

A Personal Reminiscence

Julius Harrison

On 27th October 1960 a talk by the composer and conductor Julius Harrison was broadcast by the BBC Midland Home Service in the interval of a performance of 'The Dream of Gerontius' from the Victoria Hall, Hanley, conducted by Sir John Barbirolli, in which he 'recalls some of his contacts with Sir Edward Elgar and with his music'. The script was made available 'For private circulation to members of the Elgar Society by kind permission of Julius Harrison and the British Broadcasting Corporation' and, recently, Geoffrey Hodgkins has unearthed a copy.

It was my good fortune to hear the very first performance of *The Dream of Gerontius*. At that time I was a lad of 15, too young to take in the music properly, or to realise how imperfect that performance was. But the delightful 'Dorabella' of the 'Enigma' Variations, Mrs. Richard Powell, put things in a nutshell, when, at the time *Gerontius* was produced at the Birmingham Festival of 1900, she recorded in her diary:- 'The Elgar idiom was like a foreign language that cannot be mastered in a few weeks!' This indeed was my experience on that memorable occasion sixty years ago this month.

Today we are no longer baffled by that idiom. It is now part of our native musical speech. We have, moreover, coined the word 'Elgarian' to connote something unique in the annals of our British music – unique in the sense that no other English composer before Elgar ever created sounds so original, and, shall, I say, so opulent as he did. He broke away – after a struggle mind you – from the worst of the Victoria traditions, taking in those newer chromatic harmonies which owed something to Wagner; and particularly (in my submission) to the mystical sounds we hear in *Parsifal*. Then, again like Wagner, he made use of leading themes such as were to make *The Dream of Gerontius* so immensely effective and so satisfying in its general structure as a continuous narrative.

But it is not for me here to dwell at length on the nature of Elgar's music. For I have been invited to say something about my personal recollections of Sir Edward – how I came to know him, and something about our meetings in later years.

Even before my time, my father knew him. He was born at Powick, not four miles from Elgar's birthplace at Broadheath. As a keen amateur musician my father ran a Glee Club at Stourport-on-Severn (where I was born), and to his concerts Elgar came on two occasions to play violin solos. And so through such a chance circumstance, the name of Edward Elgar was already a revered one in the Harrison family; from those early boyhood days of mine when cantatas such as *King Olaf* and *Caractacus* had brought new fame to their composer.

I longed to meet him. As a student in Birmingham in 1905 I heard his lecture on Brahms' Third Symphony, given at the University. I was so impressed by his analysis of that masterpiece – with all its wonderful treatment of a motto phrase – that the memory of that lecture still remains vivid to my

eyes and ears. I still can see and hear him, his eyelids batting rapidly with that nervous tension and energy which all those who knew him will remember; his whole mind concentrated on a subject so near to his own ideals in music

Three years later I met him for the first time – in Norwich at the Triennial Festival in St. Andrew's Hall. Sir Henry Wood was to conduct a cantata of mine which had won a prize offered by the Festival Committee. *Gerontius* was in another programme, also conducted by Wood. The hall was full; no seats were to be had. Thanks to Richard Strauss and a performance of *Gerontius* at the Düsseldorf Festival of 1902, the British public had begun to think that the flop in Birmingham in 1900 was not, perhaps, due to the composer.

Now it was October 1908, and, as I have said, St. Andrew's Hall was full, eager to listen. By great good luck I found myself sitting next Sir Edward behind a curtain near the platform. Many times he glanced downward at my vocal score – one I still have, marked with his tempi of later years, when he so often conducted *Gerontius* at the Three Choirs Festivals. Obviously he was very much moved by the performance, for from time to time he would brush the tears from his cheeks – a most poignant memory for me.

For some years after that I met him only casually. I had so far only made his acquaintance, nothing more than that. But in the autumn of 1915 he invited me to conduct his incidental music to Algernon Blackwood's *Starlight Express* – a fantasy play based on the author's 'A Prisoner in Fairyland', and which was produced at the Kingsway Theatre on December 29th of that year – myself conducting. I still have a letter of instructions sent by Sir Edward to the theatre during rehearsal days – you can find it in a volume of his letters published some few years back by Geoffrey Bles.¹ Its details, with scraps of music included, deal with a sprite-call behind the scenes – the letter headed 'Monday 6 a.m.' He was up betimes then; a busy man indeed.

From now on he gave me his friendship. We met often. I was invited to his London home, Severn House, Hampstead – oh so rightly named! For did not that noble river mean much to him – as it has always done so to me, both of us sons of Worcestershire. Once with sly humour and, not perhaps without good reason, he threatened me with a copy of Burton's 'Anatomy of Melancholy'. Instead he wrote --- well, let me quote from his letter of November 2nd 1920:

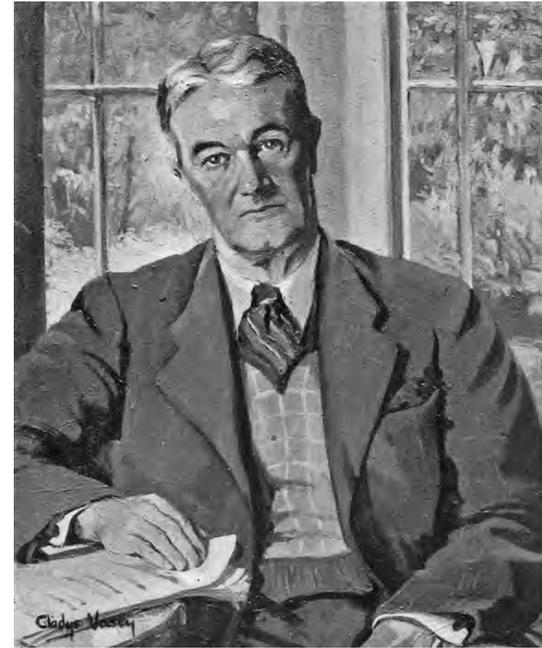
'I think you are, as I am, very much in love with our old county. I am sending you that old engraving of Stourport (1776) which I hope you will accept as a mark and a very slight token of something bigger – of my regard and esteem.'

Again – and, indeed, more pathetically from his last bed, two months before he died:

'... Unfortunately the announcement of my return home was a mistake. I am likely to be here for a long time. I am sorry I missed your broadcast of the Nursery Suite. I am glad you smell the Severn in it.'

His sense of fun throughout his long life – who else could have written the 'Enigma' Variations characterizing so adroitly his Worcestershire friends? – his stories, anecdotes, childlike play with words, anagrams, caricatures, his love of Worcestershire – to say nothing of his immense scholarship such as many men might envy – all these things you can read about in the books. While the years have robbed me of many memories I wish I could have retained, two stories told me by him, perhaps 40 years ago, still linger in the mind. The first is of those very early days when Elgar

1 Percy Young (Ed.), *Letters of Edward Elgar*, (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956), pp.226-227.



Julius Harrison - from a portrait in oils by Gladys Vasey

was leading the local orchestra in Worcester, the occasion being a concert under the Society's conductor, a worthy and indeed well-known musician, diffident, and shall I say, baton-shy. He rapped his desk. Elgar lifted his violin to his neck, his bow at the ready. The conductor held arms and baton aloft, waiting, making no movement. After a moment or two he dropped his arms; Elgar lowered his instrument. Twice this happened. Then the conductor leant over to his leader and whispered testily: 'Now look here Mr. Elgar, if you won't start, I shall.'

The other story is of two trombonists wrestling at rehearsal with the music of a composer unacquainted with the technique of that instrument. The first trombonist was having an uncomfortable hit and miss at two rapid, alternating notes which involved sliding from one end of the instrument to the other. The other player nudged his discomfited colleague, indicating he would share the passage with him. The upshot was that both players set their positions, one in the home position, the other fully extended. Not a slide was moved. Elgar told me this story with glee. He, too, played the trombone and as we all know, wrote for it as brilliantly as ever did any composer.

How then shall I best describe Sir Edward as I remember him in those far-off years – 1915 to 1920? He was forthcoming; friendly, signing letters 'yours affectionately' – the bond of Worcestershire, I felt, between us – full of stories as I have just told, yet, at times, letting out a stray remark betraying his discontent with the more mundane aspects of his art. Once he told me – this was in pre-broadcasting, pre-electrical recording days – that for that particular year his gramophone royalties on the 'Enigma' Variations totalled 4/6^d!

Above all else I felt he was at heart a mystic. His music had taught me that. Though he so vehemently defended his splendid *Pomp and Circumstance Marches* – 'I have something of the soldier in me' he once wrote – yet beneath this more worldly exterior in the glitter of Imperial,

Edwardian times, he was to me (as to so many others) a man apart; his soul in constant touch with other-worldly things, living in dreams; metaphysical; detached; his complex nature desiring much he could never attain to.

To this dream-world he returned again and again for his finest inspirations. Apart from *Gerontius*, there is that poignant cantata which tells of the music-makers 'who are the dreamers of dreams'. Or those two exquisite sketches for small orchestra – 'Dream Children'. Or again the dream-world in *The Apostles*, and those countless hushed moments in the Symphonies; or that wonderful, brooding cadenza in the Violin Concerto which sounds centuries old, almost as if its composer had been reincarnated for this set purpose. That was the Elgar I knew 40 years ago.

After 1920 when Lady Elgar died – and we knew what that meant to him – I saw little of him. We would often meet at the Three Choirs Festivals, but only in a more desultory way, for many were the people who surrounded him in his fame. My own professional activities took me much away from London and from the haunts that were his.

And now I come to this Diamond Jubilee performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* given by the City of Stoke-on-Trent Choral Society and conducted by my old friend Sir John Barbirolli. It takes me back to the year 1947, and to Malvern's first Elgar Festival which I had the honour to direct.

My enthusiastic Committee and I were agreed that the Festival could not be fully representative of the Master's music without a performance of one of the Oratorios. Of course *Gerontius* was the obvious choice, for it was composed at Birchwood not two miles from Malvern itself, and so far had never had a performance in Malvern. We envisaged the noble Priory Church as the only place worthy of *Gerontius*. Ways and means were explored. Many difficulties stood in the way. We were stumped for a choir big enough for the task. We needed ecclesiastical authority to proceed.

Then in one of those sudden flashes of – shall I say – inspiration, I rang up another old friend, Harold Gray, the conductor of the City of Stoke-on-Trent Choral Society, to whose performance we are listening tonight. 'Help us out. The occasion is a notable one', I said to him. His committee, my committee, the Society members all were agreed, as was Mr. Gray.

The Vicar of Malvern, Canon Ronald Bryan Lunt, gladly gave his consent to the performance taking place in the Priory Church. Harold Gray brought his singers all that long way from Stoke – they did not even want their expenses – and conducted a performance of *The Dream* I shall always remember, so noble was the setting, so glorious the sounds. Carice, Elgar's daughter, was there, so was 'Dorabella', as merry as ever she was in the 'Enigma' Variations.

Thinking back on that first performance in 1900; on that at Norwich in 1908 when I first met Sir Edward; on numerous others at Worcester and elsewhere, that Festival performance in July 1947 in Malvern's Priory Church seemed to me – Worcestershire man as I am – like a completion; something that had come full circle; something beautiful and enduring that had, after 47 years, returned to the home of its birth.

It is therefore an especial privilege for me to have been invited to speak to you tonight, for you will have realised how much *The Dream of Gerontius* and its composer, and, indeed, Elgar's music generally, have meant to me in my own long life. Some memories have faded, but many others remain. Tonight my thoughts are with everyone in the Victoria Hall, Hanley. Finally I think of the Second Part of *Gerontius* which you and I are now about to hear. I recall what the composer wrote at the end of the manuscript – 'This is the best of me ... This I was and knew; this, if anything of mine, is worth your memory'.

Imperial propaganda and *Caractacus*: Chivalry, Militarism and the multi-faceted character of Elgar's British Army

Bryson Mortensen

This is the second in a series of three articles that discuss various aspects of empire in Edward Elgar's Caractacus, each focusing on the allusions to one of three concepts emphasised in contemporary propaganda: national pride, chivalry and militarism, and Social Darwinism. This article will study chivalry and militarism.

Considering the negative public reaction to recent wars, it is impressive that militarism was cast in such a positive light in turn of the century England. The contemporary military is often treated critically – a result of the fact that military action is often viewed as oppressive, unwelcome, and coercive. Britain's world-wide empire, however, required a powerful military to maintain order. Thus, Britain needed to portray its military as a necessary and positive part of the empire's mission. This was accomplished by presenting propaganda that combined the positive ideals of ancient chivalry and medieval knights with the contemporary British military.

While chivalry had no direct relation to the modern concept of a military – any link between King Arthur and British Imperial conquest is a stretch at best – the British government saw Arthurian legend as a way of selling the idea that military service provided young minds with the discipline needed to be upstanding members of society, trained in proper comportment, and morally strong. In the *Daily Mail's* account of the Diamond Jubilee, much attention was paid to the military exercises that were part of the procession to Saint Paul's. There was much talk of the '... straight, and smart, and strong ...' troops as a testimony to the 'greatness of the British Race', the story told in the *Daily Mail* of sending British commanders to take control of the 'savages' of a country and teach them to '... march and shoot as he tells them, to obey him and to believe in him and die for him and the Queen ...' and that is part of the 'world-shaping force' of the Empire. Perhaps the most telling statement regarding the role that British military service played in forming exemplary citizens is found in the words: 'Pink-faced boys, already men in self-command ...'¹ Such sentiment conveyed the message that Britain's military was a type of education that transformed young boys into honourable men worthy of a seat at the Round Table.

At the height of the British Empire and the Diamond Jubilee, chivalry was a principal device used to improve the opinion of those men who joined the military. Beyond inculcating obedience and courage in combat, chivalry encouraged them to modify their personality and embrace all

1 *Daily Mail*, 23 June 1897, 'To Saint Paul's: The Procession en Route', 1

aspects of the human condition; a King like Arthur, who loved his Queen Guinevere as much as he loved battle, became the image of the British military at least as interested in gaining honor as exerting power. Elgar's music used aspects of chivalry and military as an integral part of *Caractacus*, defining how these early ancestors of the English military had shaped contemporary notions of Empire.

Chivalry, Militarism, and Elgar

The influences of chivalry and militarism on Elgar's concept of the imperialist state are often confused. In his analysis of Elgar's image as an imperialist, Harper-Scott did not effectively delineate these two aspects of Elgar's embrace of Imperialism. He begins his discussion by citing Siegfried Sassoon's observations on Elgar. While Sassoon's analysis is strongly coloured by his pacifism, he does reveal that Elgar often described himself as a 'Great Gentleman', a phrase that more effectively aligns Elgar with chivalrous rather than with militaristic attitudes.² Sassoon describes Elgar as taking pride in his 'conventional appearance', a characterization that better fits the image of a chivalrous gentleman – the 'duc d'Elgar' as (cynically) portrayed by Sassoon – than a general in the British Army.³

The self-concept of the 'Great Gentleman', seen as an aspiration towards chivalry, affected many of Elgar's early works. The first work that established him as a uniquely British musical voice was the *Froissart* Overture, a work forever identified with Elgar's inscription 'when chivalry lifted up her lance on high'. Here we encounter for the first time the chivalrous hero that dominated his musical subjects. The theme continues in *The Black Knight*, a text translated by Longfellow in *Hyperion*. The heroic nature of chivalry depicted is effectively summarised by Elgar in his description of the *Froissart* Overture, where he praises the 'knight's loyalty to his king, pure faith to his religion, hardihood towards the enemy, and fidelity to his lady-love'.⁴

In addition to that image of the 'Great Gentleman', Elgar felt pressed to portray the image of an army general as a sort of marital adhesive:⁵ Having married the daughter of Major-General Henry Gee Roberts, Elgar felt obliged to assume a pro-imperialist, pro-militant, persona. Elgar also saw the cultivation of this image as profitable in the context of the upcoming Jubilee. This complex of mental attitudes informs such works as the *Imperial March*, *The Banner of St. George*, and *The Crown of India*.

Harper-Scott further describes this aspect of Elgar's cultivation of an imperial personality by citing contemporary accounts that documented Elgar's personification of the military type.⁶ Elgar

2 Harper-Scott, J. P. E., *Elgar: An Extraordinary Life* (London: The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (Publishing) Limited, 2007), 24.

3 It is fair to note that the rest of Sassoon's description of the 'duc d'Elgar' does not always match the traditional definition of chivalry when he uses words and phrases like 'self-centred', 'inconsiderate', 'pretending', 'disguising his feelings', to describe Elgar. Harper-Scott is very effective at dismissing these scathing criticisms by understanding the circumstances under which Sassoon made his observation. In essence, the criticism is quite personal and biased, not allowing for an impartial analysis of Elgar's character.

4 McVeagh, Diana, *Elgar the Music Maker* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), 13.

5 Harper-Scott, J. P. E., *Elgar: An Extraordinary Life* (London: The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (Publishing) Limited, 2007).

6 *Ibid.*, 25.

certainly did look the part, much of his music reflecting military-imperialist agenda of Britain at that time. It is essential to emphasise that Elgar's military works were essentially paeans to chivalry that went by a different name to match the public interest of the time. At several points the jingoistic sentiment of the *Imperial March* is tempered by melodies more evocative of 'pure faith' and 'loyalty' than militarism. *The Banner of St. George*, while externally focused on the British military uniform, saw St. George as the embodiment of Claverhouse's notions of chivalry rather than merely a powerful warrior.⁷ Conveniently⁸, Elgar's plan of becoming a 'Great Gentleman' by portraying chivalrous heroes in his music was completely compatible with the British propaganda, and ultimately co-opted by it.

Caractacus as a 'Great Gentleman'

Presented with the story of an outcast from the Roman Empire who is upright, religious, and patriotic, Elgar was unable to resist using *Caractacus* to project his own support for the British Empire. Without much effort, he was able to blend his own ideas of chivalry and a quasi-jingoistic sentiment without creating a paradox. For Elgar, *Caractacus* was proof that chivalrous personality traits such as courage, compassion, and eloquence which produced the 'Greatness of the British Race'⁹ in the contemporary military were present centuries earlier in *Caractacus*. Elgar presents his message by portraying *Caractacus* as a blend of chivalry and military prowess, and his fellow Britons as 'Great Gentlemen' instead of jingoistic militants.

As a character, *Caractacus* poses an intriguing complex of emotions and personalities. His entrance in the first scene of the cantata portrays the qualities one expects to find in a king/general. His mood changes quickly, urging his soldiers to rest and prepare for battle. *Caractacus*'s description of the evening scene surrounding him changes dramatically from the preceding music (see Fig. 1). This music also includes a leitmotiv that Elgar labels as 'rest'. In addition, the meter changes to a triple meter which, according to Ernst Pauer's¹⁰ writings, represents sincere devotion. The key moves to E flat major: a serious, courageous, and dignified key according to Pauer. All of these elements seem to represent a gentle rather than aggressive *Caractacus*. The melody accompanying the text is more folk-like than militant. The stepwise melody, the rising sequence, and the orchestration (flute and strings) are reminiscent of the kind of melody that Elgar uses to portray the countryside. In addition, the melody and orchestration portray a gentler side of the warrior king.

7 *Ibid.*, 25.

8 In his analysis of Elgar's imperialist motives, Harper-Scott argues that Elgar's imperialist interests were closely aligned with his own upward social mobility. While many of Elgar's musical decisions seem grounded in political motivations, it would seem he simply took aspects of his personality (the "Great Gentleman") and tweaked them to conform with contemporary public opinion.

9 *Daily Mail*, 23 June 1897, 'To Saint Paul's: The Procession en Route', 1.

10 Ernst Pauer's "Elements of the Beautiful in Music" is a text which Elgar read and annotated, details about the text can be found in the first article of this series (*Elgar Society Journal*, Vol.18, No.3, December 2013).

Flute

Caractacus

Cello

Violins

C

Viola

The sun is red, the sky is white, All - resting round in bright - ing light, The

Fig.1: Scene I, figure 20, bar 7

Caractacus

Carac.

I have fought and i have surv - an, Fought with foes and surv'n with friends, Fought for white rob'd priests and glee - men, Fought that Bri - tons might be free - - - men,

Fig. 2: Scene I, figure 24, bar 4

Caractacus's mood changes, however, as he considers the imminent battle (see Fig. 2). The music changes to F minor (the D flat added as an accidental), a key Pauer describes as harrowing and indicative of rising passion.

As Elgar raises the vocal range to that of a more heroic baritone, the image of a dominant military personality emerges in keeping with Pauer's description of the emotional effect of higher notes. Caractacus's words give the clues necessary to understand the seemingly contradictory characters of Caractacus in the first scene. While describing the battle in what is certainly very passionate and militaristic music, the text gives away the purpose of the battle, and makes Caractacus into a character similar to the Knight as described by Claverhouse in his description of the *Froissart* Overture.¹¹ This loyalty to his people and devotion to his religion present in this text add depth to a personality that is '[hardy] towards his enemy'. The cantata's text portrays Caractacus as a military hero to reflect the popular praise accorded the military during the Diamond Jubilee. Elgar rounds out Caractacus's character by giving him ample opportunity to exhibit the characteristics of a true gentleman. While there are few other scenes that show multiple sides of Caractacus's character like this one, there are many scenes in which one single aspect predominates.

Elgar's most militant portrayal of Caractacus appears in the cantata's second scene, shortly after he receives the Arch-Druid's prophecy (see Fig. 3).

Caractacus

Soldiers

Leap, leap in fight my, brand of fight. Push to the bow's done edge so bright: When these sharp lips of steel shall get. Red from the kiss - a - tinner shall flow, And many a god - rest hand be torn, Leap - leap to the light! Leap, leap to the light!

Fig.3: Scene II, figure 28

The energetic duple-meter rhythm abounds in dotted rhythms. The simple melody is filled with short phrases that, with the jaunty rhythm convey the energy of young soldiers preparing for battle. The harmonic motion to a simple alternation of tonic and dominant is reminiscent of a march. To complete the military overtones, the entire soldier's chorus enters at the end of each of the three verses to echo Caractacus's final words and sing an extended chorus at the end of the third verse (alternating between tonic and dominant) to bring a close to the segment (see Fig. 4). The entire scene, reminiscent of a Gilbert and Sullivan opera, portrays well the camaraderie of a group of soldiers.

11 McVeagh, Diana, *Elgar the Music Maker* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), 13.



Fig. 4: Scene II, figure 34

In contrast to this bravado, Caractacus's lament in Scene 5 (after the battle with the Romans has been lost) and his speech before the Roman Emperor Claudius reveal the nobler, more chivalrous side of his character. While the music of the lament is intriguing,¹² perhaps more interesting is the text:

Oh, my warriors, tell me truly,
O'er the red graves where ye lie
That your monarch led you duly,
First to charge and last to fly;

Speak, ah! speak, beloved voices,
From the chambers where ye feast,
Where the war god stern rejoices
That his host has been increas'd;

Say that first I clove the legions
Where the golden eagle flew
O'er the head to whom allegiance
From the Roman foe was due;

Say, too, when the fight was ending,
That with glazing eyes ye saw
Me my quiv'ring ranks defending
From the greedy Roman maw;

And the god shall give you heeding,
And across the heav'nly plain,
He shall smile, and see me leading
My dead warriors once again!

Of all the thoughts and emotions Caractacus might have had, his greatest concern is whether or not his leadership was honourable. He wonders if he inspired his soldiers to act with courage, if he was valiant in the face of the enemy, and whether he continued to fight even when success was dubious. These feelings fit the category of the chivalrous warrior well. His concern for his leadership skills demonstrated his commitment to his people, removing any possible stain of Imperial sentiment. Elgar's elimination of the fourth stanza of Acworth's libretto is compelling evidence of his attempt to place Caractacus above any negative militaristic stereotype:

12 The music of Caractacus's lament is worthy of study because of its 7/4 time signature; although almost unheard of at the time, this meter effectively portrays Caractacus's disorientation after being defeated. The high baritone range of his singing expresses Caractacus's anxiety over his defeat. In addition, the chorus (this time representing villagers instead of soldiers) echoes each stanza of Caractacus's lament – a haunting reminder of the soldiers' echo in the second scene (Fig.3).

Say ye saw me stand thereunder,
In the thickest of the ring,
While the battle crash'd like thunder,
Fighting bravely – like a king;

Similarly, in his final words to the Roman Emperor Claudius in scene six, Caractacus reveals his true nobility.

Do then thy worst on me; my people spare
Who fought for freedom in our land at home;
Slaves they are not; be wise and teach them there
Order, and law, and liberty with Rome.

Caractacus is less concerned with his welfare than with that of the people he serves. His sentiment summons forth a noble melody in which octaves and fifths depict a courageous character; similarly Elgar's effective use of sequence and the upper range (Fig. 5) elicits Caractacus's self-sacrificing chivalry. The first indication of how Elgar views Caractacus's character is his use of the term *maestoso*, a marking that recalls the similar tempo markings associated with Elgar's other chivalrous descriptions of heroes.



Fig. 5: Scene VI, figure 31, bar 3

In contrast to the majestic opening and closing of Caractacus's speech, the text and harmonic implication of the middle section emphasise his patriotic character (Fig. 6). The text's reference to the woodlands is paired with the freedom of the British people and highlights Elgar's commingled love of country and nature. The key moves quickly to G major, the 'pastoral' key associated with Eigen discussed in my previous essay, (*Elgar Society Journal*, December 2013). Many of the folk themes used in the first three scenes return (see Fig. 6).

Most interesting is Elgar's use of the 'Britain' theme identified by Moore and heard repeatedly in Scene I.¹³ While the violins recall the theme in its entirety, Caractacus sings fragments of the theme, recalling the ideals of the Pax Britannica (see Fig. 7). Caractacus's fragmented singing is also evident in figure 7, a musical representation of Caractacus's 'sobbing' over the loss of his homeland.¹⁴ The common thread throughout all of these examples is Caractacus's love of country boldly declared to the Roman Emperor and sandwiched (Harper-Scott would say *immured*)¹⁵

13 Moore, Jerrold Northrop, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1984), 230.

14 Harper-Scott, J. P. E., *Elgar: An Extraordinary Life* (London: The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (Publishing) Limited, 2007), 43.

15 Harper-Scott (Harper-Scott, *Edward Elgar, Modernist*, 2006) discusses the ideas of 'immured' tonalities in his second symphony. The same principle seems to appear here.

In contrast to the Romans, the textual depiction of the British soldiers in the first scene centres on courage and love of country, both aspects of a ‘Great Gentleman.’ While the tempo marking at the entrance of the chorus provides no clue (Elgar marks only *Allegro*), the use of texts like ‘comrades firm and fearless ...’ and ‘on like men undaunted’ portray the noble courage and camaraderie of the British army. These expressions of courage are coupled with a need to protect the British countryside paired with Elgar’s named ‘desolation’¹⁸ theme: ‘Our homesteads burn, and, all between, Wide wasted lie our woodlands green.’ These images underscore the essential goodness of the British soldiers and Empire.

The musical characteristics of these two choruses vividly portray the contrast between Rome and Britain. The orchestration of the British chorus features woodwinds, instruments which provide a delicate aesthetic in contrast to the brass instruments which accompany the Romans. Similarly informative is Elgar’s choice of key. While the Roman chorus (figure 6 through figure 10 in the final scene) remains steadfastly in C minor, the British chorus in the first scene moves through several keys, opening in C minor (according to Pauer, descriptive of earnestness and passionate intensity). As the chorus describes the destruction of their homes, Elgar modulates to F minor, associated with melancholy. As night closes, he darkens the tonal centre to a sombre E flat minor. This variety of keys reinforces the Britons as different from the brutish Romans – ‘great gentlemen’ possessing complex characters.

One should also take note of the several themes that Elgar creates that are associated with the British army and are introduced at the beginning of the entire work. The first theme introduced in the work is described as connective material, and has a march-like feel that can be associated with the British soldiers. This theme is followed by the march-like rhythm described by Elgar as ‘British soldiers’ and returns repeatedly when the soldiers are present. Finally, the ‘Watchmen’ theme runs repeatedly through this scene and has a connection to his desolation theme, and returns again during the final chorus.¹⁹

A final contrast is the difference in the mimetic character of the phrases that represent the two camps. The orchestral themes representing Britain and Rome²⁰ (Fig. 9) portray the British as artful and thoughtful, the Romans militaristic.



Fig. 9: Representative Themes

Similar differences occur in other themes sung by the British and Roman troops. For purposes of demonstration, two examples will suffice: the Romans’ ‘but hark a shout, the emperor fills the cruel chair’ (Fig. 10) and the Britons’ ‘our homesteads burn’ (see Fig. 11). As might be expected, the music sung by the Roman soldiers is heavily accented. On the contrast, the Britons’ melody (described by Moore as ‘melancholy’ and associated with Elgar’s ‘desolation’ motive) is low and accompanied by strings that add to the legato quality used by Elgar to portray British temperament.

18 Rushton, Julian, ‘Caractacus Thematic Table’, personal email from author, 1 September 2012.
 19 Rushton, Julian, ‘Caractacus Thematic Table’, personal email from author, 1 September 2012.
 20 Moore, Jerrold Northrop, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1984), 230.



Fig. 10: Scene VI, figure 22



Fig. 11: Scene I, figure 6

The sharp contrast between Elgar's portrayal of the two armies seems to contradict the view that Imperial Rome and Elgar's Britain were comparable. Were that so, Elgar surely would not have used *pomposamente* and such vigorous, even violent melodies and texts to characterise the Romans. Nor would he have given the British soldiers such depth of musical character. It seems more likely, then, that Elgar sought to demonstrate that the chivalry that was a hallmark of the nineteenth-century British Empire was already present centuries earlier when they banded together to defend themselves from outside invasion. Even though Rome ultimately prevailed, it was the British character that allowed them to create a superior empire, in which – as the final chorus put it – ‘... no slave shall be subjected, no trophy wet with tears ...’.

These two ideas – a chivalrous army and a refined commander – are themes that run throughout *Caractacus*, exemplifying Elgar's intention to laud the ideals of the British Empire. Such ideas downplay the power of the British army, emphasizing its role in creating responsible, valiant gentlemen for whom chivalry was a positive aspect of their society. Such values were clearly important, even if an army was required to instil them forcibly in Britain's colonies. By promoting these ideas in his cantata, Elgar carried favour with the tight-knit, upper-class circle of pro-imperialists of which he wanted to be a part.

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