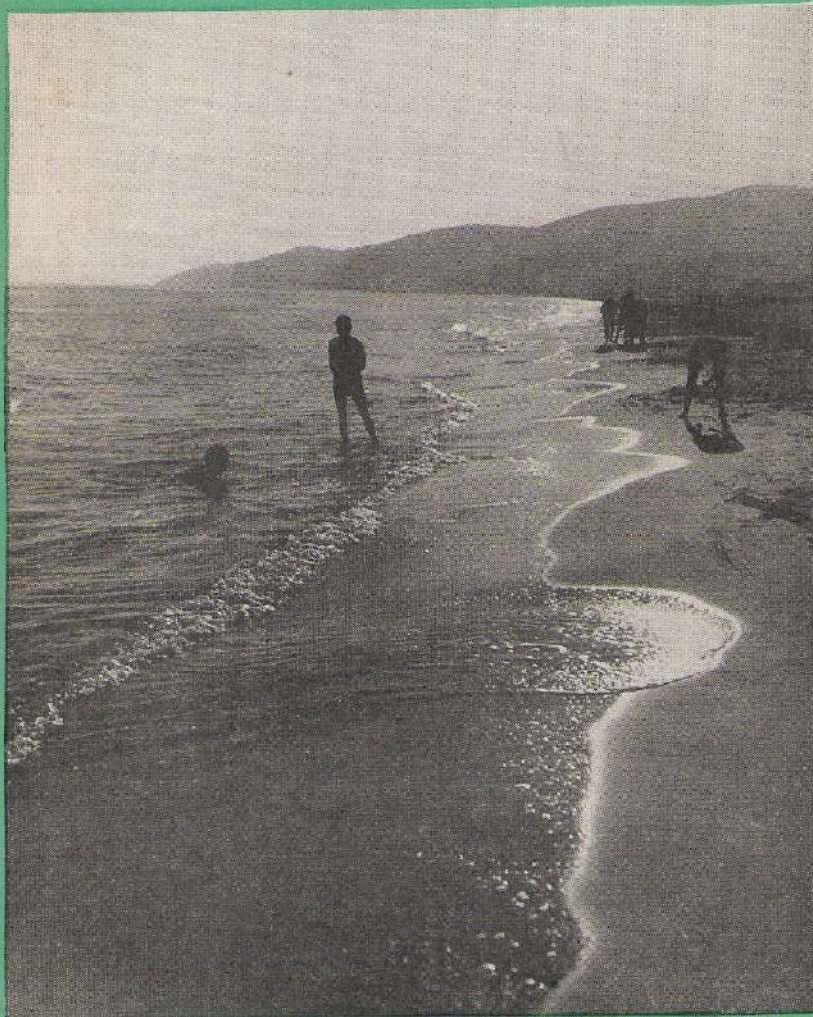


BRITAIN TO-DAY



Those Trippers. Who are They? P. H. J. Lagarde-Quost
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THE WELSH NATION

THERE is no more lovely region in Britain than the mountainous country round Snowdon, and no more lovely part of it than the Conway Valley, winding its way softly from Bettws-y-Coed to the sea near Conway Castle. In the midst of this valley is the little old town of Llanwrst, where this year was held the Royal Welsh National Eisteddfod, the annual festival of poetry, song and instrumental and choral music. There, at the gathering of the bards, the Archdruid received delegates from Brittany, Cornwall, Scotland and Eire. Eight thousand people witnessed the competitions and the prize-giving, and the most important of all the ceremonies, the crowning of the bard, whose winning poem in the Welsh language, written this year by young Mr. Glynne Davies, was rendered to harp accompaniment by Miss Gwenllian Berwyn.

It is a high and surely unique distinction of the Welsh people that the outstanding assertion of their nationality year by year should be the honouring of their writers, singers and musicians in the National Eisteddfod. What other country thus declares its confidence in nationhood through the excellence of its native tongue and the beauty of its music? And this in Wales is no artificial thing, no antiquarian exercise. The Welsh language to this day is a living thing—the language in which a majority of the people think, which they talk habitually among themselves, though of course they know English too. The Welsh are proud of their language and its literature, proud of their beautiful country, and intensely aware of their nationhood. But while they are patriotic Welshmen, cherishing their own customs, they are equally patriotic citizens of Great Britain.

What, asked the Rev. Dr. John Owen, in a presidential speech at the Eisteddfod, are the three bulwarks of nationhood? He named three: language, culture and religion. To some extent these three, and especially in the case of Wales, overlap. Language and religion are elements in culture. There is no country, I am told, whose poetry is more nearly related to the daily use of language than in Wales; and there, sectarian religion is a very important part of daily life and of culture. But the elements, none the less, may be usefully distinguished.

Language as a means of expression is with us from childhood to old age. Every feeling, every perception, every thought has its corresponding words and sentences. With it the child moves through his familiar world and explores the less familiar, fitting each action to a word, each experience to a phrase. The language of the family has its own idiosyncrasies, expressions which recall shared experiences. The speech of each district is marked by characteristic words and accents. The totality of words spoken or written by the people of a nation in a day is the outward expression of its characteristic thought and mood at that moment in its history. Language is an indispensable means by which we maintain communal life, share experience, and reveal our purposes. Embodied in literature it links us to the past, and enables us to preserve the "best that has been thought and said" by writers of other generations. With changes and developments in the national character it changes and develops too. When transplanted to another soil and environment it is subtly modified. There are differences in the spoken English of England and the United States. The Spanish of Argentina is not identical with that of Spain. The Brazilian language is not quite the same as the Portuguese, and no doubt the differences correspond to differences in national character, differences in manner of life.

It may be noticed that Dr. Owen used the word *nationhood*, not *nationality*, perhaps because he was thinking of something the very opposite of that sort of nationalism which is sensational, aggressive and fiercely assertive—which is more concerned with separatism than civilized expression of national culture. Nationhood in the sense in which he used the term is something to be prized. It is a nation's personality. It reveals itself in the

language of daily intercourse and, at its finest, in verse and prose, written or recited or sung; and in the mode of life of the people, their daily behaviour, their familiar intercourse, their social customs, the action they take to regulate their society in matters of common interest, in their spontaneous joint activities, like that of the Eisteddfod itself, and in their individual studies and pleasures.

These together make up their culture in the broader sense of the term, and determine their culture in the more special sense, which reveals itself in literature, music, graphic art, in science, in history, and other learned studies at the university, and in the preparatory stages of earlier education. When Dr. Owen gave to religion a special part in this, that was doubtless because we distinguish between the activities that are related to ordinary life and those which are concerned with a wider experience in the domain of faith—transcendent, perhaps, in one sense, yet none the less a determining influence in social and moral behaviour.

The United Kingdom is the richer for having various national elements within it; it gains by including the distinctive positive cultures of Wales and Scotland and Northern Ireland, and is the poorer by having lost, or partly lost, through errors in the past, the loyalty of Southern Ireland, or Eire. Long ago the only social organization the world has known that approximated to a World State, the Roman Empire, sowed the seeds of its own disruption by imposing a rigid uniformity under which the genius of the peoples withered. Artistic impulses were strangled at birth. The formal remains of the culture of Greece and Rome, that had once glowed with the vigorous life of Greek and Roman peoples, were offered stale, second-hand, a pale imitation of lusty originals, to races whose memories and traditions were alien. To-day, the only social organization which aims at world hegemony shows signs of making the same mistake, seeking to suppress the separate cultures and the freedom on which they flourish under a uniform culture destructive to individual talent and inspiration.

The modern world, though rightly aiming at world unity, can only keep itself fresh and free and buoyantly creative, by maintaining the living traditions enshrined in the history of

nations. Wales and Scotland, putting their national culture at the service of Great Britain, contribute their distinctive personalities to the combination, with whatever each has of strength, or talent, or grace. And in the same way, if ever Union should be attained in Western Europe or over a larger area of the world, we may be sure it will only flourish in proportion as it encourages the native genius and inherited aptitudes of each nation within it. Nationhood in this sense is invaluable to the civilized life of mankind. But how mistaken to confuse it with that utterly different thing, the so-called "nationalism" which is a perversion of the reality; which often seeks to grow, not as nations grow, by developing life from within, but by imposing the semblance of life from without; by asserting what as yet is not; by quick violent breaks with the past; by aggressive rhetoric and the fomentation of discontent.

It is right and patriotic to seek to nourish true nationhood at its source; to develop the inherent talents of a people and to make them proud of their true cultural development, and help them to be aware of their national personality. It is also right and natural for any oppressed nation to seek to gain its freedom. But how easy it is to use a term, which rightly employed appeals to a noble sentiment, with motives not disinterested; to exploit discontents or seek to break up combinations of peoples by spurious appeals to nationalism; to destroy the real seeds of nationhood by putting upon a people tasks it has not yet learnt to perform.

In these matters of social development and government there is no simple rule. It will not always be easy to say at what exact moment a backward people is ready for full self-government. But this much at least is certain, the lover of his people will always be on sure ground if he appeals to nationhood in the manner in which the Welsh bards appeal to Welshmen at their *Eisteddfods*, basing their claims on proved excellences, on a nationhood whose bulwarks are language, culture, and religion—a living language, a developed culture, a humane and inspired religion.

THE EDITOR

THE FIRST ENGLISH OPERAS

By DYNELEY HUSSEY

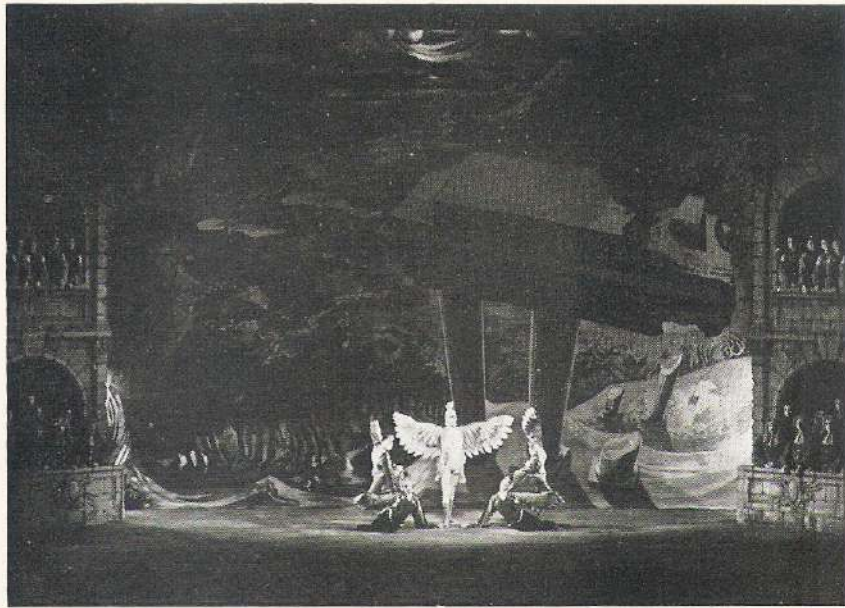
DR. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS opens his foreword to the souvenir programme of the eight concerts of Purcell's music sponsored by the Arts Council with the question:

We all pay lip service to Purcell, but what do we really know of him?

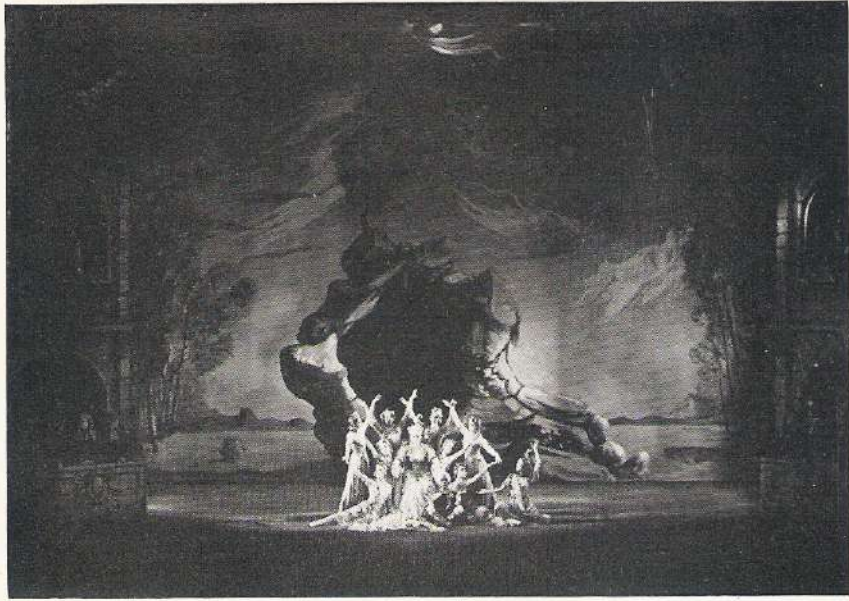
Little enough, indeed! But, thanks to this series of concerts and, among other enterprises, the B.B.C.'s Third Programme, we are beginning to extend our knowledge. *Dido and Æneas*, Purcell's solitary opera in the proper sense of the word, is restored to the repertory at Sadler's Wells and, as we remarked last month, has been performed by Benjamin Britten's company. Yet another version is promised in the autumn with Mme. Flagstad as Dido, an *édition de luxe* to be presented at Mr. Bernard Miles' private theatre in St. John's Wood.

The other dramatic works, to which the term "opera" was applied by Purcell's contemporaries, are more difficult to revive in the modern theatre. They are plays—some by Shakespeare and Dryden, some by lesser poets—with long musical scenes or masques at the end of each act. These masques often have little or no relevance to the dramatic action. They are purely spectacular entertainments, devised supposedly for the amusement of the characters on the stage, but really, of course, for the audience in the theatre. The most famous example of this type of dramatic spectacle is the masque at the end of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which was the subject of Purcell's last essay in this kind of piece. Shadwell's version of 1695 substituted new lyrics for Shakespeare's—among them being one of Purcell's most famous bass songs, "Arise, ye subterranean winds"—and greatly expanded the original masque.

This was also the treatment meted out to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for which Purcell wrote a masque to end each act. The original performances of *The Fairy Queen*, as the play was re-named, must have been inordinately long by modern standards. That is one obstacle to its revival to-day; another is a different attitude towards Shakespeare and towards opera from that of the subjects of William and Mary. We like our Shakespeare neat and complete, and we expect in opera a



The Ballet of the Birds in the first act of The Fairy Queen at Covent Garden



The Fairy Queen: (i) *Prologue to Act I*, (ii) *Dance of the Savages in Act II*



coherent drama presented through music, *dramma per musica* as the old Italian composers called it.

None the less, when Covent Garden Theatre reopened as the chief home of opera in London, it recognized what was due to Purcell as the only great English classical composer of opera, and mounted a sumptuous and beautiful production of *The Fairy Queen*. In order to give visitors to Britain an opportunity of seeing what kind of thing a Purcellian "opera" was, the piece was revived in an abbreviated form reduced to three acts. Unfortunately this involved the severe cutting both of music and spectacle. The play had anyhow been reduced to a skeleton consisting of the scenes between Oberon and Titania, and the clown's rehearsal of their play with Bottom's subsequent transformation. But, though the revival cannot be said to have done justice to Purcellian opera, it did enable us to hear a large amount of the music capably sung and well played under the direction of Constant Lambert, who was responsible for the editing of the music.

Two other more modest examples of English opera were produced in the Hall of Hampton Court Palace, where such things must often have been seen. One was an Elizabethan jig of the type referred to in Hamlet's remark on Polonius's preference for "a jig or a tale of bawdry." The piece in question, *Michael and Frances*, has been preserved because it was the subject of a libel action, and so came to be transcribed, fortunately with the names of the tunes used, in the records of the case. All the tunes but one have been traced, and were arranged for the performance by Elizabeth Poston. The piece had an antiquarian interest, if little else, as the earliest extant example of the ballad-opera, a typical English form of entertainment, whose masterpiece is Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*.

The other piece revived at Hampton Court was Eccles's *The Judgement of Paris*. It was originally produced six years after Purcell's death in 1701. Though described as a masque and belonging to the same category as Blow's *Venus and Adonis* and Locke's *Cupid and Death* (of which Professor Dent has prepared an edition for the Arts Council's publication *Musica Britannica*), *The Judgement of Paris* is closer to opera than the masques in *The Fairy Queen*. The music of the little piece was enchanting

and well worth reviving for its own sake, apart from its interest as an example of what was being achieved in England just before the fashion for Italian opera and the arrival of Handel extinguished the flickering flame of native enterprise.

New Recordings

A complete recording has been made on three long-playing discs of a performance of Weber's *Der Freischütz* by the company of the Vienna State Opera under the direction of Otto Ackermann (Decca). This is a most welcome addition to our resources for the study and enjoyment of one of the most remarkable operas that Germany has produced. As one might expect, the performance is excellent. The cast led by Hans Hopf as Max, Marjan Rus as Kaspar and Maud Kunitz as Agathe, sing their music beautifully and accurately and also with plenty of dramatic feeling, and the orchestral performance is superb. The horrors of the Wolf's Glen are quite adequately transmitted by microphone and reproducer. I wish I could add that the recording is always worthy of the performance, but too often the orchestral tone becomes thin and metallic, and sometimes it sinks to a mere whisper in the background. Still, until it is superseded by a better, this recording is worth treasuring.

Liszt's Pianoforte Sonata has reappeared in two recordings, one on a long-playing disc made by Luigi Pennaro (Capitol Classics), the other on three ordinary discs by Louis Kentner (Columbia). This is the kind of music, continuous in thought, which benefits most from recording on one side of a disc. Pennaro's performance is most brilliant and musicianly, and the recording is tolerably good, though the tone sounds rather brittle. Kentner's reading is more dramatic, making greater contrast between the dæmonic violence of the first section and the sensuous lyricism of the second. The reproduction is fuller in tone, though the recording does not always stand up to the full force of the climaxes. Another work by Liszt worthy of attention is the Rhapsodie Espagnole edited by Busoni played by Gina Bachauer, who gives a superb virtuoso performance, with the New London Orchestra under Alec Sherman (H.M.V.).

Another outstanding set is one containing the two books of Debussy's "Images" for pianoforte played by Walter Gieseking,

whose infinitely subtle touch places him high among living interpreters of Debussy's music. The recording made by Columbia does full justice to these beautiful performances. Nor could a better interpreter of Brahms's full-blooded Sonata in F minor be found than Edwin Fischer, who has recorded it for H.M.V. There is also a fine performance of Beethoven's "Eroica" Variations by Friedrich Gulda on a long-playing disc, coupled with Beethoven's Sonata in E flat ("Les Adieux"), which is unfortunately not so well recorded as the Variations (Decca).

The latest addition to the Arts Council's recordings of English poetry is a set of two records containing sixteen of Shakespeare's Sonnets spoken by Anthony Quayle and issued by Columbia. The sonnets have been well chosen by Patric Dickinson to show the range and variety of emotional expression in the sonnets. And they are finely spoken, if with rather too little emphasis upon the poetic form of the sonnet.