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MAY 1, 1919.

MODERN BRITISH COMPOSERS.

By EDWIN EVANS.

III.—BENJAMIN DALE.

'He has written fewer and better works than any English composer of his generation.' That is the considered opinion of a well-known English musician, admittedly of the older school, concerning Benjamin J. Dale. To some extent it may be coloured by personal predilection as well as by a firm belief in conservative principles, but even when discounted in both respects, this sweeping statement is not devoid of some justification. Dale has few works to his credit, but practically all of them have a real permanent value, and, in the path of his choice, he has certainly achieved remarkable eminence. The accident of chronology which led us in the introductory article to assign to one group the English composers born between 1870 and 1885 places him at the end of a period, and the circumstance, though fortuitous, has its significance. He really does represent the end of a period. Though one or two of his close contemporaries, such as James Friskin (born 1886), still adhere to the same traditional principles, Dale's work is so characteristic of them as to stand out with special prominence. It is difficult to explain in words wherein this characteristic quality lies, especially as certain traits of his writing coincide more or less with the conventions laid down by the German composers of the middle 19th century. He has, for instance, an elegance of contour which seems to constitute a link with the days in which the Mendelssohn factor was dominant in English music. Moreover, he is not entirely free from a vein of sentiment which, were one disposed to be critical, might be ascribed to a similar source, though he contrives to escape the charge of sentimentality. The fact is that the elegance and the sentiment alike correspond to indigenous traits for which such methods constitute a sympathetic mode of expression. In other words, this musical elegance is his, not because of the glamour of its German exponents, but because it is natural to himself; and the sentiment finds expression in his music not because of its prototype in the German romantics, but because he really feels it and is impelled to give it voice. In short, even where Dale, to a superficial critic, might appear to be offering up incense on much frequented altars, he is in fact being not only spontaneous, but, in a very subtle sense, markedly individual. It is a paradox the key to which would be readily furnished by personal acquaintance. Its quest in the music itself demands sympathy and an absence of preconceived opinion in the

matter. To us in England Dale's music appeals by virtue of qualities which we regard as indigenous. To segregate those qualities from the mere outward aspects of his writing is a matter of unprejudiced insight.

Benjamin Dale was born July 17, 1885, at Crouch Hill, London, and is the son of the late C. J. Dale, a talented amateur musician who was at one time the conductor of the Finsbury Choral Association. He studied with great distinction at the Royal Academy of Music, and was one of many pupils of Mr. Frederick Corder who have since acquired fame. As already hinted, his output is very modest, even in proportion to his years of musicianship. He made his début as a composer with an Overture inspired by Macaulay's 'Horatius,' which was performed May 10, 1900, but he has long since ceased to take that work seriously. Nor does he attach much importance to another Overture, 'The Tempest,' which was given two years later at Queen's Hall. These, and a Concert Overture in G minor, played at Bournemouth, are his only symphonic works, all being of very early date. With them may be classed a Concert piece for Organ and Orchestra which has had numerous performances, including one at a concert of the Patron's Fund.

It is with the Pianoforte Sonata in D minor, written in 1902, when Dale was still a student, and performed for the first time in 1905, that Dale's career as a composer acquires the outstanding prominence which entitles him to special notice among his contemporaries. A detailed analysis of this remarkable work was contributed to the *Musical Times* of April 1, 1918, by Mr. Frederick Corder. Both in its ambition and its achievement it is one of the most important compositions in the British repertoire. It is planned in generous proportions, and requires, to sustain its length, an exceptional breadth of interpretation, in the absence of which the separate performance of one of its two sections, however regrettable in itself, is the wiser course. It consists of an opening *Allegro* in the established form, and a theme with seven variations and a *Rondo*, the former being grouped to correspond with the conventional slow movement and *Scherzo* of a sonata, to which the latter supplies the *Finale*. The variations are separated from the *Rondo* by an elaborate bridge-passage which is in reality yet another variation, and the *Rondo* concludes with a re-statement of the theme in its most impressive form, the effect of which is enhanced by the high spirits of the intervening music. A romantic thread permeates the entire work, but is not permitted to exclude the element of humour which finds expression in an episode of the first movement, in several of the variations, and most characteristically in the *Rondo*. Apart from this the dominant quality is a healthy robustness combined with elegance of expression. Though the comparison may seem incongruous, one is led to think of the highly finished performance of an athlete whose strength is displayed the more convincingly through being associated with an easy grace. Though by no means ultra-modern

in its texture, the work betrays in places a sympathetic acquaintance with modern harmonic thought, in a very personal blend with the older tradition. It is difficult to realise in the presence of this Sonata that it was the work of a boy in his 'teens. The only evidence of his youth is the extraordinary exuberance of ideas which a maturer composer might have used more sparingly.

We give two extracts from the Sonata, (1) from the Variations, (2) from the *Rondo* :

EXAMPLE I.

Example I is a musical score for piano and violin. The piano part is in 4/8 time, marked *Andante*. It begins with a *p espressivo* dynamic. The violin part is in 4/8 time, marked *dolcis. molto espress.*. It features a *poco rit.* section followed by a *p p p* dynamic. The piano part continues with a *dolciss.* section and an *espress. cres.* section. The violin part continues with a *f poco allarg.* section, marked *meno forte.*, and a *p* dynamic. The piano part ends with a *p* dynamic.

EXAMPLE II.

Example II is a musical score for piano and violin. The piano part is in 2/4 time, marked *Molto allegro.*. It begins with a *fff* dynamic. The violin part is in 2/4 time, marked *a tempo.*. It features an *allarg.* section followed by a *mf* dynamic. The piano part continues with a *col 8va* section. The violin part continues with a *8va* section. The piano part ends with a *fff* dynamic. The violin part ends with a *8va* section.

Dale's only other pianoforte work is a short piece entitled 'Night fancies,' dedicated to the present writer. It consists of a *Rêverie*, associated with a bell-like chime, and interrupted with a sudden torrent of whimsical and fantastic imagination.

Much of the rest of Dale's work is indelibly linked to the personality of Lionel Tertis, the greatest viola player of modern times, whose

virtuosity has so extended the technical resources of his instrument that nearly all the younger English composers have felt impelled to contribute to a repertoire that had previously lacked interest. Even apart from the many solo works which owe their existence to his playing, any attentive student of English chamber-music will readily discover that the viola plays a distinctive rôle such as is

rarely allotted to it in the chamber-music of other countries. The first and most important of Dale's viola works is a Suite in three movements with pianoforte accompaniment, two of which were subsequently scored for orchestra. In the original form the Suite was first heard at Æolian Hall in 1906, and in the orchestral version the *Romance* and *Finale* were first played by Mr. Lionel Tertis at a concert of the Royal Philharmonic Society in 1911. Though written very soon after the Sonata, the Suite displays in many respects greater originality of invention, and the element of humour is given more elaborate expression in the first and last movements. But the gem of this attractive work is its middle section—the *Romance*—a

movement constructed on strictly classical lines and based on two simple themes of haunting beauty. It is scarcely too much to assert that no finer slow movement has made its appearance since the days of the great classics. It breathes the very spirit of poetry, and makes such an appeal to the imagination that few can fail to respond to it. To the professed sceptic it may perhaps seem to lean overmuch in a sentimental direction, but the sentiment itself is so fresh, and so free from hysterical exaggeration, that the listener stands disarmed. This one movement alone would entitle Dale to an honoured place among modern writers of chamber-music. Here are its opening bars:

EXAMPLE III.

The musical score for Example III consists of three systems of music. The first system is marked *espress molto.* and *p* (piano). It features a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a piano accompaniment. The tempo is indicated as $\text{♩} = 56$. Pedal markings (Ped.) are present throughout the first system. The second system is marked *con teneressa.* (with tenderness). It continues the melodic and piano accompaniment. Pedal markings (Ped.) are present throughout the second system. The third system includes a *tre corde* (all three strings) instruction. Pedal markings (Ped.) are present throughout the third system.

The Suite was followed by a Phantasy for viola and pianoforte, due—like so many other works in the same form—to the initiative of Mr. W. W. Cobbett. Owing perhaps to the condensation incidental to this form, the music has an aspect of greater maturity, but is otherwise conceived in the same

vein of romantic feeling. Its principal subject is a simple tune somewhat resembling folk-song, and it contains an *Andante espressivo* which is a remarkable example of the composer's ability to sustain the interest in an extended melodic line.

We give a brief extract :

EXAMPLE IV.

Anda te. p molto espress.
Viola. poco rit. . . . . a tempo.

cantabile. *poco rit.* *espress.* *cres.* *p espress.* *cres.* *cres.* *&c.*

But perhaps the most characteristic feature of the work is the *Scherzo* section, with its happy rhythmic freedom :

EXAMPLE V.

Allegro molto.
p p scherz. *sf* *sf* *pizz.* *p*

col 8va. *f* *arco.* *f* *cres.* *3* *3* *3* *3* *&c.*

In addition to these two compositions, Dale has written an ingenious short piece comprising an Introduction and Andante for six violas, which was first performed by a group of Lionel Tertis's pupils. Owing to the rarity of the combination, it is not likely ever to become popular; but it constitutes a striking display of first-class musicianship.

This practically represents the whole of Mr Dale's output at present, apart from a small amount of Church music, and a Cantata, 'Before the paling of the stars,' which was performed at Queen's Hall in February, 1913. This setting of a

poem by Christina Rossetti derives its effect from simple melodic outlines in a highly-coloured setting with a moderate amount of rhythmic freedom. It is intended for a small choir, not exceeding eighty voices, and an orchestra of forty players. When it was written Dale had lapsed into a period of relative inactivity which his friends regarded as the preface to a new development of his methods, for he has too much of the spirit of the age to be content to cling so tenaciously as hitherto to those of tradition. Unfortunately the outbreak of war caught him in Germany, and he was interned at Ruhleben until last year, when he was removed

to a camp in Holland. He interested himself in such opportunities as occurred for music at Ruhleben, but the total absence of privacy was an insurmountable obstacle to serious composition, and we shall have to await more favourable conditions to learn the effect of four years of enforced reflection on one of the most interesting and promising musical personalities modern England has produced.

Under such depressing conditions Dale has naturally produced only works of minor importance, an English Dance for violin and pianoforte, and a couple of Shakespearean songs; but his admirers are looking forward with much curiosity to the composition upon which he is now engaged, which is a Quartet in three movements for pianoforte and strings. It will probably be completed during the current month, and it is to be hoped that a public performance will be arranged before the composer leaves, some time in June, for an examining tour in Australia.

Whatever may be the outcome of his present experiences, the works by which Dale is best known, the Pianoforte Sonata and the Viola Suite, have the appearance of representing the close of a chapter rather than the opening of one. It is unlikely that any English composers who are now students will, on reaching maturity, retain as much allegiance as he has done to a tradition which has lost contact with actuality. It is also doubtful whether the somewhat aristocratic distinction of which his style furnishes an excellent example, will characterise our post-war music. The present trend of musical psychology favours ruggedness rather than polished utterance, and the cult of beautiful phrases is giving way to a search for greater veracity. It is at least probable that those composers who have passed through vivid personal experiences in the present war will be among the foremost to give us this element of uncompromising truth in their music, and it will be surprising if Dale is not of their number.

LIST OF WORKS.

ORCHESTRA.

Overture, 'The Tempest'	1902
Fantasia (Organ and Orchestra)	1903
Concert-Overture in G minor	1904

CHORUS AND ORCHESTRA.

'Before the paling of the stars' (Novello)	1912

PIANOFORTE SOLO.

Sonata in D minor (Novello)	1905
Night-Fancies (Ricordi)	1907

CHAMBER MUSIC.

Suite, for Viola and Pianoforte (Novello)	1907
Phantasy, for Viola and Pianoforte (Schott)	1911
Introduction and Andante, for Six Violas	1913
English Dance, for Violin and Pianoforte (Anglo-French Music Co.)	1916

SONGS.

Carpe Diem (Shakespeare)—(Novello)	1918
A Dirge of Love (Shakespeare)—(Novello)	1918

CHURCH MUSIC.—THREE CAROLS.

In Bethlehem, that noble place (Novello)	
The Holy Birth (Novello)	
The Shepherds and the Mother (Stainer & Bell)	

THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE FOR
BEETHOVEN.

BY W. WRIGHT ROBERTS.

The higher function of the Shakespearean jester—as 'Feste,' of all people, will remember—was enlightenment, seasoned or not with irresponsibility. 'Feste's' happy pseudonym discounts the apparent levity of some of his remarks. Last month, indeed, he wrote much that was suggestive. I fully believe that he is not attacking Beethoven; he is attacking rather the complacent, uncritical 'Beethovenite,' and I sympathise with him in his aim.

He tells us that the master 'suffers from his date.' So, surely, do all composers, unless we get just the right perspective. In the case of Beethoven—not quite antique, not quite modern—this is difficult to find. If, in suggesting how we may find it, I question some of 'Feste's' assertions, I ask him to believe that I do so in no carping spirit.

We all of us have some mind-map of Beethoven's works. Do not some of us need to draw it afresh and differently? The C minor, the 'Appassionata,' and other over-played masterpieces show us a tragic figure, a being of Promethean heroism and divine pathos, which the conservative, sentimental public has taken to its heart, not always for musical reasons. This figure has become a convention. It may be the essential Beethoven, but it is not all Beethoven. And many of us, unfortunately, look for this Beethoven in all his works. I am not sure that 'Feste' has not that tendency.

But we sometimes forget that in his early works, and right on into full maturity, alongside the growing heroism and deepening tragedy there is a gay, care-free Beethoven, a stronger, subtler Mozart. Think of the E flat Pianoforte Sonata (Op. 31, No. 3), the last 'Rasumovsky' Quartet, the fourth Symphony. Need we search these works, any more than Mozart's, for deep emotional significance? Rather we should ask of them what they can give—joy, radiance, ideal formal beauty. If there is anything in such works that really catches at the heart, it is most often the very perfection of design, or of melodic curve. Such things, to sensitive minds, can be overwhelming; and some such impression may have been the cause of that rhapsody of Berlioz, quoted last month, on the *Larghetto* of the second Symphony.

Surely, then, if we look at these works as we do at Mozart's, we shall not be disappointed. The Mozart revival, in this strenuous age, is very significant. Art affords an escape from one's age, as well as an expression of it. Those who wish so to escape, from time to time, have a right to do so. They will not necessarily become less alert to modern developments: their judgment of present-day works may in fact be all the more discriminating.

Again, if Beethoven is more antique, is he not also more modern than 'Feste' seems to imply? Is 'Feste' really fair in stating that among the slow movements of the Symphonies only the Funeral March has more than 'slender emotional significance'? Is he fair in making the *Largo* of the