Parry as Song-Writer. III (Concluded)

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What the Prince said was of greater importance. He referred to the successful completion of the Hall as 'an important feature of a long-cherished design of my beloved father for the general culture of your people, and for the encouragement of the Arts and Sciences, an object which he always had warmly at heart.' His Royal Highness further added: 'The interest shown in the Hall by the most eminent musicians and composers of Europe strengthens our belief that it will largely conduce to the revival among all classes of the nation of a taste for the cultivation of music.' In the course of her reply, the Queen, after laying stress on the value of Exhibitions, said: 'These objects could not fail to commend themselves at all times, and in all places, to my sympathy and interest, fraught as they are with recollections of him to whose memory this Hall is dedicated, and whose dearest aim was to inspire my people with a love of all that is good and noble, and, by closer knowledge and juster appreciation of each other, to cultivate a spirit of goodwill and concord.'

These were words of deep and serious import, and they imposed a heavy obligation upon those entrusted with the task of shaping the destinies of the new undertaking. The task in question has now a history of fifty years, a history replete with chequered events—disappointments and failures, periods of disaster and dissatisfaction, followed by the returning smiles of good fortune and success. The narrative of these events must be told in subsequent articles; and as the double Jubilee is not to be celebrated until May 7, the greater part of the story will have been told in these columns before then.

TWO FUNCTIONS—A CONTRAST

Meanwhile, just a word of comparison concerning the music that was given on the occasion of the opening ceremony, and that to be heard at the Jubilee function now close at hand. The programme arranged for the latter, when the King and Queen will, it is hoped, be present, is, save as to one pardonable item, all British: it illustrates the national musical growth as embodied in those composers who have been most closely associated with the Royal Albert Hall. That is doing a good deal.

Fifty years ago, the concert listened to by Queen Victoria and her family included scarcely a single piece from an English pen. The Ode or Biblical Cantata (it had no specific title) which furnished the *pièce d'occasion* was composed by Sir Michael Costa, the celebrated conductor, a Neapolitan by birth, albeit a Londoner by domicile, whose oratorios might have led his critics to expect better things from him, whereas they were agreed that he never wrote anything more uninspired than this Ode. Its one redeeming feature was the quartet of native soloists, which comprised Lemmens-Sherrington, Patey, Vernon Rigby, and the happily still-living Sir Charles Santley. In all other respects the programme was quite unworthy of the inauguration of a unique

and magnificent concert-hall—a wonderful place; a place with a purpose calculated to arouse the pride and emulative spirit of every cultivated Englishman.

(To be continued.)

PARRY AS SONG-WRITER

By H. C. COLLES

(Concluded from March number, page 158)

III.

The editors of the posthumous volumes of Parry's songs are anxious that it should be made quite clear that the responsibility for including 'When the Sun's great Orb' in Book XII. is theirs. It was not one of the five or six songs mentioned by the composer as among those which he meant to publish.

This was assumed by me when at the end of my first article I said: 'It was right to publish "When the Sun's great Orb," for without it we should lose an essential aspect of him.' A part of last month's article was devoted to an attempt to discover that essential aspect by a process of analysis and of contrast with other songs. It is possible that Parry would have withheld it from publication or remodelled some of its details, but we cannot be certain. For one of the contradictions of his style—almost the only important contradiction it contains—is due to the mixture of responsibility and impulse which at one moment would make him consider and weigh what he said either in words or music with an almost excessive conscientiousness, and at another allow him to pass some detail which seems incompatible with his own standard of self-criticism. It is a contradiction which cannot be ignored if we are to get anything like a discriminating appreciation of his music. It is as futile on the one hand to maintain, as some of his warmest admirers have maintained, that the whole of his output was checked by a severe self-criticism, as it is short-sighted on the other to allow his great music to sink into oblivion because its workmanship in certain instances bears signs of haste and even of makeshift. The baffling thing is that the hasty workmanship often appears in works to which he gave the closest and most carefully considered thought. If we are to get at the kernel of Parry's mind we have to recognize both sides of the case.

There was a definite cause for such defects in many of his big choral works. They were generally written against time for a special occasion in the hardly won intervals of an exceptionally busy life. In those cases he concentrated on the things which mattered most to him and which were never the details of phraseology or of instrumentation. The only pity was that he did not realise how much those details might count to the generality of his hearers.

With the songs, however, the case was different. He could, and frequently did, hold back a song with a view to polishing its expression, or, as he

himself used to put it 'solving its problems.' Yet some of the songs which he did publish, in the ninth and tenth sets of the Lyrics particularly, appear with some imperfectly solved problems in the instrumental part. 'The Witches' Wood' (Mary E. Coleridge, Book IX.) and 'The City Window' (Langdon Elwyn Mitchell, Book X.) are examples. In both, the function of the pianoforte part is to enforce the descriptive qualities of the verse, and both contain ideas of great musical beauty. To discuss how far these ideas permeate every feature would be to labour a point which has been already sufficiently accentuated in the case of the later songs.

There are two ways in which a composer may approach a descriptive poem. In one his music holds a mirror to the words; their features are reflected in its form. The other takes little or no account of the features, but dwells entirely in the mood which their total combines to produce. The songs just named illustrate the first method, but the latter was the more congenial to Parry. The greatest of his descriptive songs is one in which any attempt to emphasize one image of the poem at the expense of another would have been fatal. This is the setting in Book VIII. of Langdon Elwyn Mitchell's 'Nightfall in Winter':

Cold is the air,
The woods are bare
And brown; the herd
Stand in the yard.
The frost doth fall;
And round the hill
The hares move slow;
The homeward crow,
Alone and high
Crosses the sky
All silently.

The poet makes no comment, and the musician may make none. He takes quiet note of every feature of the scene in the waning light and the growing cold. There is a numbness everywhere. It is this which Parry has caught and held in the rhythm which prevails throughout, in the long, repeated notes which fall with a dull thud on every accent, and the vocal declamation, all on the middle notes of the voice, moving constantly by small intervals. The end of the song is here quoted to show its nature, but it is only in the balance of the whole that we get the measure of his insight into the qualities of the poem:

EX. 1.

It is worth noticing particularly how the rhythm is carried through to its logical conclusion in the final cadence. There is no trace here of the conventional *Coda* to round off the song which is sometimes met with, and generally with regret, at the end of a deeply felt song.

'Dirge in Woods' (George Meredith), in the same volume, deserves to be placed beside 'Nightfall in Winter,' for here the words demand a contrast in the picture of the wind swaying the pine-tops above, while beneath, the wood is 'quiet as under the sea.' The slow 6-8 measure prevails through the greater part of the song, but the stillness beneath is suggested in one extraordinarily subtle touch:

In the interpolation of that pair of quavers one sees the light pine-needles dropping straight to earth, unwavering though the wind sighs overhead. This is an instance of Parry's command of the magic of simplicity, the musical counterpart to the monosyllables by which Meredith gains the effect of his line.

If the study of these examples has been at all successful, it will have shown something of Parry's adaptability to types of poetry varying widely in mood and in manner. Something was said in the first article of his increasing fondness for lyrics by Julian Sturgis and others, which, whatever their merits and suitability for music, must be described as minor poetry. The minor poem has certain definite advantages as the text for a song. Granted that it is free from banalities of expression, it may allow a musician greater liberty of action from the fact that it gives him scope to supply the personality which it lacks. In the majority of instances where Parry chose such verse he carried it through by the strength of his own impulse. He makes real even such a stanza as :

O bird flying far to the ocean,
O bird flying far to the sea,
I ask for one buoyant emotion,
One thrill of thy rapture for me.

Only a great artist could have done so. This, from 'A Moment of Farewell' (Sturgis, Book X.), suggests a comparison with the earlier setting of Byron's 'There be none of beauty's daughters' (Book IV.). Byron's poem has a colour of its own to which the composer must bend his mood. A quotation may show how completely he has reflected that colour in the shape of his melody :

This is so apt to the mellifluous lines that one hardly finds in it the traits of the typical Parry melody as they are found in the Sturgis song. Parry rarely set the romantic poets, but this and the Keats song which follows it, 'Bright Star,' suggest that he might have added many other facets to his style as a song-writer had he chosen to do so.

But amongst the many facets which he did develop, one returns to his settings of the Elizabethans as the most completely satisfying. Of those in the earlier sets, several are among the best known of his songs. Some of the most delicate, 'Weep you no more, sad fountains' and 'Lay a garland on my hearse,' for example, should be much better known than they are. But 'On a time the amorous Silvy' (Book VII.), one of the last of the kind which he published, is scarcely ever heard :

The picture of the tender dalliance and reluctant parting of Silvy and her shepherd is completed in the following exquisite cadence :

Ex. 5.

Kiss me and take my soul . . . in

keep - ing, Since I must

go, . . . now day is near.

poco rit. *ppp*

poco rit. dim. *ppp*

a tempo.

a tempo.

In the thoughtful poise of the few chords used, in the balance of tonality, and in the rhythm of the melody extending without straining that of the verse, we find an epitome of Parry's art as a song-writer.

MODERN FRENCH COMPOSERS: I.—HOW THEY ARE ENCOURAGED

By M.-D. CALVOCORESSI

Which of the modern schools of music has achieved the most and deserves best is a question often asked, almost as often answered—and a perfectly futile question: not only because comparisons of the kind seldom serve any desirable purpose, but because time alone can supply the true answer. Counting the works of a given school is useless unless one is able to weigh them. The Hungarian school, whose prominent representatives are but two, Béla Bartók and Zoltan Kodaly (possibly three, if Nikolaus Radnai, whose works prior to 1914 were full of promise, has further made good), may be considered no less important in purport and in potential influence, and perhaps even more so, than many a school whose representatives are more numerous. The contemporary German composers are many: but may be the small group headed by Arnold Schönberg will be found to carry greater significance than all the remainder. Were we able to discover to-day how many of the contemporary composers of any country will endure, and which of them will stand foremost in the

opinion of posterity, it is not unlikely that most of us would be overwhelmed with surprise—exactly as most of Beethoven's contemporaries would have been had they known what his ultimate standing would be.

Even without attempting to deliver judgment as to the comparative merits of the modern French school, there is one statement that can unhesitatingly be made: of all countries that have constantly taken an interest in music, none has during the past hundred years or so made greater headway than France. Apart from the general causes that led to her progress during the 19th century and after—a synopsis of which will be found in the *Musical Times* for September, 1913, p. 574—we must, when attempting to investigate the circumstances in which the French School pursued its evolution, take into account the fact that in France a systematic policy of encouragement to musicians is pursued both by the State and by private initiative. Naturally enough, the methods by which that policy is carried out are not altogether flawless. A brief description will show how far they are efficient, and how far they fall short.

To begin with, the would-be composer, instrumentalist or vocalist, receives his professional education free in the Conservatoires of Paris, or of the provinces. Competitions—whose results are neither more nor less infallible than those of other musical contests—regulate his or her progress in the ranks. The highest award for composers, the Prix de Rome, ensures several years of modest independence (enough for the composer to make a good start), and carries with it the certainty that an opera or other similar work from the composer's pen will some day be produced under the best available conditions at one of the State-subsidised theatres, the Opéra or the Opéra-Comique.

These theatres, in exchange for the grant-in-aid which they receive, are compelled, among other things, to produce a determined number of works by French composers, and specially by laureates of the Conservatoire. More recently, the Gaité Lyrique, subsidised by the City of Paris, has come to widen the field thus offered.

Here, again, the methods of selection—methods strictly determined by official regulations—are not infallible. Indeed, the list of high class works by French composers which remained neglected—if not permanently, at least for a time—by the managers of the Paris theatres, is striking enough. Saint-Saëns' 'Samson and Delilah,' Chabrier's 'Gwendoline,' Vincent d'Indy's 'Fervaal' and 'L'Etranger' were produced abroad before being introduced to the French public. On the other hand, the number of important works produced under the same regulations is not small.

The great defect of this system is that it constitutes an artificial and altogether disproportionate stimulus to opera-writing. The catalogue of new works by French composers produced during the past twenty-five years or so is a most depressing document. It shows that a considerable number