

Modern British Composers. VIII. Herbert Howells (Continued)

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to which he is impervious. It may be said that unless he comes of a musical family he probably will not know modern music either; but experience shows that the child of to-day is drawn to modern music automatically. I know a musical child who at the age of ten took to Puccini as a duck takes to water, and looked upon 'Figaro' as a horrid lesson, to the despair of her teacher, who suspected her of a double dose of original sin. Now, however, at the age of about seventeen, she is beginning to be reconciled to four-bar phrases, full closes and repeats, and to love Mozart. Had she been forced to listen to Mozart and play Mozart at ten, she would by now have been a confirmed music hater.

We must, in short, recognise that love of the music of to-day is the first stage, love of the classics the second. The story of the individual does not move in the same way as the history of the world. It used to be an article of pedagogic faith that both started from the same point and followed the same path.

It is not necessary to pause long to consider how this comes about. Many explanations are possible. The children of parents who thought Gluck impossibly noisy cannot have inherited the same auditory nerves as the children of those to whom a Tchaikovsky *fortissimo* is a normal experience—to say nothing of an air-raid barrage or the hooting of a motor bus. Fathers and mothers to whom 'Tristan' is the height of euphony cannot transmit the same harmonic sense as men and women who thought the 'Eroica' discordant.

The new method—as I call it for the sake of brevity—imposes a heavy task on teachers. They must select with care; they must know how to avoid all that is vulgar and meretricious. Adherence to the old masters saved them the trouble, but it is not the ideal of education to invent labour-saving devices for teachers. There is abundance of good teaching-music being written in discreetly modern idiom, and lists of it are not lacking.

Let no one accuse me of suggesting an exclusive diet of Scriabin, Stravinsky, or Lord Berners, or neglect of the classics in musical education. On the contrary, to my mind nothing is more deplorable than the ignorance of some musicians of things like the '48' or the Beethoven Sonatas and Quartets. Were I rich, the first thing I should do would be to endow prizes for Bach-playing all over the country. I am not pleading for a displacement of the classics, but for a systematic attempt to discover in the case of each pupil—whether destined for a musical career or not—what is the proper place for them when the ground has been properly prepared.

It is not possible always to agree with Sir Thomas Beecham, especially when it pleases him to pose as martyred by a malignant Press; but when he said, as he did some years ago, that the classics are best approached by way of the moderns, he spoke words of wisdom. I freely admit that at the time I thought it was a blazing indiscretion.

## MODERN BRITISH COMPOSERS

By EDWIN EVANS

### VIII.—HERBERT HOWELLS

(Continued from February Number, p. 91.)

The Phantasy String Quartet, which also belongs to 1916, was written for Mr. Cobbett's Folk-Song competition, with the reservation that authentic folk-songs were not used but only the idiom related to them. Its atmosphere is a blend of open-air breeziness with the mystic remoteness to which we have referred in the earlier portion of this article. Of the former, the following may serve as an example:

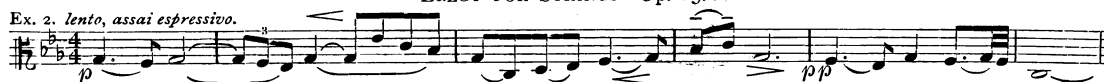
#### PHANTASY QUARTET—Op. 25.

Ex. 1.

The remoter mood is less easy to illustrate. Its very nature almost precludes definition, but for comparison one may turn to the concluding section of the first Violin Sonata, to the end of the first movement in the second Violin Sonata, and to a characteristic episode of the Clarinet Quintet.

Howells's output for 1917 includes the Sarum Sketches for pianoforte—written whilst he was assistant-organist at Salisbury, around the wistful personality of a very lonely choir-boy—three pieces for strings, and a Violin Sonata in one movement. Of the string pieces, the most important is the Elegy (Op. 15), which was performed at the Mons Memorial Concert. As already stated, it is dedicated to the memory of 'Bunny' of the 'B's,' who was lost in the war, and it deals affectionately with the personality covered by that endearing name. Hence it belongs to the most intimate kind of music, the extreme opposite of the heroic vein which would have been more appropriate for the Albert Hall Concert at which it was performed, the building itself being unfavourable to such searching introspection. The entire musical thought clusters round one theme:

## ELEGY FOR STRINGS—Op. 15.

Ex. 2. *lento, assai espressivo.*

The Violin Sonata in E major was described at its first performance as a Phantasy Sonata, but the composer has very wisely dropped this description, which in fact describes nothing. In form it is a sonata in one movement, and that is its only right designation. But there is much phantasy in the contents, which might well serve as musical illustration to a fairy tale—with a sad end, and perhaps a little long in the telling. The calmer portions are the most impressive, and particularly the concluding pages, which take the listener's imagination far away from realities into a dim world where everything becomes credible.

The second Violin Sonata, in E flat, was written the following year, and first performed in February, 1919. It is a work of strongly individual character, in the traditional four movements. The lyrical nature of the composer's inspiration is perhaps more convincingly shown here than in any other of his instrumental works. Save in their slow movements, the great majority of violin sonatas are really declamatory. The declamation may vary in character, but it is a recitative that seldom bursts into song. In this sonata one might almost say that the opposite is the case, for the song is seldom allowed to drop into recitative, and then only by way of contrast. On the last page of the first movement occurs the following:

## VIOLIN AND PIANOFORTE SONATA in E♭—Op. 26.

(Last page, 1st movement.)

Ex. 3. *quasi lento, con sord.*

which is very typical both of the work itself and of a mood to which we have more than once made reference. The slow movement and the *Scherzo*, although contained within a formal outline, show an unusual freedom of style. It is possible that

one or the other will not please everybody, but none can gainsay that here, at least, is a composer who speaks his mind. The *Lento*, in particular, has beauty of a kind that one cannot discuss—one either feels it or one does not. But it will be the mood rather than the mood-picture that settles the question.

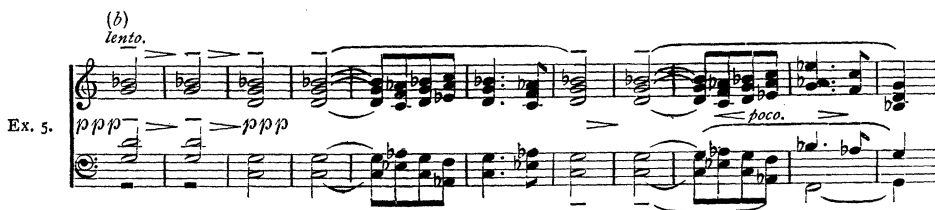
During the same year, the composer began the series of Four Rhapsodies for organ which are at present attracting much attention from players of that instrument. The organ is a hard taskmaster. Perhaps that, and its demand for absolute harmonic truth, without compromise, are the reasons why so little really original organ music makes its appearance nowadays in comparison with the almost perplexing variety of styles in other fields. There is thus special significance in the fact that Howells's harmonic personality, if one may use the expression, shows as clearly in this medium as in any other that he has employed. There is, of course, a certain reticence imposed by the instrument itself, but that only makes the result more striking. In each of the Rhapsodies, but especially in the third, there are episodes revealing an invention that could have no other source.

Last year was extraordinarily productive—so fertile in fact as to inspire a word of caution. Happily the level of quality has not suffered by it. The familiar 'Puck's Minuet' which is included in Op. 20 is really a year or two older, but its appearance opened the year very auspiciously, for it has become the most frequently performed of its composer's works. The most characteristic composition of the year was however the Rhapsodic Quintet in one movement for clarinet, two violins, viola, and 'cello. It would be possible to illustrate an article on Herbert Howells almost with this work alone, for, although it nowhere offends against the laws of unity, it passes through his most characteristic moods, and employs many of those devices which bear the stamp of his personality, such as the tapestry weaving of themes, the rhythmic elaboration, and the employment of harmonies which, without being strictly modal, convey a modal flavour. It might almost be regarded as a summary of his development at this stage. Of the two examples we quote, the first:

## Ex. 4. (a) RHAPSODIC QUINTET (Clarinet and Strings)—Op. 31.



is a striking instance of a theme which, after having entered unobtrusively a little earlier, reappears in a rhythmic setting which gives it melodic prominence. The other example :



belongs to a mystic episode which heralds the approach of one of those calm endings in which Howells delights, and in the treatment of which he almost invariably achieves the happiest results.

From a number of miscellaneous compositions

which made their appearance about the same time, we might select the pianoforte pieces, Op. 14, the third of which, 'Procession,' has been awarded the prize recently offered by Mr. York Bowen. It takes the form of a long *crescendo* and *decrescendo* with the following for its climax :

PROCESSION (for Pianoforte)—Op. 14, No. 3.



Then there are four settings of French folk-songs belonging to the répertoire of Mlle. Raymonde Collignon. There has been much discussion of late, in which the writer has taken part, concerning the degree of freedom permissible in this form of art. Howells is of those who consider that a song, if deemed worthy to endure, should be clothed as a living thing and not in antiquated garments. In his setting of 'La Légende de Ste. Catherine' he has produced an argument that should convince all but the irreconcilables. Another vocal work is 'Peacock Pie,' an objective vision of childhood that might be held to have some relation to Moussorgsky's 'Enfantines.' Finally, Howells has contributed a 'Phantasy Minuet' to the series which the Æolian Company has in preparation, consisting of works composed directly for the resources of the pianola.

His most recent composition is the String Quartet 'In Gloucestershire,' which belongs to his most 'English' vein. It is in four movements, picturesque in character, though not necessarily suggestive of definite scenes, and expressive of the open-air mood with all that it connotes—of boisterousness in one direction and of meditation in another. The writing develops naturally and logically on the one hand from Opp. 21 and 25, and on the other from the elaborations characteristic of Op. 31. As an instance, the form of rhythmic device illustrated in Ex. 4 finds its counterpart in the spirit, though outwardly perhaps in a less complicated aspect.

This ends for the present our survey of a composer whose output is remarkable for his years. Under some conditions the plentifulness might occasion misgivings, but this is not a case of hot-house production or any other form of intensive culture. It results in large measure from the combination of an enforced dwelling amid rural surroundings, and a mind with a natural bent for poetic meditation. This latter quality is not of the kind that would profit more by silence than by expression. Being essentially lyrical, it is almost compelled to sing. Hence there is no sign either of fatigue or of attenuation in the musical thought such as would lead one to diagnose over-production. Howells is too young for us to hazard elaborate conjectures concerning his future. Let the present suffice. In the list which follows are some half-dozen works of outstanding artistic value and interest, and in touching upon them we have by no means exhausted the subject. One serious omission of which the writer is conscious is the absence of any reference to the composer's settings of Latin texts for the Church.

LIST OF WORKS BY HERBERT HOWELLS

- |     |  |     |       |
|-----|--|-----|-------|
| Op. |  |     |       |
| 1.  | Organ Sonata in C minor ...                  | ... | 1911. |
| 2.  | Missa sine Nomine...                         | ... | 1912. |
| 3.  | Variations for eleven solo instruments ...   | ... | 1914. |
| 4.  | Pianoforte Concerto in C minor ...           | ... | 1913. |
| 5.  | Male-Voice Part-songs (Stainer & Bell) ...   | ... | 1912. |
| 6.  | Sarum Sketches for Pianoforte (Augener) ...  | ... | 1917. |
| 7.  | Three Dances for Violin and Orchestra ...    | ... | 1915. |
| 8.  | Comedy Suite for Clarinet and Pianoforte ... | ... | 1913. |



9. Four Anthems of the B.V.M. ... 1915.
10. Five Songs for High Voice and Orchestra 1915.
11. Five Part-Songs (Curwen) ...
12. Three Rondeaux for Voice and Pianoforte (Stainer & Bell)... 1913.
13. 'The B's,' for Orchestra ... 1915.
14. Three Pianoforte Pieces: Rhapsody, Humoreske, and Procession (Ascherberg) 1919.
15. Elegy for Strings (Goodwin & Tabb) ... 1917.
16. Two Pieces for Strings: Prelude and Serenade... 1917.
17. Four Rhapsodies for Organ (Augener) ... 1918.
18. Sonata for Violin and Pianoforte in E (one movement) (Winthrop Rogers) ... 1917.
19. Lady Audrey's Suite (String Quartet) (Novello) ... 1916.
20. Three Pieces for Orchestra (Goodwin & Tabb) ... 1918-19.
21. Pianoforte Quartet in A minor (Stainer & Bell) ... 1916.
22. Four Songs (Winthrop Rogers) ...
23. Sir Patrick Spens. Chorus and Orchestra 1916.
24. Three Part-songs (Edward Arnold) ...
25. Phantasy String Quartet (Goodwin & Tabb) 1916.
26. Sonata in E flat, Violin and Pianoforte ... 1918.
27. Phantasy Minuet for Pianola (Aeolian Co.) 1919.
28. Four Pieces for Violin and Pianoforte ... 1919.
29. Four French Chansons (Chester)... 1919.
30. Snapshots for Pianoforte ... 1919.
31. Clarinet Quintet ... 1919.
32. Poem for Violin and Pianoforte ...
33. 'Peacock Pie,' Twelve Songs ... 1919.
34. Song-group, 'Whin' ...
35. String Quartet 'In Gloucestershire' 1919-20.

## THE ORGAN WORKS OF BACH

BY HARVEY GRACE

### I.—EARLY WORKS—(continued)

Bach's early shortcomings as a fugal writer are most fully exposed in the long work in A minor, beginning on page 208 of vol. x. It bears obvious traces of Buxtehude's influence, especially in its looseness of structure and thematic poverty. We are so accustomed to find Bach improving on his model, that we get something like a shock when he falls short of it, as he certainly does here. The work consists of an introduction, a fugue, an interlude, a second fugue on two subjects, and a lengthy *Coda* in the style of the opening. Such a chaotic scheme can be made tolerable only by first-rate subjects, well treated; and it must be confessed that for once Bach's inventive powers are unequal to the occasion. To make matters worse, the second fugue has no connection with what has gone before—a departure from Buxtehude's practice.

Bach seems to have realised too late the need for unity, and apparently tried to save the situation by rounding off the work with a *Coda* in the style of the opening. But the material in both cases is too vague to make any impression, and the result is a work which must be regarded as a complete failure—a long effort with no redeeming feature.

Almost as bad is the Fantasia and Fugue in the same key (xii., 60). Its one good point is the excellent subject of the fugue—a fore-

shadowing of that of the great A minor Fugue written in the composer's prime. The Fantasia is mere passage-work of the most desolating description; the fugue sticks badly at times, and gives us thin passage-work where we expect to find episodes. To crown all, when the fugue is over Bach reels off about forty bars of *cadenza* as uninteresting as the fifty with which he began.

Weak, too, though in a different way, is the Fugue in D (xii., 83). Far too much use is made of a sequence that was probably well-worn even before the youthful Bach found it handy as a stop-gap.

Much better is a Fugue in G (xii., 86), which, in spite of a little complacent padding, maintains the naive freshness promised by the subject:



The Prelude in C which follows is usually ascribed to this period, but its style, the use of the pedal, and the material of bars 24-27 (especially in regard to the augmented sixth) seem to point to a much later date. Is it by Bach? There is a strong flavour of the Krebs and Kittle tribe, especially in the last dozen bars.

Two Fantasias, both in G, and both consisting of three sections, also belong to this period. The simpler—and apparently earlier—of the two (xii., 75), deals with a subject of Kuhnau; though it seems odd to speak of ownership in the case of such a simple series of notes as:



This is treated with a thin kind of fluency for seventy-one bars—which is about thirty too many—a full close on B leading to a brief *Adagio* in E minor on an inversion of the theme.

The third part of the work is the only one that is worth the player's attention. It is an effective *Allegro*, treating in Chaconne fashion a descending scale-passage of six notes, derived of course from the original theme. The writing is flowing and vigorous, and the movement makes a capital voluntary, especially where there is an ample pedal organ on which the theme can stalk with plenty of weight. It is a pity that this *Allegro* seems to be overlooked by teachers. It is one of the best of the early works for technical purposes.

The other Fantasia is the well-known work with the five-voice middle section (ix., 168). It opens with twenty-eight bars of *bravura* for the manual. Such passages are usually an infliction on all but the player, but the one under notice is far more interesting than the average because of its