

Modern British Composers. V. John Ireland (Continued)

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SEPTEMBER 1, 1919.

MODERN BRITISH COMPOSERS.

By EDWIN EVANS.

V.—JOHN IRELAND.

(Continued from August number, page 396.)

It is natural, in dealing with John Ireland, to pass direct from his pianoforte works to his chamber music, as—except two string Quartets and a Sextet for strings, clarinet, and horn belonging to his immature period—all his chamber music is associated with the pianoforte. It is difficult to believe that the possibilities of the string quartet can have lost their attraction for a composer so staunch to the tradition in which it is an element. We must therefore conclude that the processes of the change that has taken place in his method found in the pianoforte a more favourable 'culture-medium,' and that, these processes having run their course, his return to that form will not be long delayed. It is certainly not claiming too much to say that no news would arouse more interest amongst the devotees of chamber music at this moment than the announcement of a new string quartet from the pen of John Ireland. There is something about his present method that points to his finding in it a mode of expression at least as fertile as any he has attempted in the past ten years, and probably more so. When a composer combines elaborate imaginings with an austere simplicity of structure, the string quartet offers a prospect of virtue rewarded.

I have already referred to the Phantasy Trio in A minor which ushers in the later manner of John Ireland's writing. It dates from 1908, and was followed a year later by the Sonata in D minor which now ranks as No. 1, although it had two predecessors, both since discarded. It is in three movements—an Allegro in conventional form, a Romance, and a Rondo. The quality of the music is intimate and unassertive, little calculated to make an immediate sensation, as did its better-known successor. This is by no means a disadvantage, as it has caused the work to maintain its freshness unimpaired, whilst gradually extending its circle of friends. In course of time a second edition became necessary, and the composer took advantage of the opportunity for a revision which has enhanced its effectiveness. A desire to revise is, in fact, characteristic of him; for although, as I have said elsewhere, he is a deliberate worker who takes elaborate pains to give every bar the character of finality, that very trait constantly lures him to dream of further improvement. Many of his works have been subjected to this kind of revision, and none who have followed his development will be surprised if every subsequent reprint continues to show divergences from the

original edition. The Sonata in D minor, however, does seem at present to have reached its final form. The idiom in which it is written is not that in which John Ireland writes to-day, and the temptation to 'bring it up to date' is not one to which he is at all likely to succumb. It could only end in failure, and the work is an attractive one as it stands. I could well understand some musicians—not necessarily of conservative hue—even preferring it to its more exciting successor. It is not old-fashioned to take musical pleasure quietly.

Between 1909 and 1913 there occurred a break in the composer's output for which no explanation is forthcoming. A holiday spent in Jersey in 1912 seems to have supplied the incentive to at least two of the works that appeared in the latter year: the 'Decorations,' for pianoforte (see previous article), and an orchestral Prelude, 'The Forgotten Rite,' and it is unlikely that the new impetus spent its force in one year, though what one may term its topographical form disappeared almost as quickly as it came. There is no 'Island Spell' about the Trio in E minor, in three movements, which made its appearance in 1914, but has remained unpublished. This work, which is not to be confused with the later Trio in the same key but in one movement, has a somewhat transitional character, not unlike that of the Phantasy trio, but representing a later stage of transition. It seems to face both ways, 'for it has phases that might serve as connecting-links with his period of struggle for freedom in self-expression, and others which predict the complete emancipation of the later Sonata. Through its three movements runs a vein of connected inspiration which seems to reach its loftiest point in the introduction to the Finale.* This work maintains a strong hold upon the composer's affection, possibly because of memories which correspond to its transitional character, for in the case of John Ireland a transition in style is never merely technical. It invariably represents the passage to a new point of view, and, in a mind so scrupulous, such passages are apt to be stormy. The American who wrote 'God will look you over for scars, not for medals,' cannot have been concerned solely with ethics. The struggle of a creative artist towards expression is no less strenuous than the struggle for life.

Soon afterwards another struggle—a world struggle—was to fill the minds of all thinking men. Already in 1915 a small group of songs, consisting chiefly of the two which are bracketed under one title, 'The Cost,' had made their appearance as an outward indication—or rather an indication prompted from without—that the events of these stirring times were clamouring for musical expression, not indeed in their external aspect, but through the channel of those deeper, as yet scarcely avowed emotions which they have aroused in the more sentient of our people. Is it going too far

* The quotations are from the paper I contributed to the American *Musical Quarterly* for April of this year. Where I still feel that I have earnestly expressed my attitude towards a certain work, I do not consider it necessary to paraphrase what I have once written.—E. E.

to look upon the Violin Sonata in A minor as an expression of these emotions? That is as it may be, but it is at this date the most consummate work John Ireland has given us, and if the much maligned British public rose to the occasion, as it did beyond all question, it is at least permissible to believe that the music struck some latent chord of sentiment that had been waiting for the sympathetic voice to make it articulate. Never in the recent annals of British chamber-music has success been so immediate. The press was practically unanimous, and within a short time violinists, who as a rule do not fly to new works, found that this Sonata, for their credit's sake, must be included in their répertoire. One feature of this success must be mentioned: a British work was actually included in our programmes not as a make-weight or as a duty-task, but as the chief attraction from the box-office point of view, a position hitherto reserved for standard classics. It is indeed an excellent omen for the future. The Sonata is in three movements which one might term respectively dramatic, lyrical, and a relaxation of the prevailing tension. The first section, with its rugged vigour, strikes a serious note, but its gravity is strikingly free from elements of questioning or of even momentary dependency, and if one quality more than others accounts for the spontaneously receptive attitude of the musical public from the first note, it is—confidence. It is the music of a man who feels deeply but who is sustained by confidence, not necessarily in the outward shapings of destiny, but in that ultimate faithfulness of events which is the creed of men of good understanding. The slow movement, which maintains the same high level of sane idealism, is concerned with lyrical solace. 'Even the humour of the last section gathers a flavour of the heroic from the context, much as the fun of our soldiers gathers it from their hardships.'* The Sonata is, in short, a worthy expression of the times that gave it birth, and one of the few great works of art hitherto resulting from the underlying impulses of to-day.

The first movement is a rugged Allegro, the formal freedom of which is more apparent than real, for its sternness admits of no laxity. Its character is fully expressed in the opening phrase entrusted to the pianoforte. Some contrast is afforded by the first subsidiary, which makes an unusually early appearance:

Ex. 1.

Allegro.
mf leggiadro.

mf leggiadro.

The Lento is entirely lyrical. After a page of introductory matter, the theme of which recurs during the movement, we have a suave melody of classic purity. It is repeated in dialogue and followed by a brief reference to the opening theme leading to:

Ex. 2.

* *Pall Mall Gazette*, March 7, 1917.

An episode in 12-8 time forms the middle section of the movement.

The Finale is almost entirely based upon a boisterous theme of unaffectedly popular type.

'Another almost equally important contribution to recent chamber-music is the one-movement Trio in E minor for pianoforte, violin and 'cello, not to be confused with the earlier, more extended work in the same key. It was written in the spring of 1917, and bears the impress of the grim contrast between the season and the wastage of war at the very springtime of life. Here the atmosphere is more martial, and one might suspect a glorification of the "panache" did not a touch of bitter emphasis remind one of the tragic futility that has overtaken the glitter of the armies of the past. One feels an element of rancour in the psychology of the work, yet it is not the morbid resentment of the weak, but the angry impatience that every one must feel who has not despaired of civilization. It is a poem of mixed emotions inspired by an attitude more critical than that of the Sonata and expressing itself with more directness, though in terms into which one may read a note of sarcasm if one likes. The form is simple: a strain of thematic material progressively metamorphosed in the manner of free variations.'

As examples we quote the opening bars:

Ex. 3. *Poco lento.*

Violoncello. *pp*

Piano. *Poco lento.*

Violin. *rit.*

pp

pp

rit.

pp

Ped.

pp

pp

and a characteristic passage from the Andante section:

Ex. 4. *Andante.*

Violin. *f* *espress. e sonore.*

Violoncello. *f* *espress e sonore.*

Piano. *mf cres.*

cres.

cres.

cres.

ten.

ten.

ten.

f

John Ireland's contributions to the art of song are scarcely second in importance to his chamber music, and, in one respect at least, they offer a key to some apparent contradictions in his larger works. In the latter the two strands which run through his musical texture are inevitably interwoven. In the songs he may place his trust in one or the other according to the poetic intention, but there is seldom scope for both. It thus becomes possible to study them separately. I wrote 'two strands' advisedly. Although I am well aware that among his songs are to be found some intermediate types, it is significant that none of these attain to the high artistic value of 'Sea-Fever' or 'Earth's Call,' which are definitely characteristic of the two contrasted styles.

To describe them is more difficult than it would appear from the current generalisation of 'art-song' and 'folk-song.' The designation 'art-song' is in any case a hateful one, and it has the additional drawback of being meaningless, for any good song is surely a work of art, and certainly not less so if it can be traced to a man of the people, as is claimed by folk-song enthusiasts. It is also misleading to lay stress on the melodic character of one style and the harmonic character of the other, for there is often quite as much harmonic richness in his treatment of a simple tune as in the more elaborate method, and quite as much melodic interest in the latter as in the most tuneful of his less sophisticated songs.

Perhaps the true solution lies not so much in the divergence of the two types as in their one common denominator, which is a close communion with nature. This has been evident in some of the works we have passed in review, such as the 'Island Spell' and 'Moonglade,' and it is still more prominent in the orchestral prelude 'The Forgotten Rite.' It is so strong that on one winter's day the composer assured me he would be unable to set a certain poem until the summer brought the right mood for it. If we now examine the two songs I selected as typical, we find that in 'Sea-Fever' the human interest is placed in relief against a natural background, in this case a seascape, whilst in 'Earth's Call' it is Nature herself who provides the chief interest, the human element being merely incidental. In the same way 'The Heart's Desire,' which is a setting of the 'March' poem in A. E. Housman's 'A Shropshire Lad,' has the human interest which attaches to the whole of that wonderful collection of lyrics. This may partake of a mere coincidence, and I do not put it forward as an explanation, especially as it would ill fit 'Marigold,' but I venture to suggest that it affords a clue to the two different attitudes the composer assumes alternately towards the musical treatment of a lyric poem, the direct approach by means of a metrical melody, and the enveloping movement of a method that is often symphonic. The subject of 'Earth's Call' plainly called for symphonic treatment.

The songs of John Ireland's mature period open in 1910 with a cycle, 'Songs of a Wayfarer,' which is of unequal merit, but deserves to survive if only

for the sake of one song. The year 1913 established the differentiation described above, on the one hand, with the setting of John Masefield's 'Sea-Fever,' which continues to be the most frequently heard of John Ireland's compositions, and, on the other, with the song-cycle, 'Marigold,' which belongs to the rich vein leading to 'Earth's Call.' It comprises three songs: two settings of Rossetti, 'Youth's Spring Tribute' and 'Penumbra,' and one of Ernest Dowson's translations of Verlaine's 'Spleen.' The last is woven round a phrase so characteristic that, but for its unusually disturbed tonality, it might almost serve as a motto to Ireland's collected works:

Ex. 5.
Moderato.

The musical score for Ex. 5 is in 3/4 time and marked 'Moderato'. It consists of two systems. The first system is in treble clef and shows a melody starting on a middle C, marked 'mf'. The second system is in bass clef and shows a harmonic accompaniment, marked 'Ped.' and ending with an asterisk.

As a whole, the cycle is one of his most remarkable works, though it may perhaps be slower to attain to general acceptance than the songs whose appeal is more primitive.'

In 1915 the war-songs referred to in the course of this article commenced to make their appearance with a version of Rupert Brooke's famous sonnet, 'The Soldier,' in which he has not overcome the special difficulties inseparable from the shape of the poem. 'He relies upon the intensity of meaning, expressed in the simplest of terms, rather than upon the actual form of the sonnet, deeming the soldier-poet's message of greater importance than the literary rôle of the sestet, for which he is content to draw upon the musical phrases of the octave. A setting that adhered more faithfully to the form might have missed the substance.' Then followed two songs from Eric Cooper's 'Soliloquies of a Subaltern.' 'In the first of these, "Blind," the composer has reached a degree of poignancy that is almost painful. One has to go back to Moussorgsky to find anything equally magnetic. In "Savichna" and in some songs dealing with the peasant, the Russian composer, though hampered by technical shortcomings, attained to a tragic grandeur that has rightly been regarded as his loftiest vein. Here we have its English counterpart. Truthful, unadorned, and thus the more touching, is this simple, irresistibly appealing version of Eric Cooper's poem. In comparison the second song,

with an unavoidable note of melodrama, is almost an anti-climax—but one not unneeded to relieve the emotional tension.'

Of the songs which follow the most important are, in the direct vein, that exquisite lyric 'The Heart's Desire,' a setting of John Masefield's 'The Bells of San Marie,' and a very charming excursion into the folk-song idiom, 'I have twelve oxen.' An intermediate position might be allotted to the 'Mother and Child' cycle, consisting of nursery rhymes from Christina Rossetti's 'Sing-Song,' in a happy musical garb. The other method reaches its fullest development in 'Earth's Call,' a sylvan rhapsody for contralto and pianoforte 'which is too ambitious in design to be adequately described as a song, although its text, like that of many of John Ireland's songs, is a sonnet, this time of Harold Monro. It is in the composer's naturalistic mood, directly assertive, and demands great powers of interpretation on behalf of the singer, for it is music writ large, but although not easy of access the reward is correspondingly great. There is a dearth in the répertoire of compositions ranging in length and calibre between the ordinary song and the dramatic scena. Apart from its great merits, here is another reason for welcoming it.' Of less ample dimensions, but too important to be overlooked, is another recent song 'The Sacred Flame,' and no survey would be complete that omitted the setting of Rupert Brooke's 'Blow out, you bugles,' which is far superior to that of 'The Soldier,' and has the special merit that the composer has succeeded in the difficult task of preserving his mystic fanfare from the perils of fussy realism.

The one orchestral work which calls for notice is the prelude 'The Forgotten Rite,' to which more than one reference has been made in the course of this article. It dates from 1913, the year following the Jersey holiday, and in it he first reveals the naturalistic tendency which is 'far removed from the realism of composers who wax lyrical over the coming of spring. It is the message of a man who feels nature too deeply to "make a song of it," and yet sings in a subtle idiom that is, as it were, esoterically lyrical.' It is the mood that returns in 'Earth's Call.' We quote a fragment from the arrangement for pianoforte, four hands:

Ex. 6. *Poco più lento.* Oboe. *mf espress.*

Str. *pp*

Fl. *pp* *cres.*

Ob. *cres.*

poco cres.

f cres.

cres.

Thus ends our survey of the output of John Ireland's maturity. 'It should be noted that although the importance of the compositions has varied, their honesty of purpose has not, for there is not one in this comprehensive list that is not the outcome of the need of the artist to express himself—not one that is either a concession to a taste less cultivated than his own, or an attempt to set commercial before artistic considerations. The probity of musicians and their sense of responsibility towards the art they serve has seldom been so completely proof against temptation to 'make an effect,' or to secure an easy material benefit. This probity is associated in John Ireland with a genial sincerity and love of artistic truth that will tolerate no meretricious blandishments, and a scrupulousness that rejects anything that is arbitrary or fortuitous. Thoroughly English in his outlook and in the directness of his method, he has one point of contact with the French, and one only, in the meticulous care which he devotes to detail. His is no feverish productivity. He never will be, as many composers have been, the victim of a fatal facility.

He is content to spend days on a single passage so that he gives it the one ultimate form which afterwards proves to be the inevitable form it should take. Yet this constant preoccupation with precision in detail has nowhere resulted in laboured writing. His harmonic texture may be complex or simple, suave or acid, smooth, or, as it is more often, rugged or sharply defined, but it is constantly adjusted to the needs of the composition, and, although he is not given to finicalities, his taste in these matters is no less acute than that of those who trade in them—over all of which, rightly understood, it is in the end one quality that predominates: sincerity.

LIST OF COMPOSITIONS.

Unpublished.

FULL ORCHESTRA.

Midsummer. (Overture.)
Tritons. (Symphonic Prelude.)
Orchestral Poem, in A minor.
Pelléas et Melisande. (Overture.)

CHORAL.

Mass in the Dorian Mode, for four voices.
'Vexilla Regis,' for chorus, soli, brass instruments, and organ.
Psalm 42, for chorus, soli, and orchestra.

CHAMBER MUSIC.

Quartet, for strings, in D minor.
Quartet, for strings, in C minor.
Sextet, for strings, clarinet, and horn.
Trio, for pianoforte, clarinet, and violoncello, in D minor.
Trio, for pianoforte, violin, and violoncello, in E minor.
Sonata, for violin and pianoforte, in C minor.
Sonata, in one movement, for violin and pianoforte, in G minor.

PIANOFORTE MUSIC.

Sonata, in C minor.
Sea Idyll. (Three movements.)
Rhapsody, in C \sharp minor.
Three Pieces.

(Also shorter pieces and songs.)

Published.

FULL ORCHESTRA.

The Forgotten Rite. Prelude. (Augener.)

CHAMBER MUSIC.

Phantasie, in A minor, for violin, violoncello, and pianoforte. (Augener.)
Trio No. 2, in one movement, for violin, violoncello, and pianoforte. (Augener.)
Sonata No. 1, in D minor, for violin and pianoforte. (Augener.)
Sonata No. 2, in A minor, for violin and pianoforte. (Winthrop Rogers.)

PIANOFORTE MUSIC.

Decorations. (1. The Island Spell; 2. Moonglade; 3. The Scarlet Ceremonies.) (Augener.)
Rhapsody. (Winthrop Rogers.)
Preludes. (The Undertone; Obsession; The Holy Boy; Fire of Spring.) (Winthrop Rogers.)
London Pieces—I. Chelsea Reach.
II. Ragamuffin. (Augener.)
The Towing-Path (in the Press). (Augener.)
Leaves from a Child's Sketch Book. (Winthrop Rogers.)

SONGS.

Sea Fever. (Augener.)
The Bells of San Marie. (Augener.)
Hope, the Hornblower. (Boosey.)
Songs of a Wayfarer. (Boosey.)
Marigold. Impression for voice and pianoforte. (1. Youth's Spring Tribute; 2. Penumbra; 3. Spleen.) (Winthrop Rogers.)

I was not sorrowful. (Boosey.)
The Cost. (1. Blind; 2. The Cost.) (Winthrop Rogers.)
The Soldier. (Winthrop Rogers.)
Blow out, you bugles. (Winthrop Rogers.)
The Heart's Desire. (Winthrop Rogers.)
Earth's Call. (Rhapsody for voice and pianoforte.) (Winthrop Rogers.)
Spring Sorrow. (Winthrop Rogers.)
I have twelve oxen. (Winthrop Rogers.)
The Sacred Flame. (Winthrop Rogers.)
Bed in Summer. (Curwen.)
The Rat
The Adoration } (in the Press.) (Chester.)
There were three Ravens (folk-song setting). (Winthrop Rogers.)

VARIOUS.

Bagatelle, for violin and pianoforte. (Novello.)
Elegiac Romance, for organ. (Novello.)
Sursum Corda, and Alla Marcia, for organ. (Novello.)
Morning, Communion and Evening Service. (Novello.)
Greater Love hath no man. Anthem. (Stainer & Bell.)

TWO-PART SONGS.

There is a garden. (Novello.)
Full fathom five. (Novello.)
Aubade. (Novello.)
Evening Song. (Novello.)
The echoing green. (Curwen.)
May Flowers. (Arnold.)

THE THIRD PERIOD OF CÉSAR FRANCK.

BY SYDNEY GREW.

The works of Franck's last period (1872-90) are not only representative in the mass of every type and form of music,* but they assume in sequence a curiously complete and consistent shape—a shape to which the term *symphonic* may be applied without fancifulness. They prove that with Franck, as with Bach, Handel, Gluck, and in different measure with Beethoven and Brahms—also (as it now begins to appear) with our English Elgar—creative interest grows by what it feeds upon, and that works produced in great periods of the composer's life group themselves into closely related sections, which latter are steadily formative of grandly balanced and 'cyclically' responsive movements. In the particular case of Franck, the dominant progression is first toward the Symphony in D minor, and the continuance of that progression is diversely toward 'Psyche' and some smaller works of kindred spirit, toward the quartet, and toward the late organ pieces. This progression begins at the latest with 'Les Djinns,' but possibly with 'Le Chasseur maudit.' It thus carries with it the entire mass of the pianoforte works, which themselves form a section of the utmost consistency and compactness. Except for 'Les Eolides,' the 'Three Pieces for Organ,' 'Rebecca,' the operas, and some of the songs and part-songs, every work of the thirty forms part of the grand cyclic wave of this final period of Franck's life. 'Les Béatitudes' being what it is in the total scheme of his whole life, we might consider that this wonderfully single, unified progression which fills Franck's

* 'At this moment . . . he does not intend to be a stranger to any form of his art, symphony, vocal music, chamber music, even lyric drama—he attacks them all in turn; there is not one realm in the universe of music that he fails to explore.'—(*d'Indy*.)