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The Musical Times
AND SINGING-CLASS CIRCULAR.
MAY 1, 1911.

MR. PERCY PITT.

There are no statistics available to show how often sons do not follow the careers mapped out for them in childhood by their fond and sanguine parents; but, judging from fairly wide experience, it may be asserted with confidence that the rate of mortality of such designs has always been very high. Another and even triter general reflection on the waywardness of things is that a youth may best fit himself to be borne on the tide that ultimately comes his way, not only by studies that have no apparent value, but by avoidance of paths that seem obviously to promise success. Both these ironies of fate are aptly illustrated in the career of the subject of this sketch, Mr. Percy Pitt.

Mr. Pitt's parents were not specially musical. Heredity therefore cannot be said to be an obvious factor in his natural equipment. He was born in London in 1870. During his early youth he enjoyed no particular musical environment. He had a fair voice, and he was always fond of music, but he was never in a church choir. His general education at this stage was gained in a small private school. He had some pianoforte lessons from the late Mr. Fountain Meen, who warned him that music was all very well as a recreation, but was a poor thing to take up as a profession. When he had reached his twelfth year his parents resolved to send him to Paris in order that he might learn the French language with a view to its utility in the commercial career they designed him to follow. In Paris he was a pupil in a school the Director of which, and his wife, had musical leanings, and here he received much encouragement in musical study. He took pianoforte lessons from Mathis Lussy (author of the well-known treatise on musical expression, a translation of which appears in Novello's Primer series) and for the first time in his life he heard a full orchestra, the celebrated body conducted by the late M. Lamoureux. He recalls that at school he wore the school uniform, which made him look like a postman.

After remaining in Paris for two years, he returned in 1885 to London for a few months, and then his parents (both of whom it may be mentioned are still living) resolved to send him to Germany for the purpose of adding to his linguistic accomplishments and with no thought of musical study. Eisenach, in Thuringia, immortalised as the birth-place of John Sebastian Bach, was the chosen centre, and here the youth was quartered on a family where only German was spoken. Although he took no music lessons, he came into friendly contact with Herr Thüreau, the conductor of the local Musikverein, and in this way acquired insight into the working of choral and orchestral societies, and also obtained close acquaintance with much good music. Through Thüreau he was introduced to Count Paul Waldersee, a musician who at this period was editorially connected with Breitkopf & Härtel. The Count was very encouraging to Pitt, and introduced him to Dr. O. von Hase, the head of the great firm. This drift into musical circles induced Pitt's parents to believe that after all a musical career would best suit their son's capacities and desires. It was now decided that he should specialise, and with this view he proceeded to Leipsic and entered the Conservatoire. There he studied harmony under Jadassohn and composition and pianoforte under Carl Reinecke. He did not compose very much at this period, being content to test his powers by essays in the smaller forms: variations, songs, part-songs, *et cetera*. In this way he worked for about two years, studying no instrument other than the pianoforte. After returning to London for a short time, his next move was to Munich, where he joined the Music School. This was under the direction of Baron Von Perfall, who was also the director of the Opera, a significant and pregnant combination that welded into a unity the objective of two musical activities. At Munich he came under the influence of Rheinberger, well-known as an organist and as a highly capable professor of harmony, counterpoint, and composition. In these advanced times, when all these branches of musical study can be taught by post while you wait, as it were, and success at examinations guaranteed, it may be of some historical interest to record how in this antiquated period they were treated at Munich. The full class course, as planned by Rheinberger, was spread over three years. Lessons were given from 8 (this deserves noting) to 10 a.m. every week-day. Mondays and Thursdays were devoted to elementary work, Tuesdays and Fridays to more advanced study, and Wednesdays and Saturdays to fugue and the higher forms. The custom, which was followed by Mr. Pitt, was for students to attend the elementary course during the first year, the more advanced class during the second year, and both the advanced class and the higher-forms class during the third year. Thus in this last year the student worked four mornings a week with the professor. The blackboard, with its fleeting chalked record of harmonic sins that find an early grave in a callous duster, was, as it always must be in class-work, a constant aid in teaching. Rheinberger would start a theme, a student would be set to devise some treatment, general criticism would ensue, and other students would be called upon to continue the construction. When it was completed, students were selected to play the exercise, which was always written in the proper clefs. All the members of the class were supposed to copy in their note-books the evolutionary stages of the exercise, with its elimination of the unfit and its survival of the fittest. Backward students were deputed to clean the blackboard.

Mr. Pitt had some organ lessons from Rheinberger, more in order to learn something of the

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capabilities of the instrument than with a view to cultivate its technique. Amongst the experiences gained at Munich, Mr. Pitt values highly those derived from the students' orchestra, which students were regularly allowed to conduct under special guidance. Frequent attendance at rehearsals in the Opera House, and the coaching of singers in their parts, familiarised him with the exigencies of opera production, and equipped him without his knowing it for what has now turned out to be his chief professional avocation. His ambition as a student was to become a composer and perhaps a conductor. He did not devote special attention to pianoforte technique, and therefore his present substantial acquirements in pianoforte playing are of the utilitarian order, and are a sort of by-product of his general musical study. Whilst at Munich he formed the idea of settling permanently in Germany. But this unpatriotic intention was happily frustrated by the wise decrees of fate, and in the words of the song he still remains an Englishman. In 1892 his parents thought it was time for him to turn his budding talent to account. He came home to London and surveyed the prospect. As he had no inclination to teach, there seemed little or no scope for his abilities as a conductor and composer. Yet, as stated above, he had really been exactly fitting himself for the work to which he slowly gravitated. Covent Garden would not have known Percy Pitt if he had been forced to the teaching mill already over-stocked with capable professors. For a few months after his arrival in London he gave some lessons and accompanied and coached singers. Then in the season 1892-3 Schultz-Curtius started the Mottl orchestral concerts at Queen's Hall, in connection with which Henry J. Wood was engaged as musical adviser. An important part of the concert scheme was the performance of sections of 'The Flying Dutchman,' which were to be done in English, and of 'Parsifal' and 'Die Meistersinger,' which were to be done in German. This involved the engagement and training of a chorus. Wood coached the chorus in the work to be done in English, and a young German who had happened to be a colleague of Pitt when he was abroad was engaged to coach them in German. But the latter had not sufficient knowledge of English to make himself understood by the chorus, and as the work to be done was heavy and the time short, it was arranged that Percy Pitt should help him with the rehearsals. Then Mr. Robert Newman came forward with a great promenade concert scheme with Henry J. Wood as conductor. Wood, knowing Pitt's capabilities, offered to introduce him as a composer, and a Suite for full orchestra composed in the Munich days was performed and favourably received. Later, Pitt made himself generally useful in Queen's Hall doings by selecting voices and accompanying rehearsals for the new choral society formed by Mr. Newman, and when the post of accompanist fell vacant he was selected to fill it. His orchestral compositions now and again found their way into the programmes, and his reputation as a capable composer became established. About this time, after an acquaintance many years before, Pitt met Messager, who held an important post at Covent Garden, and this led to his being introduced to Mr. H. V. Higgins, the chairman of the Opera Syndicate, who soon found that his linguistic and musical attainments were likely to be of service to a polyglot opera house. He was soon engaged as *maestro al piano* and stage conductor, and later, was sent on a roving commission abroad to find competent operatic artists. Eventually this brought him in contact with Richter, then one of the chief conductors at Covent Garden, and an intimacy was established that has been one of the cherished rewards of Pitt's life. Pitt was occupied as described above for about three years. Then, in 1906, an opera, 'The Vagabond and the Princess,' by Poldini, was selected for production, and Pitt was asked by Richter to coach the artists. Two days before its production Richter deputed Pitt to direct the full rehearsal of the opera, an experiment that was so successful that he was appointed to conduct the performance. This was Mr. Pitt's first appearance as a public conductor, and his success increased the general confidence in his abilities.

In 1907 Messager resigned his post at Covent Garden in order to accept a similar engagement at the Grand Opera House at Paris. The post vacated was now divided, Mr. Forsyth being appointed general business manager and Mr. Pitt looking after the artistic side, and this is the position of affairs to-day.

Rehearsals for the coming season are now in full swing. As already stated in our columns, operas will be given this season only in French and Italian. In this connection it is gratifying to record that Mr. Pitt talks very hopefully of the experiment that is being made of engaging some English singers for the chorus. Hitherto the Covent Garden opera chorus has been staffed by foreigners. Mr. Pitt finds that the English singers have better voices, and that they are quick to pick up the music and the foreign languages used.

All who know Mr. Pitt's ability as a composer will look forward to the production at the London Musical Festival of his new English Rhapsody for full orchestra. This composition, upon which he is now busy, is based upon folk-songs, amongst which may be mentioned 'The three merry men of Kent,' 'The Lass of Cumberland,' and 'Lilliburlero.' The work is in four sections, but it is continuous.

The following is a list of Mr. Pitt's chief compositions:

VOCAL.

'Hohenlinden,' for male chorus and orchestra. (1899.)
*'The Blessed Damozel,' for soli, chorus and orchestra.
*'Schwerting, the Saxon,' ballad for chorus and orchestra.
Five poems for baritone and orchestra. (1902.)
Poems for mezzo-soprano and orchestra. (1904.)

(* Not hitherto performed.)

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PART-SONGS :

Mixed Voices:
- Laugh at loving if you will.
- A love Symphony.
- O nightingale.
- Shepherds all and maidens fair.
- To-night.

Male Voices:
- A cavalier's song.
- Sunset.
- While my lady sleepeth.

INSTRUMENTAL.

Suite for orchestra. (1895.)
Suite, 'Fêtes galantes.' (1896.)
Concerto for clarinet and orchestra. (1897.)
Overture, 'The Taming of the Shrew.' (1898.)
Suite, 'Cinderella.' (1899).
Symphonic Prelude, 'Le sang des Crépuscules.' (1900.)
Ballad for violin and orchestra. (1900.)
Suite, 'Dance Rhythms.' (1901.)
Incidental music to 'Paolo and Francesca.' (1902.)
Coronation march.
March for military band (for the trooping of the colour).
Oriental Rhapsody.
A Ballet-Pantomime in 2 Acts.
Incidental music to 'Flodden Field.'
Incidental music to 'King Richard II.'
Symphony. (Birmingham Festival, 1906.)
Serenade for small orchestra.
Serenade for strings.
Chamber music. M.

ELGAR'S SECOND SYMPHONY.

BY ERNEST NEWMAN.

Like Brahms, who did not bring out his first symphony until he was forty-four, and then added three more in about nine years, Elgar finds that the appetite for writing in the symphonic form grows with what it feeds on. His first Symphony was produced in December, 1908; last November we had his Violin Concerto; and now we have to welcome the second Symphony, in E flat, which is to be performed for the first time on the 24th of the present month, at the London Festival, and for the second time at the International Musical Congress of the week following. The new work bears the opus number 63. It is scored for a normal modern orchestra, without resort to any of the newer instruments of which some of our younger men are so fond—the sarrusophone, the heckelphone, and all the rest of them, that make a score look so imposing and the chances of performance so remote. The Symphony is dedicated 'to the memory of His late Majesty King Edward VII.' It is in the usual four movements, though the third bears the title of 'Rondo' instead of the customary 'Scherzo.'

Elgar gives no encouragement to those who would seek for 'programmes' in his symphonic works. It may no doubt be taken for granted that his imagination is kindled by what he reads and hears and sees, and that his musical invention is prompted by this in some subtle way or other. So much can be said of the most 'abstract' of composers; unless he shuts himself up all his days with closed eyes and ears in a darkened and sound-proof room, the tone and colour of the life of the world around him are bound to imprint themselves upon his musical thinking; and the more sensitive his nerves are the more radical will be the connection of his music with all this life. But though practically every musical work of any emotional value must start from this basis, the connection of it with the external world or with the symbols of the literary and plastic arts may range through many degrees of vagueness or precision, according to the psychological build of the composer. Many of us, declining to be tied down to any *à priori* æsthetics against the judgment of our own senses, keep our minds hospitably open to all these types of music, and decline, for example, to turn up the whites of our eyes at first-rate music, such as 'Till Eulenspiegel' or 'Don Quixote,' simply because it has been written to a programme. But when a composer's mind does *not* work on these lines, we can understand his anxiety to prevent unauthorised programmes being read into his music. Elgar's new Symphony, then, is not written upon any programme. The only clue he will give us as to some of the moods in which it had birth is the quotation of the first two lines of Shelley's 'Invocation':

> Rarely, rarely comest thou,
> Spirit of Delight;

though anyone who tries to correlate the Symphony as a whole with that poem as a whole will find himself baffled. The dominant tone of the poem is one of despondency, merging into hope at the end; the speaker is a man regretting that he is now too rarely visited by the old, pure delight of soul. The prevailing note of the Symphony, on the other hand, is joyousness,—though this mood, of course, has to submit to various temperings. The music seems to correspond most closely with the last four stanzas of the poem, in which Shelley speaks of his love for 'all that thou lovest, Spirit of Delight,'—the fresh earth, the starry night, the autumn evening, the golden morn, the snow, the waves, winds and storms, and 'tranquil solitude,' and Love itself, and finally

> . . . Above other things,
> Spirit, I love thee—
> Thou art love and life! O come!
> Make once more my heart thy own.

The Symphony will be found to offer a complete psychological contrast to the earlier one. It is untroubled by any of the darker problems of the soul. For the most part it sings and dances in sheer delight with life; and even in the beautiful slow movement, thoughtful as it is, there is nothing of the tense, nervous emotion of the Adagio of the first Symphony. The work will, I think, be found particularly enjoyable just by reason of this prevalent spirit of gladsomeness. Our greater music has worn the tragic mask long enough; it is good to have it break into a smile occasionally. Laughter is almost impossible, apparently, to our younger men; they are lost without their 'customary suits of solemn black,' and 'windy suspiration of forced breath.' We have to get towards the autumn of life before we see the full meaning and beauty of the spring, as Wagner's Hans Sachs very wisely points out to the impatient young Walther.

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