

Dr. Arne's "Caractacus"

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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."

Now the opening words of Arne fully bear out the above comment. The composer says:

The design of this Music is to represent, by corresponding sounds and rhythms, the Ideas expressed, and those alluded to, in the Drama, principally in its lyric parts; the former is attempted to be done by the *vocal*, the latter by the *instrumental* Music.

Of his instrumental music he remarks that it

professes to represent that to which the drama in different parts refers, viz., Symphonies, or that which may be expressed by Symphonies; the words therefore which precede or follow will often sufficiently point out the nature of each: but, as there is no such guide for the Overture and some others, and as several of the rest are very generally referred to, I shall subjoin a particular explanation of such as I think require it.

The overture, then, is not of the ordinary formal kind, but one of dramatic intention and meaning. It consists of two parts: the first representing the "Spirits of Snowdon lamenting the approaching fall of Mona"; and the second the "Souls of the departed Druids, personified by the harp, interceding to avert the impending danger." Later on there is a symphony "suitable to the character of the Druids."

In the matter of programme music the composer shows himself quite an English Berlioz. One instrumental number represents "the beginning, progress, and completion of a storm." But here is something more in the spirit of the composer of the "Symphonie Fantastique":—

No. 26, to where the bassoon enters, is intended as a solemn and pleasing symphony to excite ideas suitable to the occasion described in the preceding words. From the bar where the bassoon enters to the end of No. 26 I have endeavoured to represent, by the notes allotted to that instrument, the act of dying of a man, such as alluded to in the words; the upper part, which may be considered as a continuation of the symphony, being intended to soothe him in his last moments.

From many other remarks in the Introduction it is sufficiently clear that Arne was trying to write music which would only have force and meaning if heard in connection with stage action. The *New Morning Post*, or *General Advertiser*, of December 7, 1776, in noticing the production of the work, congratulates the town "on the acquisition of so fine an entertainment as 'Caractacus,' where poetry and music unite their fascinating powers." The writer fears, indeed, lest "the general solemnity of the performance may render it not perfectly pleasing to the taste of so slight an age as the present." By "performance" the writer, of course, refers not merely to the music but to the play; but the two were practically one: the form, character, and even colouring of the music show how intimately it was connected with the scenes and with the words and gestures of the actors.

There is an interesting letter from William Mason, author of the play, to Thomas Harris, manager at Covent Garden, which shows that *he*, too, was concerned about the union of poetry and music. He had altered his

play, which at first was published merely to be read. He had curtailed it. But he fancies "it may still be too long for representation." "If, therefore," he continues, "*upon rehearsal with the music* (the italics are mine), you should find this to be the case, I will send you a second copy, in which several other lines and passages shall be marked with inverted commas, which you may either omit, or retain, as shall then seem expedient." The poet, therefore, looked upon the musician as an ally, as one who was trying to strengthen his drama.

As to the music itself, it may reasonably be doubted whether it would be worth reviving at the present day. The composer's intention, rather than what he actually achieved, is here the point for notice. The music is certainly not lacking in interest, though how far it would satisfy ears attuned to the dramatic works of the nineteenth century is open to question.

Just a word or two about the orchestration. Many numbers, such as the overture, are for strings, with addition of harp or organ, flutes, clarinets or trumpet, but some have quite special combinations. Thus, No. 7, "a sweet and pathetic invocation of Snowdon," is for flutes, bassoons, and two harps. The sepulchral tones of the bassoon were suitably chosen, as mentioned above, to express "the act of dying of a man." Afterwards, as his spirit is supposed to be "stealing from the earth," there is a short *Andante* section for one bassoon and one violoncello; as the spirit rises higher, the sound of flutes, harp, and bassoons is heard. In a *Largo* in the third Act, the words which follow refer to "Rome's rav'ning eagle"; then, and for the first time, trombones combined with harp are introduced. The trombones, three in number, are marked *tutti piano*. A Dead March "for the end of 'Caractacus'" is written for flutes, clarinets, bassoons, serpent, and kettle-drum.

At the head of the published score of "Caractacus" (the autograph appears to be lost) there is a letter from the composer to the author of the drama, in which he says:—

I have in them (*i.e.*, pages of music) endeavoured to restore to Music its ancient and long neglected office of handmaid to Poetry. Poetry is the language of enthusiasm and passion; Music the suitable enunciation of that language; while therefore the latter subordinately co-operates with the former, it acts in its proper sphere: but when, quitting this dependent situation, it arrogates to itself independence of, nay dominion over, its powerful directress; it loses sight of the end of its nature and becomes justly reprehensible.

J. S. S.

A VERY important and gratifying announcement reaches us from Dublin in regard to the foundation of a permanent orchestra in that city. Hitherto the Irish capital has had to rely upon a "scratch" orchestra to accompany choral performances. Moreover, there seems to have been no taste for purely orchestral music until it was appetised by the visit of the Hallé orchestra last year. The new scheme is