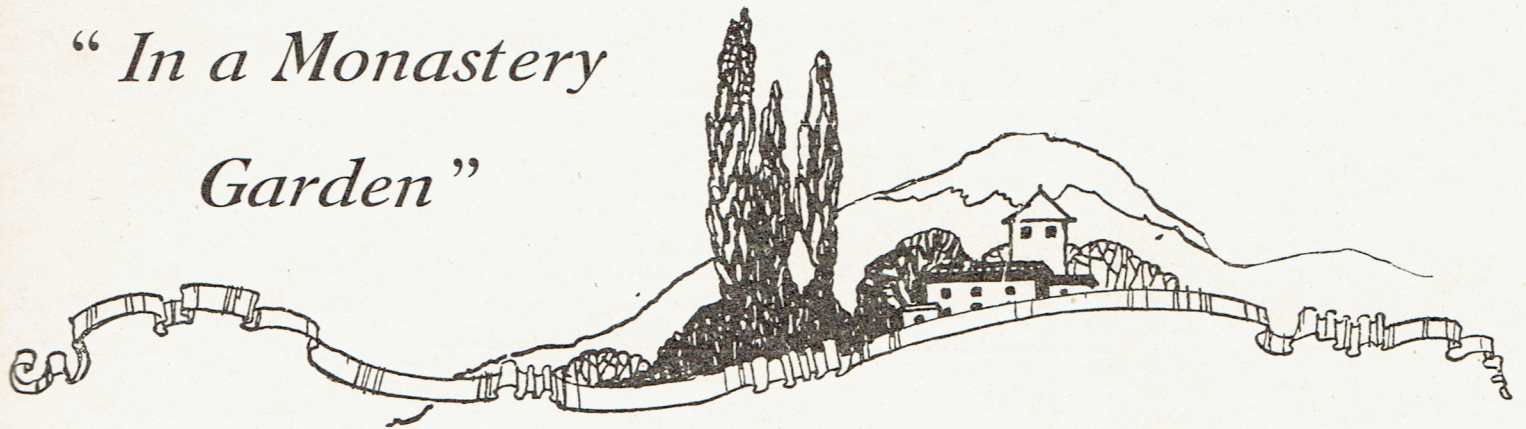


"In a Monastery Garden"



CURIOSLY enough, it was by means of several competitions with which Messrs. Ascherberg were actively associated that I first attained any substantial degree of popular, as distinguished from purely artistic, success.

For years I had been writing serious music. At the age of 11 I composed a sonata for the piano which I performed publicly as a boy in the Worcester Town Hall, and which in later years Sir Edward Elgar told me he remembered well, and greatly admired at the time. Afterwards I won the Sir Michael Costa prize at Trinity College with a quintet for wood-wind and piano, and I also wrote concerted music for piano solo and orchestra, an orchestral suite, an overture, string quartet, and so on.

But, unfortunately, I found that it was mainly artistic satisfaction that one derives from this kind of work, and as I was in the position of knowing music only as a means of earning a living, I had to turn to something lighter and more likely to catch the popular fancy.

It was at that period that the competitions gave me an opportunity of trying my hand at this kind of composition. In the first, a prize of £50 was offered for a melody to be played by Van Biene, the famous 'cellist. He had exhausted the possibilities of his well-known "Broken Melody," and wanted something that would take its place in a monologue.

I won the prize with a piece called "The Phantom Melody." This proved a great and lasting success, and brought my name before the public in a way that had never been possible before. Not long afterwards, I won the first prize of £100 for the best song for a man's voice, and was second in the same competition for the best song for a woman's voice.

Then a complete change came over things. I came to be recognised as a "composer" as well as a musician (terms which are not necessarily synonymous). The reason was that I gave the public melody well harmonised and (I think I

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can say) well constructed, which is what they want, instead of what the "high-brows" think they ought to have. I have never been able to see anything derogatory in that, for a composer (who is, or should be, a business man when his livelihood is concerned) can no more afford to ignore public opinion than the ordinary commercial man can. The same inexorable law of supply and demand operates in each case.

One grows tired of the intolerant attitude of the "highbrows" towards light music. One would think that a good dinner may only consist of dry bread and solid beef. Don't they ever eat a sweet? Art is not confined to so-called classical music.

In the world of composition, it is true to say that many are called but few are chosen. A thorough knowledge of musical theory is, of course, a *sine qua non*; in addition, there are four indispensable requirements of successful light music: Sincerity, emotional impulse, vigour of rhythm, and good craftsmanship.



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It is highly necessary, to feel what one writes, and also to have the right kind of inspiration. When I was writing "In a Monastery Garden," one of my most popular compositions, I was, for the time being, an imaginary monk, and as in my earlier days I had had certain ascetic inclinations it was not difficult to get myself into a suitable frame of mind.

The first inspiration to write this piece came to me during a visit to Scarborough. I happened to drive over to Bridlington one day, and on the way I visited a beautiful old monastery. Its quietude and its aloofness from the gaiety of the world at its doors seemed to cry aloud for expression through the medium of the orchestra. I had an idea, and when I returned home I set to work to draw a musical picture of the scene as it had impressed itself upon my mind—the chanting of the monks, the serenity and calm of the landscape, and the emotional aspect generally.

I have always thought it a great compliment that many clergymen have asked me to allow them to incorporate the "chant" section of the piece into their church services.

My tone-picture, "In a camp of the Ancient Britons," was inspired by a visit to Weston-super-Mare. When I saw the gay promenade, and in the background the old ramparts (Worlebury), carrying the mind back to the time of the Roman legions and the Druids, I felt the vividness of the contrast, and I wrote music that, I hope, conveys the atmosphere of the old drama, gradually merging into present-day brightness and gaiety.

It will be seen that a composer must be sensitive to impressions. He cannot convince the public if he is incapable of feeling deeply himself. I never consider a composition finished until, to my mind, no single note of it can be altered without spoiling it. I have invariably found that a splendid test, but before it can be passed I frequently revise a piece time after time. It all means hard work, but the responsiveness of the public is a very satisfying reward.