by the conflict between heathendom and Christianity in medieval Norway. For Olaf Tryggvason and later for St Olaf, the struggle to give Christianity a monopolistic position in Norway had the main aim of justifying a strong royal power and an organised state with a limited number of universal personal rights that would appeal to the poor farmers on whom the kings were dependent for military support. It is probably significant that when Olaf Tryggvason suppressed the sacrificial feasts to the heathen gods, he introduced in their place not only the solemn feasts at Christmas and Easter but also the beer-drinking on Midsummer Eve and the autumn ale-drinking at Michaelmas.

It seems likely to me that the compiler of *Heimskringla* based his story of Olaf Tryggvason on these two major themes related to his efforts to strengthen his kingdom - his diplomatic marriage alliances and his missionising. Various other episodes were drawn in from other semi-historical sources and Icelandic literature, both heroic poems and legendary sagas. This is not, of course, to deny that Olaf was a historical figure who actually played a role on the wider European stage.

He was probably born in about 968, and not 950 as sometimes claimed, and was chosen as king by the people of Trøndelag in 995. Eventually he christianised the entire coastal area of the country but did not gain much influence in the interior and the eastern parts. He died in the battle of Svold in 999/1000.

We even have a contemporary portrait of Olaf, for he was the first Norwegian king to mint coins and a stylised portrait of him with diadem and sceptre and hedgehog-hairdo adorns the obverse of the first coin. The head is surrounded by the inscription ONLAF REX NOR (Olaf king of Norway or the Norwegians). The reverse names the moneyer GODWINE MO NO (Godwine moneyer in Norway). It is a peculiar fact that regal coinages began in the three northern countries at more or less the same time, about 995, and an even

more peculiar one that the moneyer in all three cases bore the Anglo-Saxon name *Godwine*, a compound name of the same type as *Edward* and *Elgar* and, of course, *Olaf*. Now *Godwine* was a popular name in England at the end of the tenth century but it seems just too much of a coincidence for three moneyer *Godwines* to have emigra-ted to Scandinavia at the same time or for one single *Godwine* to have held an important administrative post as moneyer in all three countries at once. I have always been inclined to think that the inscriptions on the three coins are simply copies of part of the inscriptions on genuine English coins. It has been pointed out to me, however, that striking coins was a skilled and trusted occupation and there is, in fact, evidence for the presence of Anglo-Saxon moneyers in Denmark, so it is not impossible for one *Godwine* to have been ultimately responsible for the striking of coins for *Svein Forkbeard*, *Olaf Tryggvason* and *Olof Skötkonung*. One fact is incontrovertible, however; it is the same stylised portrait on each of the coins, even if the Swedish king faces right and the Danish and Norwegian kings face left. The coins are all, in fact, close imitations of the type of coin that was struck for King *Æthelred II* of England between c. 991 and c. 997 and the great *Danegeld* of 994 was probably paid in this coinage. I am therefore afraid that the portraits of *Olaf* and *Svein* and *Olof* are, in reality, merely degenerate versions of a portrait of *Æthelred*.²⁰

Olaf is mentioned by some reputable historical sources outside Scandinavia. *Adam of Bremen* was an eleventh-century German historian and canon of Bremen. The archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen had at that time authority over the church in Scandinavia. *Adam* wrote a history of the church of Hamburg, which was based partly on written Latin sources, partly on oral information from Archbishop *Adalbert* and the Danish king *Svein Estrithsen*, at whose court he had been the archbishop's envoy. The history is an important source of information about Scandinavia in the period 800-1072. *Adam's* major aim was to glorify the see of Hamburg and this unfortunately influences what he has to say about *Olaf Tryggvason*. He claims that *Olaf* was baptised by missionaries from Hamburg-Bremen, although he does note that others say that *Olaf* was converted by English missionaries. A significant piece of information is that *Olaf* was killed during an attack on the Danish and Swedish kings between *Skåne* and *Sjælland* where, according to *Adam*, the kings usually fought their sea-battles, a comment which makes one think that *Adam* is just assuming that this was where the battle took place, although commentators have suggested that the information might derive from *Svein Estrithsen*. *Adam* seems to be in doubt as to the state of *Olaf's* faith at the time of his death, recording that some say that he was a Christian, others that he was an apostate, but noting that all agreed that he was very interested in portents, oracles and divination from the flight of birds, a habit that gave him the nickname "crow's leg". It seems likely that *Adam* raised doubts about *Olaf's* faith to justify his unfortunate end.

Adam was writing about 70 years after *Olaf's* death, while the other significant foreign source, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, consists of annals kept in various monastic centres that provide a contemporary chronological account of events in England. Even here, however, we run into difficulties when trying to establish the truth about *Olaf*. One of the most famous battles fought between the English and the Vikings is the *Battle of Maldon*, which took place in 991 and is commemorated in a splendid Anglo-Saxon poem. The English army was assembled on the shore at Maldon, while the Viking band was on an island from which it was only possible to cross over to the mainland by a narrow causeway at low tide, as is still the case today. According to the poem, the Danes asked to be allowed to cross over and the English general, *Byrhtnoth*, an early exponent of the English doctrine of fair-play, gave them permission to do so. Commentators are in two minds as to whether this was an act of bravery or of hubris. At all events, *Byrhtnoth* and all his faithful retainers were slain and the Vikings were victorious. The poem is fragmentary and the Viking leader is not named but one version of the *Chronicle* says that he was called *Olaf* and goes on to record that the English king stood sponsor at this *Olaf's* confirmation, showing that the reference is to *Olaf Tryggvason*. *Olaf's* presence at this famous battle has long been one of the received facts of Viking history. The problem is, however, that other versions of the *Chronicle* date *Olaf's*

harrying in England and his confirmation to the year 994. As the English historian Simon Keynes has said recently, "To maintain that the viking army which invaded England in 991 was led by Olaf Tryggvason is thus to give oneself the benefit of the doubt, but such leaps of faith are the stuff of Anglo-Saxon history".²¹ As long ago as in 1937, Professor E V Gordon of Manchester concluded a study on Olaf Tryggvason and the Battle of Maldon with the words, "Olaf's presence at Maldon still remains a possibility. But it is no longer a probability".²² I have to confess that I have reluctantly decided to plump for 994 as the more likely date for Olaf's activities in England. For one thing, four versions of the *Chronicle* give this as the date and it seems most likely that the compiler of the other version has simply misdated Olaf's arrival in England. For another thing, after the account of Olaf's confirmation, at which King Æthelred stood sponsor and gave him royal gifts, the versions which date the episode to 994 note : "Olaf then promised, and has also kept his word, that he would never come again to England with warlike intent". This is not mentioned in the version which links Olaf with the Battle of Maldon, possibly because the compiler realised that this would make Olaf an oath-breaker on his new plundering raid in 994. The compilers of the other versions obviously link Olaf's keeping of his word with his confirmation. The more sceptical might perhaps think it was because the royal gifts, probably a nice, large portion of Danegeld, enabled Olaf to make a successful bid for the kingship of Norway. The even more sceptical have suggested that Æthelred's main motive in sponsoring Olaf in both senses of the word was to divert the attention of Svein Forkbeard from England - and in this he was successful for a time at least. If I might be allowed an aside on Olaf's name at this point, I should like to point out that the normal spelling of it in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is *Anlaf*. This suggests that in the period down to about 1000, the first vowel of the name was still heard as a nasalised *a* (the first element of the name was originally **anu-* 'ancestor'), although an alternative spelling *Unlaf* has been explained as a mistaken translation by the English of Ó as the negative prefix *un*, and if this explanation is correct, the *An-* spelling may simply be archaic. An alternative explanation of the *Unlaf*-form, however, is that *Anlaf* might have become confused with an Old English adjective *unlaf*, which is used to gloss Latin *postumus* 'born after the father's death', a description that would have been thought applicable to Olaf Tryggvason.²³ What is significant is that the name of St Olaf, the Norwegian king who died in 1030, is always spelt *Olaf* in the *Chronicle*, suggesting that there was some marked change in the pronunciation of the Norwegian name after the year 1000.

To return to the question of what we actually know about Olaf Tryggvason, the answer must unfortunately be "very little". We know that he raided England and made a treaty in 991 or 994 with King Æthelbert, promising to leave the country in peace and never to return with warlike intent, a promise that he would seem to have kept. We also know that he died at the Battle of Svold. I am deliberately ignoring the legendary reports that he survived this battle and fled to Wendland and subsequently to the Holy Land, Greece or Syria, where he entered a monastery. Such reports tend to flourish after important military disasters, from that of the survival of Harold Godwinson after the Battle of Hastings to that of Lord Kitchener after the sinking of the *Hampshire* in 1916.

I should like to conclude with a few words on the use Elgar made of the material he had to hand. Working from Longfellow's *The Saga of King Olaf*, he only had access to a comparatively small part of the matter of the saga in *Heimskringla*. Elgar needed to reduce the matter even further, however, and his neighbour

1997) p 201

¹⁹ Lunden, Kåre : 'Religionskiftet - Kva hamla det egentleg om?', in *Innsikt og Utsyn; Festskrift til Jørn Sandnes*, ed K Haarstad *et al* (Trondheim, 1996) pp 71-78

²⁰ Malmer, Brita : 'King Canute's Coinage in the Northern Countries'; the Dorothea Cooke Memorial Lecture in Northern Studies (London, 1974)

²¹ Keynes, Simon : 'The historical context of the Battle of Maldon', in *The Battle of Maldon AD*



The first coins to bear the names of the kings in Denmark, Norway and Sweden c.995.

Top :Svein of Denmark. Centre : Olaf of Norway. Bottom : Olof of Sweden.

The names of the moneyer on all three coins is Godwine.

[Reproduced with permission from

Tusindtallets Danske Monter/Danish Coins from the 11th Century, ed. Jorgen Steen Jensen, Copenhagen, 1995. Copyright the National Museum of Denmark.]

Harry Acworth, a retired civil-servant with experience in collecting and editing Indian ballads, offered to help him. Some scenes were cut out altogether, particularly episodes showing Olaf's brutality. Other episodes were revised by Acworth to stress the more visionary and romantic elements of the hero's life.

The murder of Hakon Jarl is omitted, being only of relevance for the story of Olaf in so far as it paved the way for his acceptance as king. Another omission is Olaf's drowning of a band of warlocks. His missionary priest Thangbrand's ham-fisted and completely unsuccessful attempt to convert the Icelanders, the story of the building and manning of the ship known as *The Long Serpent*, Olaf's alliance with Earl Sigvald and several minor episodes at the Battle of Svold were also dropped. Some of Longfellow's scenes were muted. Iron-Beard is turned into an almost noble figure and Olaf's savage treatment of the pagan Norwegians is played down and the episode concluded with a miraculous vision of the Cross.

The story told by Elgar can hardly be called a well-constructed drama. As its title, *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf*, reveals, it is simply a series of linked episodes, not unlike the saga-text or a modern soap-opera. In his composition, Elgar exploited the technique of representative themes with consummate mastery and by turning the scene of Olaf's death into a kind of coda in which he revives all the various themes at the appropriate references in the text, he imposes an artistic unity on his rather heterogeneous material. After an epilogue extolling the consolations of nature, the cantata is rounded off and brought to completion with "a low, monotonous, funeral wail".

For Olaf's mother Astrid there was consolation. For Edward Elgar the success of *King Olaf* at Hanley, a landmark in his career, was perhaps a mixed blessing. His wife is reported as saying on a later visit to Hanley that the Elgars had always kept a warm corner in their hearts for North Staffordshire, "since it was here that Sir Edward through the birth of *King Olaf*, first had that attention drawn to him which we all know has never since been relaxed".²⁴ Success came almost as an anticlimax to Elgar, however. In a letter written on 4 November 1896, he wrote: "My work is done and I feel I have proved myself a man! but I cannot afford to write any more".²⁵ Elgar did, of course, write much more and the success of his later work has perhaps tended to overshadow the greatness of his achievement with *King Olaf*.

I owe debts of gratitude to two of my school friends: Ann and John Kelly, who first introduced me to *King Olaf*, encouraged me to work on the topic, supplied me with a great deal of information about Elgar, and were instrumental in arranging my London lecture.

991, ed D Scragg (Oxford, 1991) p 89

²² Gordon, E V : 'The date of Æthelred's treaty with the Vikings: Olaf Tryggvason and the Battle of Maldon', in *The Modern Language Review* XXXII, 1937 p 32.

²³ Fellows Jensen, Gillian : *Scandinavian Personal Names in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire* (Copenhagen, 1968) CIV. Bately, Janet : 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', in *The Battle of Maldon AD 991*, op cit, p 47

²⁴ Pope, *op cit.*, p 48

²⁵ Anderson, *op cit.*, p 34



The Danish actor Johan Adolph Gottlob Stage (1791-1845) as Olaf Tryggvason in Adam Oehlenschläger's tragedy *Hakon Jarl* from 1808.

INTERPRETING ELGAR - A CONDUCTOR'S THOUGHTS

Rory Boyle

[The Scottish composer Rory Boyle studied at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and privately with Lennox Berkeley. His extensive output covers most genres and his music is performed and broadcast widely both in this country and abroad. He is Director of Music at Malvern College and Conductor of the Malvern Festival Chorus, with whom he has performed most of the great Elgar works, the most recent being The Apostles (at the 1996 Festival), The Dream of Gerontius (1998) and Caractacus (1999). The following article is based on a talk he gave to the West Midlands Branch in October 1999.]

When I was invited some months ago to speak to the Elgar Society I thought : "What can I possibly be interesting, witty and informative about on the subject of Elgar which they haven't already heard?" However, I have had the opportunity over the past eleven years as the chorus master of the Malvern Festival Chorus to conduct a number of the great choral works of Elgar, something which many of my colleagues would give their back teeth to do. I am also first and foremost a composer and perhaps see music through the eyes of both creator and interpreter. I have not however had the opportunity to conduct Elgar's major orchestral works although I know them all well as a confirmed admirer of the great man and still refer to his scores for useful hints on orchestration as well as directing my composition pupils in his direction to learn how to handle forces with skill and ingenuity, so perhaps my talk should really be subtitled "A Choral Conductor's Thoughts", since it is largely the choral works which I shall be addressing.

It is perhaps useful to start by putting Elgar into an historical context particularly regarding the state of English music at the time of his rise to fame. In a letter to Jaeger in November 1899, Elgar wrote : "I'm glad you like my idea of Judas" (a theme from the sketches intended initially for a work about the Apostles and later to become the introduction of the Angel of the Agony in *Gerontius*), "I'll send you another wildly expressive bit, but it's very hard to try and write one's self out and find that one's soul is not simple enough for the British Choral Society." In April of the next year he wrote again to Jaeger expressing his concern about the need for the Birmingham Chorus to have their parts for sections of *Gerontius* "as soon as possible". His fears were well founded and depressingly prophetic. What a fearful blow it must have been to a man of such musical conviction and deep sensitivity (remember he had written on completing *Gerontius* "this is the best of me : this, if anything of mine, is worth your memory"), that the first performance of the *Dream* was the most notorious bad performance in the history of English music. The conductor and choir were not up to the task and the soloists were also woefully inadequate (with the notable exception of Marie Brema the Wagnerian mezzo-soprano as the Angel : however even she did not appeal to everyone present. Vaughan Williams, who attended the premiPre, remarked wittily, yet perhaps unkindly, that whilst Plunket Greene, who sang the bass roles, "had lost his voice, Miss Brema had none to lose"). In short, nobody had understood the subtleties and inventiveness in the score enough to realise the amount of rehearsal required and poor Elgar poured his heart out to his friend Jaeger : "As far as I'm concerned music in England is dead - I have worked hard for forty years and at the last, Providence denies me a decent hearing of my work.... I still hear it in my heart and in my head so I must be content. Still it is curious to be treated by the old fashioned people as a criminal because my thoughts and ways are beyond them." I wonder how much has changed in England today: judging by the number of times I hear people say "Oh, I don't like twentieth century music!", the answer is not much!

Consider the situation in the second half of the nineteenth century. Since the death of Purcell in 1695 there had not been a major composer in England (Handel after all was only an adopted son). The first

serious step towards the training of professional musicians was the establishment of the Royal Academy of Music in 1822 (followed by Trinity College in 1872 and the Guildhall School of Music in 1880). In the course of the century there was increasing interest in the publication and performance of old music; the Purcell Society was founded in 1876 and began publishing the composer's complete works two years later; and the Musical Association (now the Royal Musical Association) was founded in 1874 "for the investigation and discussion of subjects connected with the art, science and history of music". In 1877 George Grove produced his first *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Madrigal singing was a long-standing tradition and the popularity of oratorio saw the rise in provincial choral societies. It is worth remembering that the first English performances of Bach's *St John Passion* and *B Minor Mass* took place in 1872 and 1876 respectively. However most of the conductors of these choral societies were the Cathedral organists, a deeply reactionary and conservative bunch who fed their singers unchallenging works by second-rate English composers. The whole stuffy Cathedral Close atmosphere coupled with a rigid class structure and the suppressed and prudish morality of Victorian England created a moribund musical climate into which the tradesman's son, Roman Catholic, and musical visionary did not fit. There were of course notable composers like Parry and Stanford but there is normally a good reason why works are neglected and today not many Choral Societies perform Stanford's *The Resurrection* or Parry's *King Saul*. There are still performances of Stainer's *Crucifixion* but perhaps the less said about that the better.

Against all this unpromising background Elgar wrote some of the greatest choral works ever written. As in all his compositions he was the most practical of workmen and knew well the shortcomings of choirs and orchestral players in England at the time. He left nothing to chance and I shall return to the subject later.

In the 1890s the Elgars spent several holidays in Germany where Elgar heard much Wagner. It is hardly surprising therefore that the early works (*From The Bavarian Highlands*, *King Olaf*, and *Caractacus*) bear significant signs of Wagnerian influence. Indeed in *Caractacus*, a leitmotif technique is abundantly clear. It is also perhaps the one Elgar oratorio which comes closest to an operatic layout and which requires therefore a more dramatic realisation in performance. Elgar even included stage directions (Scene 1: "Caractacus proceeds to the foot of the mound by the Spring of Taranis"; and Scene 4: "Enter Caractacus and remnant of British Soldiery in disorder"), and he had still to establish his own musical voice. However all the hallmarks are there and it is astonishing to note how quickly Elgar matured and blossomed as a composer since within one year of *Caractacus* he had written the *Enigma Variations*. It might not be too fanciful to suggest that some ideas may even have been filtering through his system whilst composing *Caractacus*.

There is no doubt that *Caractacus* is an uneven work - there are great moments but there are also passages which amount to little more than musical padding. The pacing of the work is a real challenge but Elgar has infused it with such dramatic feeling that the story unfolds with considerable energy and his unflinching ear for orchestral colour. But he is ill-served by the libretto which to our twentieth century minds is too jingoistic and relies too heavily on awkward rhyming couplets :

Tell me, before I meet the foe,
What fate the holy omens show.

However there is no doubting the impact that the work can make particularly the second Scene in which the Druid god Taranis is evoked. Incidentally, as Orbin finishes with the words "charging sword in hand on the foe" on a top B, the stage direction reads 'He casts down his harp and rushes off!' Elgar clearly understood how to help the chorus at all levels and very little is left to chance. A notoriously poor area

in much choral singing is the tidiness of phrase endings and the placement of final consonants. Elgar is very careful to place staccato marks over the notes which contain these final consonants and his dynamic markings which sometimes border on fussiness do at least make it theoretically impossible for singers to misinterpret the requirements (and I emphasise the word theoretically!). One area however which is a difficult one is the balance between singers and orchestra in *Caractacus*. The orchestra is a large one and I feel that Elgar must have conceived this work with an enormous chorus in mind, perhaps



something along the same lines as Berlioz's *Requiem*. The texture in many of the more dramatic passages is very thick although the inventive orchestral colour is wonderful thanks to the composer's innate understanding of all the instruments of the orchestra. It is unusual to find a choral society today with massed ranks of tenors and basses and thus it is difficult for them to compete with the orchestra in a passage such as the 'gathering at the river' sequence in Scene 4 of *Caractacus*. An added complication here is that the tenor tessitura is terribly high. In the Malvern Festival Chorus performance in the summer I unashamedly added the first altos to the top tenor line (making the tenors sing only second tenor) taking the view that in these politically correct times it would be perfectly acceptable to have lots of female warriors fighting on the English side. This helped the balance but this passage does have a fiendishly fast metronome mark of dotted minim=120 in a time signature of 3/4 (ie. 2 bars per second) which must have scared the living daylight out of the late Victorian singers and players (much of the orchestral writing includes quavers!), and it is still scary today. To obey the tempo here is risking everything and would I believe result in a loss of clarity and control - even the fine performance by Hickox is on the conservative side.

Whilst a great deal of energy is required from all participants in this early work, the score is mercifully free from the multitude of 'allargandos', 'rits' and 'colla partes' which litter the scores of both *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*, the two finished sections of the projected triad of major choral works Elgar undertook at the beginning of the twentieth century on the subject of the life of the Apostles. Before those of course came his masterpiece *The Dream of Gerontius* which I shall come to later; but it is worth mentioning here what astonishing strides Elgar made between the completion of *Caractacus*, and the composition of the *Enigma Variations* (one year later) and the *Dream* (two years later) in both orchestral/ vocal control, dramatic pacing and architectural design. In touching on the *Enigma*, it contains another nice example of Elgar's ability to use his experience of players of the time to pre-empt any possible performance problems. It may be that he was revealing a true understanding of acoustics but my hunch is that he was probably less than confident about the organists of his time observing a conductor's beat. Next time you look at the final minim chord of the *Variations* you will notice that the organ part is the only one in the entire orchestra to contain a staccato mark, just to ensure that the organist doesn't hold on too long!

Both *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom* contain remarkable sections of dramatic vision and musical

inventiveness (for instance 'The Ascension' from *Apostles* and 'The Arrest' from *Kingdom*). Both also make extensive use of leitmotifs which shows Elgar's continued interest in the Wagnerian methods he heard whilst in Germany - Jaeger counted no less than 92 examples in *The Apostles*. The libretto (of *Apostles*) is the composer's own and he extracted passages from the Bible and other religious texts and juxtaposed them in a most remarkable if seemingly rather random manner. He clearly knew his Bible well and the skill with which he ascribes texts to the characters in the drama as well as to the chorus is astonishing. As in all of Elgar's choral works the chorus is, if not exactly centre-stage, at least a crucial component in virtually every scene and has to assume a number of different roles. This is what makes Elgar such fun to rehearse and to sing, and something that I go on to the chorus about frequently. To be convincing as a chorus member you have to be 'actor' as well as 'singer' and climb inside your dramatic persona - without that you may as well be singing passages from yellow pages. For me the supreme example of the success of Elgar's libretto for *The Apostles* is the movement entitled 'The Betrayal'. Against the gradual self-recognition of Judas, Elgar set the voices of the chorus as if in the Temple chanting verses from the more bloodthirsty psalms constantly reminding the listener what a totally evil cad this fellow Judas is. Judas himself picks up odd phrases to apply to his own situation with bitter irony and so explain his behaviour and suicide. The drama which Elgar creates is astonishing and the difficulty in revealing this drama in performance is a real challenge. My own belief is that one should emerge from that movement with a sort of grudging sympathy for Judas and a feeling that man's weakness is in all of us. The mood of this movement is as always reinforced by the composer's skilful and innovative orchestration. The concentration required by all performers but particularly by the conductor in performance is immense. The full score which runs to 237 pages contains no less than 433 different tempi directions. If all these were to be adhered to the performance would become indulgent and lack forward direction (not to mention adding about thirty minutes to the length), and the skill is therefore to infuse the interpretation with the meaning of the markings without actually obeying each one to the letter. There is always a danger in Elgar's music of overdosing on the 'largamentes', but without observing them as subtly as possible the music would lose much of its essential character. The skill of the chef in adding just the right amount of essential herbs and spices to arouse the taste without ruining the palate might be a suitable analogy,

I have to come clean and admit that, although I think I have very catholic tastes (with a small c), there is one composer whose music makes me squirm and that composer is Wagner. So it probably isn't surprising that the passages in *The Apostles* which don't work for me are those that rely on chains of leitmotifs rather than a continuous musical development. Such passages seem to resemble a jigsaw puzzle where the pieces have been hammered in despite the fact that they don't always fit. But I do find much of the work deeply moving and sincere particularly the 'Betrayal' scene and the short movement entitled 'Golgotha'. This starts with an introduction infused with awe as the chorus sings the words, "Truly, this was the Son of God" - a text that most composers probably try to avoid since any attempt to follow the sheer perfection of Bach's setting of the same words in the *St Matthew Passion* seems futile. However, Elgar treats it with such honesty, the chorus part being almost hushed and understated whilst the orchestra bridges it with two brief but violent crescendos which wield immense power. The rest of the movement, both tender and painful, feature the reflections of Mary and John as they stand beneath the cross. The result is so effective and moving.

Incidentally, and to illustrate my earlier point, in that movement which occupies just three pages of full score there are actually twenty different tempi markings. If one were to interpret each one to the letter, the music would become heavy and sugary and the essential impact would undoubtedly be lost.

For most composers the writing of a major choral work scored for large forces and lasting some two

hours would be an achievement which most might not relish the idea of repeating. Elgar of course had always planned a trilogy of works (aside from *The Dream of Gerontius*), and although the proposed final work *The Last Judgement* was never written, it seems remarkable to me that he was able to continue the threads in *The Kingdom* which, although about twenty minutes shorter is just as complex a work as *The Apostles* and arguably contains some of Elgar's most expressive music. Although many of the leitmotifs first encountered in *The Apostles* reappear in *The Kingdom*, it would be wrong to see this work as a mere reworking. I find the balance of the leitmotifs much more satisfying in *The Kingdom* but it is still a difficult work to perform - the problems of pace, balance and drama are there in abundance, and I find the ending most unconvincing although this of course is explained by the fact that Elgar's canvas was even bigger and he still had the final part of the trilogy in mind at the time. Frank Schuster, a close friend of Elgar, confided once to Sir Adrian Boult that, compared with *The Kingdom* he considered *The Dream of Gerontius* to be the work of a raw amateur. Whilst I cannot agree with his view, the chorus perhaps does not have quite such a splendid time as in *The Apostles* or *The Dream*, but there is some challenging writing in the movement entitled 'Pentecost'. There must have been many more tenors in the English choral scene at the turn of the last century since Elgar once again in this work has much *divisi* writing for them, and this presents problems of balance today in many Societies which like ours contains a relatively small number of this rare and special breed (yes, I know I am biased but I too am one of their select number!). In many passages it is possible to divide the basses instead as well as making the second altos sing first tenor. I have to say that I even had the altos singing some sections which are marked as being sung by 'the Disciples', but I insist that I did this for entirely musical reasons and not from any zealous belief that in fact several of the disciples were actually female. However, with the emergence of the feminist version of the Lord's Prayer (itself a contradiction in terms) in recent years, that such a batty suggestion might be made would not entirely surprise me. (Incidentally I have two pet hates - political correctness and the Millennium! The composer Hugh Wood and I are founder members of the "Let's hope that everything computerised crashes at midnight on 31 December and everyone can learn to talk to each other once again" Society.)

The passages in *The Kingdom* which affect me most include the sheer beauty of 'The sun goeth down' and the unbridled aggression of the opening of 'The Betrayal'. Here Elgar creates a mood of palpable fear and impending doom with a sinister throbbing pedal point in low strings and organ pedal whilst a martial menace tramps across the score. I have always been struck by the portentous venom of several passages in Elgar's music. This was not the music of a moustached country gentleman and English establishment figure which is often the picture manufactured, but the visionary warnings of someone who throughout his life showed a remarkable ability to predict the future in his art. A work from exactly the same period as *The Kingdom* is the concert overture *In the South* which contains arguably the most terrifying of Elgar's martial music but which to me mirrors the passage from *The Kingdom* which you have just heard. Programmatically it is supposed to depict the Roman legions crossing a viaduct but Elgar interestingly described it as "a sound picture of the strife and wars, the 'drums and tramlings' of a later time". The unbridled dissonance of this music coupled with the masterly orchestration reveals the innovative side of Elgar in all its glory.

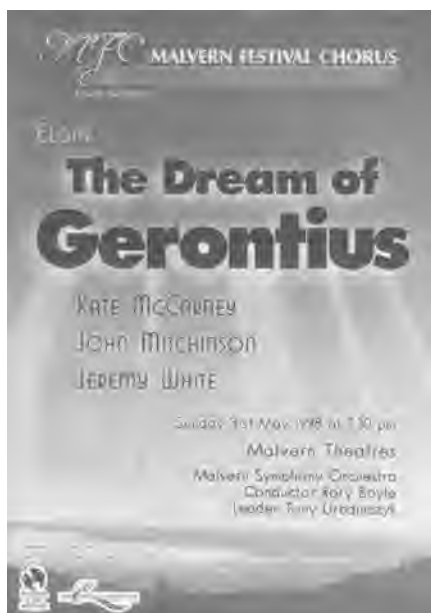
I have had the pleasure of working at *The Dream of Gerontius* for three performances and each one has convinced me of the genius of the work. It does not have the musical padding of the other choral works, the solo characters are so masterfully conceived, the chorus parts are so rewarding and the orchestral handling is, in my opinion, unrivalled. Its popularity is partially explained by the fact that it is a shorter work and a less expensive one to perform but that of course makes it a much more demanding proposition to a conductor who has to try to bring an interpretation which will satisfy a critical and knowing audience. I can only go by my own musical integrity and intuition but I believe that an honest realisation

will be one that obeys the score and attempts to understand the message in the unfolding drama. It is extraordinary to think that, were it not for Jaeger, one of the most astonishing passages in the history of music would not have been written. In the original score which Elgar sent to Jaeger the passage where Gerontius sings "Take me away" is written in a manner which as Elgar explained is because "the soul is shrivelled up and voiceless and I only want on this page a musing murmur - I can't do this better if I try for fifty years". Continued correspondence ensued between Elgar and Jaeger including this from Jaeger : "A musician has no business, in setting a poem, to become dull, clumsy, ugly, tied by the leg, and unimaginative even if the poem seems to invite such delightful attributes. Your view of the Soul seeing God, as expressed in the music, suggests to me nothing so much as an 'Oh Lor!', is that all? What a poor show. Take me away, it gives me the miserables'. I want you to suggest, in a few gloriously great orchestral chords the MOMENTARY vision of the Almighty but you have shirked it." In the end Elgar rewrote the passage claiming that this is what he had actually thought of in the first place. The challenge in performance is to build to that one moment where Elgar directs every instrument of the orchestra to "exert its fullest force", but to judge the pause over the preceding bar line to achieve the impact of this remarkable passage.

Elgar was a great recycler of sketches and unfinished scores - very little material went to waste, and he always showed a great attachment to thematic material. In this habit he is far from alone, since most composers find that a once-rejected or incomplete draft will serve for something entirely different at a later time. However this attachment reached its apotheosis in the composer's last great choral work *The Music Makers*. Elgar's principal works tended to summarise his outlook at a given period and, by self-quotation, he drew upon this store of past musings to clothe O'Shaughnessy's poem in a garb of personal testimony. Most important of all is the use of the 'Enigma' theme in the introduction and elsewhere which represents, as it does in the *Variations*, the loneliness of the creative artist. Themes from many past works are hinted at or partially stated. The result could be a fragmented collage in the hands of a lesser talent, but the handling is so skilful that the work is, in effect, a self-portrait in which the inner loneliness that inspired so much of Elgar's music is consoled by thoughts of friendship and by deeper introspection. The ending of this wonderful work, despite the reprise of the opening line of the poem "We are the music makers and we are the dreamers of dreams" seems to show Elgar leaving the dreams unfinished.

I would never turn down any chance to conduct any of Elgar's great choral works again, nor indeed any of the orchestral works as well. He left behind such a catalogue of superb music, and I have to include Tony Payne's elaboration of the Third Symphony - an undertaking about which I was decidedly dubious at first, but one which few of us who were lucky enough to be at the astonishing premiere in London could deny was a work of integrity and historical importance. Its inventiveness and musical language, which continues the threads of works like *Falstaff*, reveal that Elgar was still looking forward - the vision was undimmed.

And what would he make of music today? I like to think that he would delight in the variety of styles on offer at the end of this extraordinary century and I feel he would be thrilled by the high standard of musicianship and skill of the players and singers of today, particularly in his own country. I believe he would feel very much at home as a composer, with few of the barriers he had to cross in evidence, But I think he might be appalled by the invention of such an unmusical and unpoetic liturgy which seems to produce congregational church music of a mind-numbing banality, and I suspect that he might share my abhorrence of the dumbed-down awfulness of everything to do with 'Cool Britannia'. The question remains rhetorical : his music speaks for itself.



*Boyle conducts Elgar :
The programme for the May 1998
Malvern Festival Chorus performances of
The Dream of Gerontius which for many
Society members provided a fitting climax
to the 1998 Birthday weekend.*

SINGER, SOLDIER... REMEMBERING CHARLES MOTT

Charles A Hooley

[Charles Hooley is a member of the Elgar Society and lives in Canada. He has a passionate interest in singers of the early part of the 20th century, and it was research into one of them, Caroline Hatchard, which led him to discover that the first complete performance of The Spirit of England was given in Birmingham on 4 October 1917. The article based on this research, Spirit Insights, appeared in the JOURNAL for November 1996.]

Anyone visiting the Somme area of northern France might consider stopping by the grave of a singer who was very special to Elgar; and perhaps say a prayer for this unfortunate free spirit who was cut down at thirty-seven years of age.

Charles James Mott was born about 1880, the son of Henry Isaac and Eliza Brockley Mott of the East Finchley/Highgate district in north central London. Actually, his home was not too far from Covent Garden, his future stamping ground. His first musical exploits came as a boy chorister with St James's Church Choir at Muswell Hill, London. By the time he reached adulthood, young Charles had decided on a career in banking, but he had not reckoned on the repetitive nature of a bank clerk's job. Boredom set in. To relieve the situation, he turned to his other interest and began singing softly as he worked. And so was born the legend of the singing bank clerk. Such behaviour in the 1890s hardly pleased his superiors, who happily were of a mind to help rather than chastise. He was allowed to work at the bank in daytime as long as he confined his singing to after hours. This he did while studying voice with Josiah Booth, and then with Henry Stanley for finishing.

Good fortune smiled when his path happened to cross that of Baron Frédéric d'Erlanger, a composer, financier and, most significantly, a force within the Royal Opera Syndicate. The Baron took kindly to this brash youngster with the big ideas and agreeable baritone voice, secured the Syndicate's support and quickly Charles was in Berlin studying with Paul Knüpfer, the famous basso. After a year of great progress, Knüpfer secured for him an audition with the Hofoper at Dessau. He thus earned a two-year posting as principal baritone.

We next hear of him back in London, pursuing his studies with Madame Novello Davies. When an invitation arrived to sing in a concert on 26 October 1906, he did not hesitate. The concert was organized by Chough's, a prominent London-based musical society that staged events regularly in the Cannon Street Hotel. Mott sang a varied programme with Alex Webster, Fred Ranalow and a concertina player, Alex Price. Chough's brought him back on 1 February the following year to sing with one 'J. F. McCormick', along with Ernest Pike, Alfred Heather, Conway Dixon, Percy Frostick and Sydney Walter, with G. D. Cunningham providing accompaniment.

As the Royal Opera's new season at Covent Garden neared, Mott approached, seeking employment. As befitted d'Erlanger's protégé, he was welcomed with open arms and happily signed prior to opening day on 26 April 1909. As time passed, he probably felt disappointed to find his opportunities limited to support roles. On 9 June, he sang the role of Méru, a Catholic noble, in Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*, with such luminaries as Luisa Tetrizzini, Emmy Destinn, Giovanni Zenatello, Antonio Scotti and Marcel Journet. He may have fancied himself as one of those 'Seven Stars' some day.

We next hear of Mott in 1912 as a mainstay in a Wagner Festival being staged in Budapest. Near the end of the following February, he sang music of Beethoven during an orchestral festival in Edinburgh under Michael Balling's able direction. Mott and Carrie Tubb sang on five occasions.



*Left :
Charles Mott
[Photo:
Elliott & Fry];*

*Right :
Paul Knüpfer
[Courtesy of
Lawrence
Holdridge]*



At this moment in time, Raymond Roze, son of soprano Marie Roze, was in desperate need of a top baritone for six weeks of grand opera in English which he was about to give at Covent Garden. Mott was happy to oblige, and sang all of Roze's main baritone roles. For a sensational opening on 1 November 1913, Roze presented his own *Joan of Arc*, which he conducted, and in which Mott sang Philip, Duke of Burgundy. Roze gave his all but it proved a dreary affair, brightened only by the splash of colourful costumes. Ultimately, four hours of dullish music spelled doom. And yet the optimistic Roze gave no fewer than twenty performances with alternate singers in most key roles, including Mott's. As the season progressed, Mott would have found more palpable on 8 November the role of Kurwenal in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, which he sang with John Coates and Marta Wittkowska. More Wagner followed on 4 December with Coates as Lohengrin, Lillian Granfelt as Elsa and Charles Mott as Telramund. Finally, Mott donned toreador's breeches for *Carmen* with Violet Essex and Pauline Donalda.

Early in 1914, The Royal Opera began a German Opera Festival of their own and signed Mott to sing in four of five operas. His first appearance on 2 February provided a special thrill as the Company was presenting *Parsifal* in German for the first time in England, and Mott was singing Second Knight of the Grail with Heinrich Hensel as Parsifal, Eva von der Osten as Kundry and his old mentor, Paul Knüpfer as Gurnemanz. Altogether it was given fourteen times. Another 'first' came the next night when Étienne Méhul's *Joseph* was given with Johannes Sembach as the hero and Mott as Judah. A critic commented, "Méhul's *Joseph* has hitherto been excluded from the English stage on account of its biblical libretto; and it is well that Mr Beecham is the first to take advantage of the wider views which now prevail in such matters, to give us so beautiful a work." It was repeated on 6, 9 and 17 of February.

Mott sang Melot in *Tristan und Isolde* when this opera, also in German, was presented on 11 February with Jacques Urlus and Eva von der Osten in the title roles, Friedrich Plaschke as Kurwenal, and Albert Coates conducting. Next, on 21 February, he sang the Nachtigall in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* with Plaschke as Sachs, Claire Dux as Eva, Knüpfer as Pogner and August Kiess as Kothner. Later in the series Mott assumed Kiess's role. Elgar was present on 5 March, anticipating the final *Tristan und Isolde* but the curtain rose instead on *Die Meistersinger* and thus Elgar "discovered" Charles Mott. Elgar was well-known for his aversion to English singers, but he warmed instantly to this particular singer. On 16 March, he wrote to Percy Pitt, "I wish you would cast Charles Mott for Kothner again - he is far and away the best I have ever seen - I have sent a note to Mr. Higgins telling him this as he may not have been present on that chance evening." Then, he wrote to Mott, "I have seen more representations of the opera than I care to count, but have never seen this part done in so entirely satisfactory a manner."¹

For the next season, which opened on 28 April, Artur Nikisch conducted *Götterdämmerung* with an all-star array that included Gertrud Kappel, Peter Cornelius, Louise Kirkby Lunn, Paul Knüpfer and Charles Mott. His other roles that season, if any, are not known. On 28 July, the Company closed its doors as England prepared for war. As the war machines began to stir, the Three Choirs Festival became an early casualty. Mott had been pencilled in for Worcester in September, perhaps as Elijah, and if this had transpired, it might have added to his oratorio laurels. He turned his attention instead to a series of weekly concerts. In Bournemouth, he possibly would have included Easthope Martin's song *Speed the Plough* and the cycle *Songs of the Open Country*, as this was music he favoured.

Adelina Patti chose the Royal Albert Hall and Saturday afternoon of 24 October 1914 for her final 'farewell'. The 'Great Patriotic Concert in Aid of the European War Fund' was indeed a spectacular. It offered Mott, Patti herself, Carrie Tubb, Phyllis Lett, Plunket Greene, George Parker, the Royal Choral Society under regular leader, Sir Frederick Bridge, the Queen's Hall Orchestra conducted by Sir Henry Wood and the massed bands of H M Brigade of Guards led by Capt J Mackenzie Rogan. It must have

been magnificent! Charles got his chance on 4 November to sing *Elijah* in Nottingham with the Sacred Harmonic Society, Laura Evans-Williams, Frank Webster and Helen Blain. Allen Gill was the conductor.

Meanwhile Elgar, at the request of a friend Lena Ashwell, had begun composing incidental music for *The Starlight Express*, a play she intended to produce at Kingsway Theatre at the end of the year. The play's authors, Algernon Blackwood and Violet Pearn, had drawn their ideas from Blackwood's own novel, *A Prisoner in Fairyland*. For the key role of Organ Grinder, Elgar had Charles Mott clearly in mind. The play's theme was the significance of childhood vision in a world sullied by the mistakes of grown-ups. The timing was perfect, for late in the autumn of 1915 the Great War was in its second year, crunching inexorably onward; if ever there was a monument raised to the stupidity and wretchedness of the adult world, this was it. As it turned out, trying to create a show with and for children but with a powerful message for adults was not an easy task.

The Starlight Express opened at the Kingsway Theatre on 29 December 1915 with Mott as a kind of Pied Piper, singing before each act with a group of children. He proved ideal in every way. Later, after Mott's death was announced, Herman Klein wrote; "His singing of the Organ Grinder's songs acquires a double pathos, so full is it of tenderness, repose and sustained charm." The rest of the cast included O. B. Clarence who fussed as Daddy, the frazzled author/dreamer; Ruth Maitland as the far more practical Mother; and Clytie Hine as The Laugher "who sings trouble into joy". In review, the *Musical Times* wrote, "(The music) is certainly the main lure. It affords a glimpse of a quality of Elgar's genius that owing probably to lack of encouragement has not yet been sufficiently explored. We had a foretaste of its potentialities in the *Wand of Youth Suites*, which resurrected some of Elgar's youthful fancies, and much of the music is deftly woven into the *Starlight Express*. The scoring is delightfully dainty...dance-music especially is captivating, and many of the songs and other incidental music have conspicuous melody and rhythmic grace".²

The music was universally acclaimed and the singing actors praised, but both story and staging came in for criticism. Elgar was so annoyed he stayed away and let Julius Harrison conduct. The staging differed so much from his childhood memories, but gradually he warmed to it and ended up attending regularly throughout January. But his music could not stem the inevitable; it closed after a single month. After attending a performance, Thomas Dunhill wrote, comparing it with Elgar's wartime recitations, "Of slighter texture, but far more musical importance, were the delicate entr'actes and songs which Elgar wrote for Algernon Blackwood's fantastic children's play, *The Starlight Express* ...the music which accompanied it does not deserve to be forgotten. It is of altogether finer quality than that of the ephemeral songs called *Fringes of the Fleet*".³

Disappointed as he was, Elgar had his spirits lifted when The Gramophone Company requested that he record eight 78-rpm discs of music from *The Starlight Express*. For 1916, it was nothing less than a recording miracle. But for the composer it signified something deeper; it meant his intense personal and private memories at least would be preserved.

Mott returned to singing *Elijah* in Liverpool on 16 February 1916, this time with tenor Alfred Heather. Two days later he was back at Hayes for the recording session, as the Organ Grinder; while Agnes Nicholls, an Elgar favourite, sang the Laugher's songs. All eight records were made on that one day. Klein found Mott's singing "so full... of tenderness, repose and sustained charm". The records were hurriedly

¹ Hodgkins, Geoffrey and Taylor, Ronald : 'Elgar and Percy Pitt', i, *Elgar Society Journal* Vol 9, no 1 (March 1995) p 12

produced and introduced two months later at a lavish press event in the Savoy Hotel. On 13 March, a set was thrust into Elgar's hands just as Blackwood arrived for an extended visit. On 26 March, Charles Mott, his wife and child were welcomed by Edward and Alice for tea and biscuits, and most likely a lively reliving of their *Starlight* adventure through the magic of the shiny new discs.⁴

That summer Mott must have meant to sing with Beecham's Opera Company in Manchester for his name appears on the company roster for Stanford's *The Critic* on 10 May 1916. But there is no evidence he performed there at all. Concurrently, Clara Butt was organizing a series of concerts to shake Londoners out of their wartime doldrums. She would give *The Dream of Gerontius* with Elgar conducting, herself as the Angel, and Charles Mott as the Angel of the Agony as so she insisted. How could he refuse? Then again, maybe he thought that casting his lot with Clara would do more for his career than being lost on a Manchester stage. They had pre-London airings on 3 May in Leeds and the next day in Bradford, before moving to London to open a six-concert stand in Queen's Hall on 8 May. In his role, Mott "sang with all the fervour of his strong temperament." He sang the same music in Birmingham on 22 November as part of a Hallé Concert, with Gervase Elwes stepping in as *Gerontius* when Captain John Coates was called away on military duties. Dilys Jones sang the part of the Angel.

Mott turned to the music of Coleridge-Taylor on 6 March 1917 and "sang well" as *Scenes of Hiawatha* was given in Liverpool with Nicholls and Heather, as Sir Frederic Cowen conducted.

In 1905 Elgar and his friend Frank Schuster had enjoyed a fortnight's cruise in the Mediterranean as guests of the Admiral, Lord Charles Beresford. A dozen years later, the Admiral approached Elgar with a request that he set to music four poems of Rudyard Kipling, known as *Fringes of the Fleet*. By combining these brilliant talents, Beresford hoped for a sure-fire tonic that would raise everyone's spirits. Despite sorrowful grumbling by Kipling whose son had just gone "missing" at Loos, Elgar forged ahead. He settled upon a cycle of four songs for four baritones, one to act as soloist, that singer again to be Mott, so Elgar imagined.

The songs were arranged in order, their mood darkening gradually and then lifting gently at the end. He dedicated them, appropriately, to Admiral Beresford. To Ernest Newman, he described them as being in a "broad saltwater style". They did capture the mood of the moment, not least because submarine warfare was much in the news of the day. The songs were given twice daily as part of a wartime entertainment at London's Coliseum Theatre. When the curtain rose on 11 June, Mott, Harry Barratt, Frederick Henry and Frederick Stewart strode onstage as brawny, weatherworn mariners, took their places and sang before a rustic country pub as Elgar himself conducted. The daily performances were so successful that a provincial tour was organized to begin as soon as the London run ended. On 4 July, the singers recorded the four songs at Hayes.

Elgar however was having further thoughts and produced a fifth song based on a poem by Sir Gilbert Parker. On 28 July, the four singers recorded *Inside the bar*, and then made haste to the Coliseum to perform their last shows. Afterwards on stage, they took part in a wind-up party, although their mood was far from joyful. On everyone's mind was Mott's imminent call-up. Amidst the festivities, Elgar rose and presented a small silver ship to Charles, wishing his friend "clear sailing".⁵

² *The Musical Times*, 1 February 1916

³ Dunhill, David : *Thomas Dunhill - Maker of Music* (Thames, 1997) p xxi

⁴ Neill, Andrew : 'The Great War : Elgar and the creative challenge', *Elgar Society Journal* Vol 11, no 1 (March 1999) p 23

That summer and autumn, with George Parker filling in, *Fringes of the Fleet* was performed to great acclaim in provincial music halls throughout Britain, until they came to an abrupt halt. Kipling had become embittered over the loss of his son and had decided his poetry should no longer be used to glorify war. The tour returned to the Coliseum on 1 December and ended where it began.

Besides their musical value, the songs hold special meaning for many, even today as Harry Howe in Kent explains : "I have a soft spot for these discs as my father was a Regular in the Old Navy (1911 - 1946) and served in the Dover Patrol in both the First and Second Wars. The Dover Patrol was made up almost entirely of local Navy and Merchant Navy people, so a Dover Patrol ship sunk meant that a good many houses in Deal and Dover were bereaved. In Memoriam notices still appear in local newspapers for people lost in that fashion".

When he heard his call to arms, Mott enlisted at Paddington, and was duly posted to the Artists' Rifles along with fellow singers, Tom Kinneburgh and Roy Henderson. A centenarian as of last July 4, Roy has fond memories of his light-hearted fellow baritone : "The Artists' Rifles had in the battalion a Vicar from Essex (who chose) recruits needed to send suitable people for Officer Training and also to supply the 1st Battalion in France. One had to have an interview to get into the Artists' Rifles; it was selective. I was in the same hut (about thirty men) as Mott who was promoted Training Corporal. Mott was very popular and very kind to me personally but didn't conform to the spit and polish of the Battalion and was sent to France, where he became the life and soul of the Battalion there".

As First Battalion London Regiment (Artists' Rifles) faced the German spring advance of 1918, Lance Corporal Mott waited with his mates in Aveluy Wood. It was 20 May...we can imagine the fiery shell bursts, machine guns spluttering, the hellish hail of metal few could elude. Charles James Mott fell, mortally wounded. And died two days later. He lies buried in Grave 2, Plot 11, Row C of Bagneux Military Cemetery, south of Gezaincourt, two kilometres southwest of Doullens.

To visit Bagneux Cemetery, one should travel to Gezaincourt, turn at the Commonwealth War Graves signpost and proceed south down a rustic trail that can become an adventure in rainy weather. There is a zigzag as the road crosses a railway line that once serviced a busy casualty clearing station. The rusting rail is all that remains. Bagneux is a well-tended but lonely place, far from the beaten track and infrequently visited. Charles lies in the second plot in a front row, which suggests he was interred early. All around the green and rolling countryside could just as well be southern England. It is sad now to see these white Portland stones, row upon row, but in their quiet setting a feeling of respectfulness is ever present.

* * *

Roy Henderson spoke highly of Mott : "He was a superb singer who would have been Number One baritone in England had he lived. As a boy of 16, I heard him singing *Elijah* at Nottingham and was thrilled by his performance". (Perhaps it was the event mentioned earlier.) Besides his participation in recordings of *The Starlight Express* and *Fringes of the Fleet*, Mott made a few other discs, including Edward German's *Merric England* in which he offers a robust and rollicking 'Yeomen of England'. But one song that sticks in my memory is *The Sands o' Dee*, a tale of a young girl who, in gathering her sheep, decides to cross the sand while the tide is out... but she fails to return in time and her man laments ...there is a scream in the voice of this uncommon soldier as he expresses his grief and torment ...and brings a lump

⁵ *Op cit.*, pp 28-9



The Fringes of the Fleet at the Coliseum Theatre, June 1917; seen above from left to right : Frederick Stewart, Charles Mott, Harry Barratt and Frederick Henry.

to my throat every time.

* * *

I would like to thank, most sincerely, those who have helped in one way or another, over the last few years, to put together this tribute: Dame Norma Major for direction to British government information services, The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, John Davies, Dennis Foreman, Ewen Langford, Lawrence Holdridge, Jim McPherson, Graham Oakes, Tom Tulloch-Marshall, Wayne Turner and John Ward.



*Bagneux Military Cemetery, Gezaincourt : Views of the cemetery toward
(above) the Stone of Remembrance and (below) the Cross of Sacrifice
Next page : The grave of Charles Mott*





BOOK REVIEW

The Best of Me : A Gerontius Centenary Companion, edited by Geoffrey Hodgkins

Elgar Editions, 1999. 362 pp + index. £18.00 hardback

This book will hopefully be disseminated beyond Elgar Society members (to whom it will have an obvious appeal), for it is a fascinating and cleverly structured collection of essays by many illustrious writers, enthusiastic amateurs and professional musicians or musicologists. Most of the material, it should be stated, has already appeared in various issues of the *Elgar Society JOURNAL* over the years, but much has been revised or updated by their original authors. Five articles are new, one of these a translation from its original German. The current editor of this JOURNAL, Geoffrey Hodgkins, has also edited the book, and I have no hesitation in acknowledging that he has done a great service to those within and without the Society who are interested in Elgar (and Newman too), not forgetting John Norris who originally conceived the idea of the book.

First a summary of its contents. It is divided into six sections, each having several essays. The first section is 'Before Elgar' (consisting of a biography of Newman, the complete text of *Gerontius*, not just those parts used by Elgar, and including the markings made by General Gordon in his copy, and an essay on Newman as a librettist); 'The composition of a masterpiece' (articles on the places where Elgar lived, composed and walked 1898-1900, one comparing Elgar and Newman in their respective approaches to *Gerontius*, another on manuscript sources, sketches and proofs); 'The struggle for survival' (a selection of Birmingham première reviews, an account of early performances, and of two contemporary musicians' associations with the work); 'The intervening years' (reviews and essays written between the two World Wars); 'The recorded legacy' (comparing recordings 1945-1997, a complete discography, goings-on behind the scene at the famous 1945 Sargent-Nash recording, and Barbirolli's personal view printed in his 1965 recording's sleeve notes); 'Performing *Gerontius* today' (some practical tips, reminiscences, a modern Turkish performance, a centennial assessment, and nationwide performances 1995-2000). The index is mostly thorough in its details (a reference to Muriel Foster should be page 234 not 233 and her twin sister Hilda is missing), and photographs abound, if a trifle murky in some cases, with those on page 242 having an incomplete caption (presumably 'composer' might be the missing word?). Unfortunately there's no bibliography; a gathering together of all those books mentioned in the footnotes would have been helpful.

The five new articles are the short biography of Newman, the places that inspired Elgar, the translation of the German article tracing the pioneering aspect of English oratorio, an account of *Gerontius* in Budapest, and the assessment of *Gerontius* in this, its centennial year. There are also seven unique cartoons from 1913 (whose origins are currently a mystery) which can also be published separately or as a set. A couple of them are very funny indeed, but although all are worth the modest outlay I suggest to Elgar Editions that they also produce them as a set of postcards : I am certain they would sell like hot cakes.

Because so much of the material has already appeared in the JOURNAL, it seems appropriate to focus on the revised or new material, though before doing so I want to comment on Gareth Lewis's article on Hans Richter's association with *Gerontius*. These days one has to declare an interest, and I do so as Richter's biographer. I must also express my gratitude to Gareth, who I never met but only corresponded with or talked to on the telephone. He gave me considerable support and enthusiastic help when I was collecting material for my book, which he regrettably failed to see because he died in 1992, a year before my book was published. But his 1977 article does contain factual errors, and I am certain he would have gracefully and keenly accepted correction where it was required. They include : Richter's mother did not create the

role of Venus in *Tannhäuser*, she sang it in the first Viennese performance; nor did she introduce her son to Wagner - the Musical Director of the Kärntnerthor Theatre (Heinrich Esser) was responsible for that. Richter returned to Bayreuth not two years after the *Ring's* première but in 1888, twelve years thereafter, and then not as chief conductor. He was not a young conductor when Birmingham appointed him as its Festival conductor in 1885, he was 42. He was not on unfamiliar territory when conducting choral music, for he had plenty of choral experience in Vienna, where he directed the choir of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde and was in charge of the music of the Court Chapel, which required weekly services for much of the year. His choral repertoire extended from Bach to Verdi. This is a common misconception as far as Richter was concerned : he did after all conduct twelve performances of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* and 56 *Choral Symphonies*, plus fifteen of Berlioz's *Grande Messe des Morts* over the course of his career, to say nothing of twenty *Elijahs* and these were not exclusively after his Birmingham appointment. As one comes to expect from Lewis Foreman, his extensively detailed and excellent article (the centrepiece of the book) which follows Gareth Lewis's puts much to right, although I would place a huge caveat on anything Stanford wrote about Richter. Foreman and Lewis both quote Stanford's description of him as "a bandmaster" and Foreman includes the (hearsay) tale of Brahms's dislike of Richter's interpretation of the slow movement of his First Symphony. Stanford blew hot and cold in his professional relationships, and I have a large Brahms photograph signed with the inscription to Richter "in friendly remembrance, Johannes Brahms and these four, C-D-F-E" (the respective keys of the composer's four symphonies), which seems to me to provide ample evidence to the contrary.

However Richter did have some responsibility for the debacle of the première a century ago, but his was not the principal fault. That surely lay with Novello, the Birmingham Committee, and Elgar himself to a certain extent. The impossible timetable of commissioning, delivery of manuscript, and publication of the musical material lay at the heart of the problem. Richter saw the full score just one night before his first (very public) rehearsal, and like Henry Wood, I blame him for not postponing the first performance. There was simply not time for all concerned, including the poor chorus battling with chorus scores rather than complete vocal scores they would later have as a matter of course, and inadequately trained by an old man brought out of retirement at the last minute. All three soloists had their shortcomings too. Richter vowed to make amends, conducted it nine times more and well too, and declared at the end of his life in 1916 that for him there had only ever been two composers whom he deified, Wagner and Elgar. Foreman's piece incidentally contains one of very few printing glitches in the book. The penultimate paragraph on page 171 dealing with Brewer's organ transcription of the 'Prelude and Angel's Farewell' has been transposed from page 169, where it should have been placed after dealing with the orchestral version of the same two extracts published the previous year in 1902.

Newman's turbulent life with its wrench from the Anglican Church to espouse Roman Catholicism is graphically and evocatively told by John Norris. How things might have gone had Newman been offered a post in Ireland by his mentor Richard Whately, newly appointed Archbishop of Dublin, is open to conjecture, but the two men had irreconcilable theological differences and Newman went his own way. Without the schism we would have no *Gerontius*. Norris also contributes a fascinating piece on the places that inspired Elgar at the time of the composition of *Gerontius*, with many photographs. There's a degree of duplication with background material concerning the gestation of composing, and the sequence of events, but Dora Penny's well-known recollections of Birchwood in the summer of 1900 make an inspired sequel to Norris's article. Andreas Friesenhagen's piece will give the reader food for thought while ploughing through a lot of in-depth analysis; whether this is the right publication for such musicology is questionable. Table 4 has an error in line five where the key should be B *flat* minor. It's worth the effort to get through to Friesenhagen's closing observations with its perfectly accurate claim that the Düsseldorf performances under Butts in 1901 and 1902 provided a 'German midwife' for Elgar's oratorio, but it should not be forgotten that the Sheffield (1902) and Manchester (1903) performances were already planned

before a note had been heard in Germany.

Both Walter Essex and Carl Newton have revised or added to their JOURNAL articles on the recorded legacy now that David Hill and Andrew Davis (video) have joined Essex's list of complete recordings, the latter perfect in every way except the limited sound reproduction of the video rather than CD format. Like Essex I always turn to Barbirolli/Baker/Lewis but am no fan of Kim Borg's Priest (warm voice but almost incomprehensible English with those flabby consonants; the best Priest in my view is Bryn Terfel - whose name is missing from the annex of recent performances which concludes the book). In an ideal world one wants to juggle the available permutations, but the Angel I really wish we had on disc is Muriel Foster. Carl Newton's tabloid account of the goings-on behind the scenes before the wartime recording was made by Sargent, the Huddersfield Choral Society (much anti-southerner resentment) and the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra (not much better here either) is fascinating. Unsurprisingly Walter Legge is in the thick of all the derring-dos, but it's the highly pro-Elgar Walton whose role in the affair is the most intriguing.

We should take Michael Kennedy's centennial thoughts to heart, even if, as he himself writes, they are "pessimistic views". There is a real danger that we may lose the Elgarian style of performance as we lose touch through time's passing with those who saw, heard or even played under the composer. To hear a performance on instruments "pertaining to October 1900" would be interesting indeed, though I am always wary when it comes to "authenticity". Kennedy's suggestion of an account by Rattle with his newly acquired Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra would be even more intriguing. Such a move, to re-establish *Gerontius'* German associations, was on the point of being made by Barbirolli when illness intervened, but it should also be noted that elsewhere in Germany it has been performed recently in places such as Cologne and Mainz. The *Dream* does indeed live on, and in many ways thanks to such people who are featured within the covers of this excellent book.

Christopher Fifield

RECORD REVIEWS

In the South, Op 50. With works by Walton and Britten.

*Hallé and BBC Symphony Orchestras conducted by Sir John Barbirolli
BBC Legends BBCL 4013-2*

By 1970 Barbirolli had been conducting Elgar's music for over forty-five years, yet the overture inspired by the composer's holiday in Italy in the winter of 1903-4 had not been part of his repertoire. That this was remedied was due to Elgar's biographer Michael Kennedy, who exhorted this half-Italian conductor to study the score - which resulted in three performances of the overture in 1970 in Manchester, Sheffield and London. It is this last performance, at the Royal Festival Hall, which opens this disc. It is a dazzling interpretation, full of exuberance and warmth. The resplendent opening is ablaze with energy and much of the success of the piece is due to the passionate playing of the Hallé strings, which produce that particular "Barbirolli sound", emanating from his deep knowledge of stringed instruments as a result of his days as an orchestral cellist. The *grandioso* section, representing the past glory of Rome, with Elgar's bold harmonies, is given real weight and power (a precursor of the terrifying central section of the Rondo in the Second Symphony, also inspired by Italy?); which is followed by the contrasting beautifully expressive 'Canto popolare' with its magical viola and horn solos. Even though Barbirolli had only just over two months to live there is no evidence here of failing powers. Whilst the Festival Hall sound might lack resonance and is a little restricted, this does not diminish the overall power of the performance. Elgar said of the overture; "I love it : it's alive!", and he would say the same of this recording which no Elgarian should miss.

The disc also contains a bustling, vivid interpretation of Walton's Parita, taken from a Prom performance in 1969 - the Albert Hall sound is richer and more spacious than that of the RFH - and an intense rendition of Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem*, from the 1967 Prom season. The *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* is taken from a studio performance. It is as fine as the others on the disc but the mono sound is unfocused.

This is a splendid disc which captures Barbirolli's art in full flight and devotees of this conductor should not hesitate to hear these brilliant interpretations.

K D Mitchell

[Kevin Mitchell is working on an article about Barbirolli and Elgar, including a complete discography, which it was hoped to include in the previous issue to celebrate the Barbirolli centenary, but sadly this has had to be delayed. We hope to include it in the JOURNAL as soon as possible. - Ed.]

Introduction and Allegro for Strings, Op 47. Serenade for Strings, Op 20. Elegy, Op 58. Sospiri, Op 70. With works by Vaughan Williams.

*Allegri String Quartet, Sinfonia of London, New Philharmonia Orchestra
conducted by Sir John Barbirolli
EMI CDM 567240-2*

This is the latest in EMI Classics' 'Great Recordings of the Century' series, and few would quibble with its right to be there. It includes Barbirolli's sixth and final recording of the Introduction & Allegro (he had conducted the first two recordings in the 1920s), and with the string Serenade and the Vaughan Williams pieces, it dates from May 1962, soon after Barbirolli had signed a new contract with EMI. (Less than 50 minutes music was fine for LPs, but when the recordings were first transferred to CD in the mid-80s, two other Elgar string pieces - the *Elegy* and *Sospiri*, recorded in 1966 - were added and they are retained here.)

The use of an internationally famous string quartet instead of section leaders in the Introduction & Allegro was a novel feature, and the outstanding sound quality and orchestral playing marked this out immediately as a recording of some distinction. By the time the record was on sale the following year, Ken Russell's *Monitor* film on Elgar had been televised, with its memorable opening sequence of the young Elgar riding a horse on the Malvern Hills to the strains of the Introduction & Allegro, and this obviously was a fortuitous coincidence. However that should not detract from the intrinsic merit of these performances. This was music in which Barbirolli excelled; he loved these works, and it shows. For a conductor often castigated for slow tempi, his performance of the Introduction & Allegro is faster than many. The opening Introduction is superb, and the clear Kingsway Hall acoustic enables the engineer to highlight the different timbres of the quartet and the full band. The occasional *largamente* and *accelerando* is not allowed to disrupt the overall pulse. Ironically enough, Barbirolli is slowest in the Allegro, but builds impressively to a superb peroration of the 'Welsh' theme at fig 30. The Serenade is slowish, but faster than Beecham, Groves, and (predictably) Sinopoli. The opening *allegro piacevole* is too sedate for my liking, but once again the playing is superb, and Barbirolli highlights points which most other conductors overlook; for instance, the *diminuendo* in the second violins in the bar after letter K in the Larghetto is absolutely magical. The *Elegy* and *Sospiri* are again beautifully played and Barbirolli brings out wonderful expression from these little masterworks.

The *Tallis Fantasia* was recorded in the Temple Church, and benefits from this larger acoustic. Once again Barbirolli elicits top quality playing from his strings and the recording is demonstration class. The only slight disappointment is the *Greensleeves Fantasia* which is a little too sleepy for my taste. But do get this if you haven't already got it; these are key works by a great Elgarian.

Falstaff, Op 68. Wand of Youth - Suites 1 and 2, Opp 1a and 1b.

*London Philharmonic and Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestras
conducted by Vernon Handley
EMI Classics for Pleasure 573722-2*

It is surely something of a scandal that despite the great acclaim accorded to Vernon Handley's Elgar recordings on budget-price labels - the symphonies, *Falstaff*, *The Dream of Gerontius*, and particularly the Violin Concerto with Nigel Kennedy - EMI have rarely granted him the kudos of recording on a full-price label. Anyone listening to these performances would be at a loss to see why. I had not heard the *Falstaff* for some time - I only have it on LP - but was very impressed by every aspect of the recording. Handley has such a fine grasp of structure and pace, like his great mentor Boult, and this is essential in such a work, in which many conductors seem to lose their way. These versions of the *Wand of Youth* suites I am much more familiar with, and once more, I feel that Handley seems to get to the heart of the music, even if once or twice his tempi are on the slow side. He was equally successful in 1976 with his complete recording of *The Starlight Express*, first cousin of these suites. Fearing that I might have lost my critical edge (!) I consulted back numbers of the JOURNAL to discover that John Knowles and Gareth Lewis were similarly eulogistic, possibly more so.

The works have appeared on CD before, *Falstaff* some seven years ago with its original 1979 LP coupling, *Cockaigne*, plus the Introduction & Allegro. The two suites date from 1989 and were coupled with the superb recording of Gordon Jacob's orchestration of the Organ Sonata. The acoustics of the two recording venues - St Augustine's Kilburn and the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall - are excellently captured by the EMI engineers. Wonderful value and highly recommended.

The Editor

Other new releases include three CDs taken from the 'Elgar Edition' in the 'British Composers' series, featuring Elgar conducting his own works. The First Symphony and *Falstaff* appear on CDM 567296-2; the Second Symphony on CDM 567297-2; and finally the Cello Concerto, *Froissart*, *Cockaigne*, *In the South*, and the two Interludes from *Falstaff* (CDM 567298-2). For those who might like something slightly more esoteric, two recordings of *Salut d'Amour*. On the first, Carol Williams plays a selection of popular pieces on the historic Father Willis organ in the chapel of Blenheim Palace. This is the first time the organ has been recorded, and the recital also includes five pieces played at the opening in 1891, and five tracks as a special tribute to Sir Winston Churchill (Bandleader OS 243). Then the Elite Artists Trio of Berlin play salon music on a disc entitled 'Rote Rosen' (Red Roses), which as well as the Elgar contains other well-known pieces by such as Rubinstein, Grieg and Nevin (Largo LARGO 5143). Finally Roger Sayer, the organist of Rochester Cathedral, in a recital on Herald HAVPCD 238, plays the *Imperial March*. I should add that I have not heard any of these discs, except of course the ones that are part of the 'Elgar Edition'.

LETTERS

From : Jerrold Northrop Moore

Thank you for printing Roger Hecht's article in the last issue - the best thing I have seen on the Sea Pictures.

In particular I am fascinated by Mr Hecht's taking my old suggestion (p 160) and running so far with it. Might I ask if he would find it too far to think (entirely suggested to me by reading his article) that Sea Pictures might be looked at as the transition (all subconscious, since Gerontius was not yet specifically in view) between the outward-looking Enigma and the inward-looking Gerontius?

That would go some way to explaining things in Sea Pictures such as the dialogue of keys. If this were thought to hold any water (pardon the metaphor) Mr Hecht might be prepared to assist us with some observations about this C major - D major in relation to :

- 1) the Enigma's G;
- 2) Gerontius D, with the 'big blaze' in C;
- 3) a larger pattern I have noticed but failed to explain.

This is the general progression of Elgar's tonalities through his maturity from G major and minor (and thus B^b and E minor) flatwards into C minor and major (and E^b), to the distance of four flats (Apostles frame and First Symphony - his creative crisis) - and then symmetrically back the other way to end in the chamber music and Cello Concerto more or less where he began.

Might there be a hint in Ariel's second song in The Tempest?

... Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea change
Into something rich and strange.

Would the concluding 'ding-dong, bell' then recall to him the Catholic signal of Transubstantiation?

From : Arthur D Walker

In the letter from Denis Bloodworth re pedal timpani (JOURNAL, November 1998) he states that : "as far as I know Elgar never used these (not even in Falstaff)... I feel sure Elgar knew of them and I wonder why he never used them?"

What is the source of this information? The following passages will require pedal timpani, unless an orchestra can afford to hire an extra set of timpani to deal with the quick changes of pitch. References are to the miniature score pages.

The Dream of Gerontius

p 8 E in D three bars between at q = 92

pp 53-4 E in D for two bars then return to E at q = 138

pp 98-99 C in B, four bars, three at Allegro q = 112

p 106 B in C two bars between at q = 120

pp 146-7 B in C and E in G, two bars between at h = 42

Falstaff

p 30 F in G six bars between at h = 96

p 45 G in A five bars between at h = 120

In the South

p 13 B in C three bars between at h . = 63

p 49 last bar to bar 5

p 50 A in A at h . = 63

Symphony no 1

IV. pp 139-40 G in F four bars between at h = 84

Symphony no 2

I. pp 37-8 B in A three bars between at q . = 100

From : A J Heward Rees, Chairman South Wales Branch

Can anyone blazon (describe in technical detail) for us Elgar's heraldic achievement (coat of arms)? I have not so far come across any reference to such a thing in biographies or other sources, and am naturally inclined to think that it simply does not exist. However, I believe there are good reasons for a little harmless speculation on this point.

Unlike such earlier awards as his knighthood (1904), the baronetcy conferred on Elgar in 1931 was a hereditary honour, carrying special privileges and conditions. It would be normally required of the recipient to petition for a grant of arms for himself and his descendants by Letters Patent. These, specially designed after mutual discussions, would be issued to the new baronet by the Earl Marshal of England (the Duke of Norfolk) as titular head of the College of Arms - unless the recipient was, unlike Elgar of course, already a member in the male line of an armigerous family (one bearing a coat of arms), in which case the coat would be duly differenced and matriculated (officially adjusted for the new branch). In passing, I wonder whether Elgar's in-laws, the Roberts family, had their own escutcheon (shield); if not, acquiring one would have been a nice touch of one-upmanship, however belated, for Alice's widower!

By the time of the award (June 1931) it was naturally quite obvious to the rather depressed and disillusioned composer that the baronetcy itself (gazetted as Elgar of Broadheath) would become extinct (die with him) as there was to be no legitimate male heir. Baronetcies, apart from some Scottish exceptions, descend from father to son in the male line only. Hubert Parry's baronetcy, conferred in 1902, had similarly become extinct on his death, leaving daughters only, in 1918, but as the scion of Gloucestershire gentry he had already inherited the Parry family arms. Nevertheless, Carice Irene Elgar (Blake) would have been entitled, as a heraldic heiress, to inherit her father's armorial bearings. Although prospects of her having children had already faded, dispositions could have been made in a will for other collateral Elgars to assume (adopt) eventually any heraldic device, if so chosen, however unlikely this may now seem in the social context. Elgar may simply have decided not to bother, not having Alice to coerce him to such social niceties. There is also the possibility that any detailed heraldic discussions were overtaken by his death two years and eight months after the award.

Despite this, it is difficult to believe that the composer of Froissart, The Black Knight, The Banner of St

George, and other works showing his lifelong interest in matters of chivalry (not to mention his intense, almost painful awareness of social rank and precedence) would have refused to proceed, especially after accepting the title itself. There would certainly have been at least some queries and correspondence from the heraldic authorities, and with Elgar's position as Master of the King's Musick, it is likely that contact would have been made (as a fellow member of the Royal Household) by Garter himself (Garter King of Arms, the highest ranking officer of the College) rather than by lesser heralds and pursuivants. Elgar would surely have been delighted with, and tempted by, the canting (punning) devices of heraldry, as well as by various other opportunities to create mysterious allusions and even puzzles. If no finished coat of arms exists, there may well be sketches and messages to be discovered somewhere in the depths of the historic building in Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4BT - if only a blunt note from our hero saying 'No!'

I gladly offer the prospect of investigations to readers of this JOURNAL who are geographically better placed (or better armed?) than myself. Meanwhile, Society members who are so disposed may perhaps amuse themselves by guessing at details of the hypothetical arms, complete with a suitable motto....

From : Ian Parrott

Roger Hecht has delved deeply into the intricacies of Sea Pictures in his fascinating article (JOURNAL November 1999).

A small criticism might be that he over-states the Wagnerian influence, strong though it undoubtedly was in Elgar's output. 'The Swimmer' doesn't really owe very much to Die Meistersinger, does it? Indeed, if Mr Hecht had consulted my Master Musicians Elgar (Dent, 1971), he would notice the similarity of its main theme to Mackenzie's The Dream of Jubal, which interestingly Elgar had himself recently conducted.

From : Carl Newton

It is curious that no one seems to have noticed the odd (or is it significant?) fact that all the poets Elgar set in Sea Pictures have West Midlands connections. The Gordons, as their name suggests, were indeed of Scottish descent (from the Lairds of Esslemont), but in the poet's time they lived in Worcestershire, and he was brought up in the area before leaving for Australia. Like Elgar he played on the banks of the Severn as a boy. Moreover his father served with Henry Roberts in India. Elizabeth Barrett Browning lived at Colwall, Alice Elgar at Redmarley and Garnett in Staffordshire. Roden Noel had family connections with Gloucestershire; and incidentally his son, Conrad Noel, was the notorious 'red' Vicar of Thaxted, and acquaintance of Holst and Rawsthorne. Could it be nothing more than local patriotism that induced Elgar to choose these poems, rather than an obsession with suicide or loss and alienation? Elgar could have been amused by the fact that these poems about the sea were written by poets associated with the part of England which is just about as far as one can get from blue water.

From : John Knowles

In his review of Michael Gassmann's CD of organ music, Christopher Fifield mentions in passing that it includes a transcription of the Loughborough Memorial Chimes, "a curiosity of little consequence". Elgar recording premieres are now just about a thing of the past but this nearly was one!! In fact, it was beaten to the post by just a few months with the release in the US of an Erasmus CD featuring Jacques Maassen

Mackenzie : *The Dream of Jubal* (1889) Funeral March

Molto maestoso

p legato

Elgar : *Sea Pictures* (1899) No 5 'The Swimmer'

dolce

p legato cresc.

as carillonneur. The curious can hear a one-minute clip of this Elgar rarity via Amazon's US web site (www.amazon.com)

100 YEARS AGO...

The decision on 1 January 1900 that Elgar was to write *The Dream of Gerontius* for the Birmingham Festival in the autumn placed him under considerable pressure. But apart from performances of the *Variations* and *Sea Pictures* in Manchester, and the latter at Crystal Palace, there are few signs in the diary for the first two months of the year that life at Craeg Lea was anything out of the ordinary - the usual round of teaching, Worcestershire Philharmonic practices, visits from Malvern neighbours, and so on. There were also rounds of golf, despite the season. On 5 February "Very cold - E. played with Jones & Carr"; and the following day a triumph - "E. played with Carr & Paterson [-] did 16th hole in 2 mirabile dictu [wonderful to relate]". Another sporting diversion was a football match at Wolverhampton with Dorabella on 13 January.

But once clearance was obtained from Father Neville at the Birmingham Oratory on 12 January to use a revised version of Newman's text, work began in earnest. Elgar wanted to incorporate some Gregorian chants into the work and on 20 February wrote to his old friend Hubert Leicester to ask for a book which he remembered from St George's. On 27 February "E. writing hard", and three days later "sent 1st part of 'Dream of Gerontius' to Novello", which was all of the work up to the beginning of 'Sanctus fortis'. Possibly the size of the task and the importance of the commission was unsettling him, as he wrote to Jaeger on 4 March asking for proofs to be sent as quickly as possible. "Get on with it fast as I want to see some in print to 'kinder' encourage me - I'm wofully nervous about my powers - or want of them - as you know". Rosa Burley confirms that at this time Elgar was "not happy... He seemed uneasy and... unduly pessimistic about [the work's] future". Just over two weeks later he sent the rest of Part I to the publishers, but was still assailed by doubts, suggesting to Novello's Chairman Alfred Littleton in a letter of 19 March that part of the tenor solo (from 'I can no more' to the next chorus entry - 'Rescue him') be omitted. Fortunately Littleton and Jaeger would have none of it, the latter writing in his most encouraging vein. "The poem is wonderful & must appeal to you most forcibly. But, by Jove, what a task for you! Yet I feel sure you will be equal to it, for... you seem to *grow* with your tasks, & the greater the difficulty, the more surely you will rise to it. So I don't think you will disappoint us over your present great task".

At the end of March Elgar sent a copy of the Angel's Farewell to the heavily-pregnant Isabella Jaeger - he had played it to her on 25 February whilst visiting them. But now composition was held up as Elgar developed a chill and bad throat. On 17 April he wrote to Jaeger that "... *all* has perforce been at a standstill for a fortnight, alas!" He began again and worked steadily on the dialogue between Gerontius and the Angel. Mrs Jaeger had a little girl on 26 April, and Elgar wrote to Jaeger: "I quite know your joy... in your little one, for I have been thro' it all & know the strange, new feeling that comes into life". As a postscript he added "...if the Birmingham people like, they can have copies up to the end of the Demons' chorus". On 2 May, after a walk from Bransford to Powick he was "writing *lovely* part". Musical events still conspired to hinder composition - a Worcestershire Philharmonic concert on 5 May, and *Sea Pictures* at a Philharmonic Society concert at the Queen's Hall on the 10th. The rest of May saw Elgar hard at it as he realised that time was beginning to run out. At last, on 6 June Alice's diary could record: "E. finished 'The Dream of Gerontius' Deo Gratias. raser porsley".

The Elgar Society Journal

107 MONKHAMS AVENUE, WOODFORD GREEN, ESSEX IG8 0ER

Tel: 020 8506 0912

Fax: 020 8924 4154

e-mail: journal@elgar.org

CONTENTS

Vol.11, No.4

March 2000

Articles

| | |
|--|-----|
| King Olaf Tryggvason and Sir Edward Elgar | 202 |
| Interpreting Elgar - A Conductor's Thoughts | 219 |
| Singer, Soldier ... Remembering Charles Mott | 227 |
| Book Reviews | 237 |
| Record Reviews | 240 |
| Letters | 243 |
| 100 years ago... | 247 |

Front Cover : Elgar with bicycle. Elgar first took up cycling in the summer of 1900.

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

