

Some Recollections: VI. A Trap for the Vicar

Author(s): Joseph Bennett

Source: *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 40, No. 672 (Feb. 1, 1899), pp. 86-88

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3365964>

Accessed: 15-02-2016 18:44 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Musical Times Publications Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

the instrument, a specification was drawn up for the Colston Hall organ: the order was given to Messrs. Willis and duly executed. It will be in the recollection of our readers that the Alexandra Palace and its fine organ were totally destroyed by fire, June 9, 1873. A similar fate befel the Colston Hall and its organ last year. Thirty years have passed away. Mr. Riseley finds himself located at the Alexandra Palace as its Musical Director. Still more extraordinary, Sir W. H. Wills (who gave the first organ) and Father Willis, who were so closely associated with Mr. Riseley in preparing the scheme of the first Colston Hall organ, are again assisting him with the magnificent instrument which is to be placed in the new building. Such is life.

AN APPRECIATION BY PROFESSOR PROUT.

"I gladly send you a few lines," writes Professor Prout, "about George Riseley. My acquaintance with him dates from 1879, when he invited me to come and conduct my first organ concerto, which he was proposing to play at one of his concerts in the Colston Hall. I readily accepted the invitation, and he then wrote, asking me to compose a new work specially for the concert. I agreed, and wrote a Minuet and Trio for orchestra. That visit laid the foundation of a friendship that has never been shaken. I have frequently since gone to Bristol, to conduct works of my own, at Mr. Riseley's request; and my second organ concerto, which he performed at the last Bristol Festival, was composed in 1883 expressly for him.

"With possibly the single exception of Mr. Manns, no man living has done so much for the works of English composers as Mr. Riseley. I believe that the programmes of his orchestral concerts at the Colston Hall contain even a larger percentage of works by native musicians than those of the Crystal Palace Saturday Concerts. It was, indeed, the exception to find one of his concerts at which some important English work—symphony, concerto, or overture—was not included. Few people realise how much the cause of British art is indebted to Mr. Riseley's exertions.

"The qualities which most impress those who are brought into personal contact with Mr. Riseley are his thoroughness and his enthusiasm. As illustrating the former, and showing his conscientiousness, I may mention that on the occasions when I have visited him, and he was to play one of my concertos next day, though he was perfectly familiar with every note, I have known him to sit up till the small hours of the morning to practise the difficult passages on a pedal piano that he has in his house. The same minute attention to detail will have been noticed by anyone who has seen him, as I often have, conduct an orchestral rehearsal. He has studied the score so thoroughly that he knows exactly what he wants, and no one

understands better how to get it. No less remarkable is his enthusiasm for everything that is good, no matter of what style. He has a large library of orchestral music, and is equally at home with a symphony of Beethoven, Brahms, or Dvorák, a suite of Massenet or Delibes, or a Wagner selection. Unlike some other fine orchestral conductors, Mr. Riseley is no less successful as a chorus-master, as those who attended the last Bristol Festival or who have heard his magnificent male-voice choir can testify. His fine organ playing is the more remarkable when it is remembered that he began to work at the instrument at a much later period of life than most who attain distinction.

"Of his personal character it would perhaps be unbecoming to say much. Those who know him best will the most highly appreciate his honesty of purpose and the warmth of his heart."

Mr. Riseley is a man of fine physique and splendid constitution. Thoroughly businesslike, a strict disciplinarian, delighting in hard work, he has made the best use of his "picking up" opportunities. His career offers a fine example to the young men of our time of what may be accomplished by earnestness of purpose and enthusiastic zeal in the discharge of every duty.

SOME RECOLLECTIONS.

VI. A TRAP FOR THE VICAR.

In the present days of cheap music only those who remember an earlier time can form a just idea of the straits to which church choirs in rural districts were reduced for lack of a supply of tunes, anthems, and chants. I recall the condition of two large and important parish churches—those, namely, of Berkeley and Thornbury—to which I successively belonged in the capacity of a choir boy. Let me, however, confine myself to the case of Berkeley, where a noble Early English edifice of almost cathedral-like proportions, standing hard by the castle of a powerful peer and serving the needs of a prosperous district, suggested rather an excess of equipment than the poverty which, as a matter of fact, existed.

The Church musician of whatever degree who now finds ready to his hand, in profuse abundance, everything required for the discharge of his duty, will smile to be told that the music library of Berkeley Church consisted of about a dozen more or less dilapidated manuscript books. In my time these must have been many years in use. Such, at least, was the evidence of their condition given by exterior and interior alike. Broken and time-stained bindings found their testimony supported within by an extraordinary collection of anthems, tunes, and chants, representative of many tastes and fashions, written by a number of hands, and indicating by more or less faded ink the long periods that sometimes

elapsed between one entry and the next. Over these books no supervision of any kind was exercised; to their contents nothing was ever added; the organist lived seven miles away, and the state of musical affairs was about as bad as it could be in regard of provision for wants.

I must here add that Berkeley parish and church had, previous to the time now spoken of, undergone some curious experiences, demoralising and entirely unfortunate. For years there was no vicar, and the gentleman last appointed to the post, the Rev. Caleb Carrington, went to law with his flock on some question, was defeated, and spent the rest of his days in jail, as a prisoner for debt. Mr. Carrington had been chaplain to the Earl of Berkeley, from whom he received a presentation to the living. He appeared as a witness in the celebrated Berkeley Peerage case heard by the House of Lords in 1811, and something may be read of him in the "English Spy," a now scarce and costly book written by "Bernard Blackmantle" (*nom de plume* of a London editor for whom the late Alfred Bunn did much as a collector of gossip and scandal), and illustrated with coloured plates by Robert Cruickshank. During Carrington's enforced absence from the parish, the clerical duties were, so to speak, put into commission; and after his death a clergyman was appointed to keep the place warm for a nominee then at Cambridge. The young gentleman in question, John Seton Karr, was, I believe, a scion of a Scottish family, in whom the patron of the living took great interest. Anyhow, the post was left open till John Seton Karr gained his B.A., received ordination, and qualified himself after a fashion to enter upon his sacred duties.

The new vicar of Berkeley presented himself to his parishioners as an exquisite of the first water—a clerical dandy entirely irreproachable. He was a young fellow of the "oiled and curled Assyrian bull" species. Well built, with a handsome face, raven black hair and the neatest of curled whiskers, faultless in attire, a capital reader and a good preacher (in an academical way), Mr. Karr considerably fluttered the country-side at his coming. Many gentle bosoms were excited by the presence of such a paragon in the pulpit, while the entire district took in him an admiring if not exactly an affectionate interest. It is true that a few parishioners of the stricter sort complained because he rode to hounds instead of visiting the poor and sick, and were further of opinion that Berkeley Castle, where the notorious Colonel Berkeley, under the style and title of Earl Fitzhardinge, reigned as lord, was not exactly the place in which a young clergyman should dine every night. There was no perfecting the Christian life, they thought, in that atmosphere, and they were not far wrong. None the less because of the mutterings of a

minority did the Reverend John Seton Karr, B.A., vicar of a huge parish, and without a curate, employ himself in hunting, shooting, and making one at the castle dining-table.

In the "forties" a Mr. Leech, editor of the *Bristol Times*, greatly interested his readers by visiting the churches of Somerset and Gloucester, making observations and recording them in a chatty, pleasant manner over the pen-name, "Church-goer." He did not neglect Berkeley; the volumes in which his articles are collected containing one of the best possible word-portraits of John Seton Karr. Leech was, so to speak, fascinated by the reverend gentleman—by his good looks, his exquisite reading, and his general demeanour in the discharge of sacred duties. At any rate, the Bristol journalist dwelt with gusto upon the vicar's elaborate preparations for the delivery of his sermon. Wearing the black Geneva gown and bands, the vicar would stalk majestically from chancel to pulpit, float upward with flowing sleeves like wings, and from the topmost height of the three-decker survey the congregation. That done he would remove a massive gold watch from his person, and, with bejewelled fingers, place it securely on the velvet pulpit-cushion, to the right of the sermon case. Next, a dainty handkerchief was forthcoming and carefully laid on the left to balance the watch on the right. These preliminaries went on with the greatest deliberation before the admiring eyes of the people. Having completed them, the vicar would sink upon his knees, and in suave tones, with the nicest possible regard for supplicatory modulation, offer the prayer before sermon.

My excellent friend, the reader, may think that I have unduly wandered from the main line of such story as I have to tell. In so far as he is right, I crave pardon, but plead that I have given a true description of the state of things existing in an important parish more than half-a-century ago; scarcely tolerable at present even in thought. And now to the story again.

Mr. Samuel Partridge, of whom I have made grateful mention before, was organist of Berkeley Church on Mr. Karr's arrival. To him it naturally occurred that the young vicar, so careful concerning his own equipment, would pay at least some regard to the furnishing of the church. It chanced, moreover, that a "Psalmist," words and music, the precursor of many, came into being just then. Here was a favourable conjunction to the end of abolishing the worn-out manuscript books, and to utilise it did the organist much incline. He interviewed the vicar and explained matters, but took little by his pains. The reverend gentleman, fresh from the conservative influences of Cambridge, as Cambridge was then, intimated that he saw no necessity for change; also that the new "Psalmist" was costly, and if purchased, would create aggrieved

parishioners; also that, if at any future time reform seemed to be called for, he would take the matter up himself. So poor Mr. Partridge retired from the presence snubbed and discomfited. But if the vicar thought he had snuffed out the organist, he had quite mistaken his man. Mr. Partridge was remarkable for quiet persistence in what he conceived to be the right course. He had set his heart upon the new Psalm books, and not one denial—no, nor twenty—could make him give up hope of them. Like the woman who, in the parable, got the better of the unjust judge, he was, from the vicar's point of view, continually coming. As often, alas! he went empty away. Clearly, thought the organist, another method must be tried. There was nothing to be done by a front attack, but it might prove possible to turn the vicar's flank with success. A plan therefore matured itself in the artful organist's head.

Mr. Karr's taste in music was shrewdly suspected to be somewhat light. As a rule, he made no comment upon what was done by the choir, but sometimes dropped a word of approval after the rendering of a "pretty" anthem, the more secular and catching the better. Upon that revelation of weakness our organist acted, and in pursuance of his plan we were called upon to "get up" a new anthem of a particularly frivolous description. I have quite forgotten the name of it, as also the identity of its composer, only a fragment of a rollicking "Gloria," with which the piece ended, remaining in my memory, while, of my own solo in it, I can only recall an impression of something lackadaisical and, to mundane ears, very fetching. The anthem was rehearsed *con amore*. We liked it ourselves, and soon stood ready for singing its lightsome strains "to the praise and glory of God," or any other purpose. In Berkeley Church, at that time, the organist was permitted full control of the musical part of the worship; choosing metrical Psalms (there were no hymns) and anthems as seemed to him good. Thus it came to pass that on a particular Sunday our new anthem figured in the order of service, without question, or thought of question, in any quarter. I have the clearest recollection of the performance, which was safe and spirited; also of the unusual attention paid by the congregation. The vicar was distinctly seen to nod his head to the lilting rhythm—an absolutely unheard-of occurrence in the history of the parish, I should say. As for the organist, he turned upon his seat, after the final "Amen," with an expansive smile. He also nodded his head, equally with gratification; perhaps, also, with some hope, as to which, however, we knew nothing at the time.

The result was soon proclaimed, and, the choir being kept back for practice, we were all witnesses. Mr. Partridge, good man, stood

in the centre of the West gallery, fronting the vicar as he came down the noble nave to go out at the North door, and so home. The reverend gentleman rarely showed bad form, and he could not pass without a word. The following dialogue, as a matter of fact, ensued:—

VICAR (*looking up*). Partridge!

ORGANIST (*looking down*). Sir!

VICAR. That was a very pretty anthem you sang this morning—a very pretty anthem indeed, and very well rendered.

ORGANIST. We are extremely obliged to you, Sir.

[*Vicar moves a few steps towards the door. Organist's face falls. Vicar again stops.*]

VICAR. Oh, Partridge!

ORGANIST. Sir!

VICAR. You—yes—you can get those books.

[*Exit Vicar. Organist looks triumphantly round upon the grinning faces of his choir.*]

"Those books" were in their places a fortnight later, the MS. volumes being then consigned to dust and oblivion for ever and ever. The moral is that a thing may be done in more ways than one, and that the way which is the most direct is not always the shortest.

JOSEPH BENNETT.

DR. ARNE'S "CARACTACUS."

MR. EDWARD ELGAR is not the first composer of music to "Caractacus." On December 6, 1776, Mason's drama "Caractacus" was produced at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, with incidental music by Dr. Thomas Augustine Arne. It is quite impossible to institute any comparison between the works of the two composers, seeing that the aim of each was entirely different. Arne provided an overture and incidental music only for the Druidic scenes in the drama, while Mr. Elgar has set to music, in cantata form, a libretto written by Mr. H. A. Acworth—the work to be performed in the concert-room. There are, however, several points in connection with the earlier work which are certainly deserving of notice. Arne, next to Purcell, is one of the most prominent names in the history of English music, and a name, moreover, to which full justice has scarcely been rendered. No apology, therefore, need be offered for the subject of this brief article.

When Arne published his "Caractacus" music, he wrote some introductory remarks concerning which the "Dictionary of National Biography" observes that "Arne shows a curious insight into the relationship between dramatic poetry and music." The writer (Mr. Barclay Squire) further remarks: "He (Arne) expresses opinions on the subject, the truth of which, though couched in the stilted language of the period, is only beginning to be recognised at the present day."