

Our Greatest Contemporary Composer

Elgar---Musician Laureate of Empire

On Monday evening next, at 2YA, Elgar will be the subject of the usual Musical Portrait, and a talk on the composer will be given by H. Temple White, under whose direction the Wesley Choir will sing "As Torrents in Summer" (from "King Olaf") and "Weary Wind of the West." Elgar solo items will be rendered by Nellie Amies (contralto) and Roy Hill (tenor). The 2YA Orchestra will play the composer's "Crown of India" Suite, and, as an overture, an electrical recording of "Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1 in D" will be played by the Royal Albert Hall Orchestra.

SIR EDWARD ELGAR is 74. In the words of the late Dr. A. Eaglefield Hull his is the strongest voice in England since the days of Purcell and Handel. A composer of international repute, he shares with Richard Strauss in Germany, the honour of being the greatest musician of the twentieth century. Since a reputation of such magnitude only follows slowly after the work, trailing behind a man like his shadow, both these composers really belong in spirit to the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Although possessing, like Strauss, an amazing pictorial power in sound and superb orchestral mastery (and indeed owing something to Strauss in this respect), Elgar stands at the opposite pole to the German master. Strauss worked through a period of intense romanticism on to realism. Elgar has always been a thorough-going romanticist—England's greatest romantic composer, in fact. Strauss is always materialistic; Elgar is as spiritually minded as Bach. The German is orchestral and operatic; the Englishman choral and orchestral. The oratorio (as Handel discovered) really takes the place of opera in England. Strauss is supernatural; Elgar is always singing the praises of England. No one could be better suited than Elgar for the ancient post of "Master of the King's Musick."

Modest and retiring by nature, Elgar has never been slow in wit, from the time when, as a youngster at a new school, he was asked his name and replied, "Edward Elgar." "Add the word 'sir,'" said the headmaster sharply; and meekly but prophetically came the reply, "Sir Edward Elgar." There is something very fine about the career of this composer, who began on the lowest rung of the musical ladder and ended on the highest pinnacle of fame.

ELGAR was able to sound the new note in English music by reason of his own genius and his freedom from a rigid academical training. Born in Worcester, at the time when the "Three Choirs Festivals" were steadily rising to their prime, he is entirely the product of the West Country. He began as a violinist, played the organ for a few years, but he never understood the genius of the piano, which has escaped him completely, just as it has eluded Bantock.

His uncanny sense of the orchestra is one of his very greatest assets, and a superb gift of melodic eloquence is another. No other composer has made so deep an impression of his own personality on

the huge array of the modern chorus and orchestra as Elgar has done. Indeed, in "Gerontius," he solved that problem of the perfect union of voices and instruments for which Beethoven and Franck strove in vain. Elgar is English, but he does not represent the whole of England. His England is the England of the West Country. His music feels superlatively right in one of the magnificent Gothic cathedrals of Hereford, Worcester, or Gloucester.

HIS art is as really one with their architectural aspirations, as it is with the peaceful rivers and the rolling Cotswolds. No great composer has less of the dance element, less of the passion of love or of the power to depict evil, than he.

He is far more lyrical than Strauss. With a single long line of flowing melody he can reproduce the charm of the West Country landscape, give the refined solace of organised religion and of the Tennysonian line, and even reach the perfect serenity of the ethereal region.

He is not a constructionist of the order of Beethoven or Brahms. Although in his oratorios, his splendid use of climax gives a certain shape and coherence to the works, for the rest he relies entirely on a liberal use of "leit-motifs" along Wagnerian lines.

As a late-romanticist, he felt called upon to attempt the problem of the great classical symphonic forms and, taking the finest of models—Mozart in G Minor, Beethoven No. 5, and Brahms's third symphony—he grappled with construction on a large scale on lines of his own. He increased the number of subjects in his exposition.

Though his art of gliding from one to another does not always bring in the "recapitulation" with conviction, it would be a mistake to think there is no connection between the episodes in his essentially rhapsodic style. The sequence of thought is there, though it can easily be lost in performance.

Many words have been spilt by many critics about Elgar's facile (and perhaps a little cheap) compositions; but every composer had to write "occasional pieces," even aristocratic craftsmen like Mozart and Chopin; and Elgar is no worse than they, despite the highly-perfumed "Salut d'Amour" and things like "Land of Hope and Glory," both, by the way, being well-composed pieces of their kind.

Elgar, like Handel of old, does not disdain to be popular. He is one of the few composers who can create that broad, swinging kind of tune with an irresistible rhythm which (Concluded on page 28.)



IN 1857 a son was born to Mr. Elgar, organist, violinist, and music-seller, of Worcester. Thirty years later, young Edward Elgar, past his gruelling apprenticeship, and now a master craftsman, spent a further thirteen years in proving it. And then things happened. Hans Richter taught us what to think of the "Enigma Variations; Richard Strauss told us what the Germans thought of "The Dream of Gerontius; we ourselves learnt what to think of "The Kingdom," the two Symphonies, and Falstaff; and now, on Monday night, we realise that we are to hear not so much the works of Sir Edward Elgar, Bt., O.M., Master of the King's Musick, but rather the music of Elgar, a plain citizen of Worcester, who, single-handed, set out to restore, in the eyes of Europe, the musical prestige we had lost since the days of Purcell—and he achieved this end.