

The Prodigal Son

AN ORATORIO FIRST PERFORMED AT
THE WORCESTER MUSICAL FESTIVAL
SEPTEMBER 8, 1869

**THE WORDS SELECTED FROM
THE HOLY SCRIPTURES**

THE MUSIC COMPOSED BY

ARTHUR S. SULLIVAN

THE ORCHESTRAL ACCOMPANIMENTS
ARRANGED FOR THE PIANO
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PREFACE

It is a remarkable fact that the Parable of the Prodigal Son should never before have been chosen as the text of a sacred musical composition. The story is so thoroughly Christian; the characters, though few, are so perfectly contrasted, and the opportunity for the employment of “local colour” is so obvious, that it is indeed astonishing to find the subject so long overlooked.

The only drawback is the shortness of the narrative, and the consequent necessity of filling it out with material drawn from elsewhere.

In the present case this has been done as sparingly as possible, and entirely from the Scriptures. In so doing the Prodigal himself has been conceived, not as of a naturally brutish and depraved disposition, – a view taken by many commentators with apparently little knowledge of human nature, and no recollection of their youthful impulses; but rather as a buoyant, restless youth, tired of the monotony of home, and anxious to see what lay beyond the narrow confines of his father’s farm, going forth in the confidence of his own simplicity and ardour, and led gradually away into follies and sins which, at the outset, would have been as distasteful as they were strange to him.

The episode with which the parable concludes has no dramatic connection with the former and principal portion, and has therefore not been treated.

ARTHUR S. SULLIVAN

HISTORICAL NOTE

On 10 February 1869, Dr. Philip H. Williams, Honorary Secretary for the Three Choirs Festival which was to be held in Worcester that year, wrote to Sullivan saying that the Executive Committee had heard with great pleasure that he might be willing to write “a work” for the Festival the following September. The work was to be an oratorio – a musical setting of a religious text for solo singers, chorus and orchestra in dramatic form – and the subject Sullivan chose was *The Prodigal Son*.

Sullivan selected his own text from the scriptures, and composed the music astonishingly quickly in a little over three weeks. He asked Rachel Scott Russell, a young lady with whom Sullivan had a romantic liaison and who was constantly urging him to concentrate his energies into serious music, to copy the music. She replied:

“The *Prodigal* is too beautiful and it made me weep to read it. I rejoice to do the copying, and I want you to conduct from my copy – will you, I should so like it, and I will try to do it beautifully and make as few mistakes as possible.”¹

The Prodigal Son received its first performance in Worcester Cathedral on 10 September 1869 with great success. Sullivan conducted, the soloists being Therese Titiens, Zelia Trebelli, Sims Reeves and Charles Santley. Rachel Scott Russell was there and the following day wrote to Sullivan

“I am far prouder of the *Prodigal* than of anything. The *divinity* of your gift of God breathes through the whole work and it is a glory to have written a thing which will stir men’s souls to their depths, as it does, and make them feel better and nobler, even if it is transient. You know now what your gift is – and you will use it. That hour in the Cathedral yesterday was perfect happiness and everyone is talking even here of your success.”²

After the Worcester premiere, a further performance was scheduled for 18 December 1869 in London at the Crystal Palace. Sims Reeves found himself double booked for that occasion, and the performance was brought forward a week. However, Sims Reeves still failed to appear, absenting himself on his frequently applied plea of illness. Two days after the performance, in a letter to the critic Charles Gruneisen, Sullivan wrote:

“...and finally I am thrown back upon Perren! The choruses went well, Santley as usual was magnificent, giving me the idea that he was working all the harder to make up for my

¹undated letter

²letter dated 11 September 1869

disappointment...[But] as far as the Prodigal's part, thank God not a note was heard except the accompaniment – it left no impression at all upon the audience. In fact it was *Hamlet* with the part of Hamlet omitted. I must say the public were very good natured and ... enthusiastic to me personally ... *In Memoriam* went superbly.³

Reeves was not the only original soloist who was absent on that occasion: a Mlle. Vanzini substituted for Titiens.

Sullivan's old teacher, Sir John Goss attended the Crystal Palace performance and wrote a long letter containing many complimentary remarks to Sullivan on 22 December 1869. However, he closed with a note of caution:

“You are an admirable conductor. The band seemed to me most capital in your hands, the Chorus seemed to do very well...All you have done is most masterly – Your orchestration superb, & your effects many of them original & first rate...Some day you will I hope try another oratorio, putting out all your strength, but not the strength of a few weeks or months, whatever your immediate friends may say ... only don't do anything so pretentious as an oratorio or even a Symphony without *all your power*, which seldom comes in one fit.”⁴

The following year there was a performance of *The Prodigal Son* in Manchester conducted by Hallé, it was repeated at the Three Choirs Festival at Hereford in September, and in November it was performed in Edinburgh with Sullivan conducting. During his visit to America to supervise the “official” New York production of *H.M.S. Pinafore* and launch *The Pirates of Penzance*, Sullivan found time to conduct a performance by the Handel and Haydn Society in Boston on 23 November 1879.

However, it seems that despite its initial success, the work did not establish a regular place on the concert platform. Writing in 1899, B. W. Findon states:⁵

That the work is now only heard at long intervals is no disparagement to its worth as a composition, for although the oratorio-loving public will courteously listen to novelties, perhaps give a grateful ear to them a second time, their standard is the *Messiah* and *Elijah*, and unless an oratorio has the

³letter dated 13 December 1869

⁴letter dated 22 December 1869

⁵B. W. Findon: *Sullivan as a Composer* in Arthur Lawrence: *Sir Arthur Sullivan*, 1899

captivating power of Handel, or the mellifluous quality of Mendelssohn, it has no chance of being even temporarily enrolled among the people's favourites.

Of the music of *The Prodigal Son*, Percy Young writes⁶:

The Prodigal Son, as Goss suggests, betrays a lack of commitment. In this work Sullivan, like many other composers, was unable to escape from the limitations placed upon him by a God-fearing public which misread respectability for piety. But there are a number of places where the music comes to life, often stimulated by fine details of orchestration. In bar 5 the side-drum enters, followed at a distance of three bars by timpani and wood-wind. Five bars later the double-bassoon is introduced. In the tenor aria 'How many hired servants' (No. 11) there is beautiful colouring by solo oboe, muted strings and delicately shaded flutes, while in 'There is joy' (No. 2) – which was written in D but marked 'a note lower' in the autograph – a background of clarinets, bassoons, four horns and organ effectively gives way to organ only. In 'My son attend to my words' (No. 4) the exhortation to 'trust in the Lord' swings into a broad, confident tune in 3/4 time, cheerfully anticipating the virile measure of Parry. In 'Let us eat and drink' (No. 6) a tiny 'oriental' figure, such as Sullivan frequently used in his operas, flickers across the score. In 'They went astray' (No. 15) there is some splendidly dramatic writing in gaunt canon – first for soprano and bass, and then for alto and tenor – against an empty orchestral background. Here Sullivan is at his most economical and his most effective, and way ahead of his British contemporaries.

Like all British composers of his generation, Sullivan not unreasonably believed that if music for great occasions was to be written it was best done by paying due regard to Handel. The last fugal chorus of *The Prodigal Son* is Handelian in outline, but is, alas, too restricted in movement to carry conviction.

He later concludes:

As a composer of oratorio, Sullivan was obviously not uninfluenced by Handel and Mendelssohn, but certainly in *The Prodigal Son* ... he attempted definitions of character and of scene that removed their subjects some way from the pulpit interpretations of the period.

⁶Percy M. Young: *Sir Arthur Sullivan*, Dent, 1971

The Prodigal Son

No. 1 INTRODUCTION

No. 2. CHORUS

There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

Like as a father pitieth his own children, even so is the Lord merciful to them that fear Him. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. *Luke xv. 12; Psalm ciii. 13; Rev. viii 16,17*

No. 3. SOLO (*Tenor*)

A certain man had two sons; and the younger said unto his father: Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. For I know that there is no good but for a man to rejoice, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of his labour. *Luke xv. 11, 12; Eccles. iii 12, 13.*

No. 4. RECITATIVE AND ARIA

(*Bass*) My son, attend to my words, incline thine ear unto my sayings; Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase.

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and in all thy ways acknowledge Him; for the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

Prov. iv. 18, 20; iii 6, 9.

No. 5. RECITATIVE (*Soprano*)

And the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

Luke xv. 13.

No. 6 SOLO (*Tenor*) AND CHORUS

THE REVEL

Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.

Fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to-morrow shall be as this day and much more abundant. Let us eat and drink. *Isaiah xxii 13; lvi. 12.*

No 7. RECITATIVE (*Contralto*) AND CHORUS

Woe unto them that rise up early morning that they may follow strong drink, that continue until night till wine inflame them. And the harp and the viol, the tabret and pipe are in their feasts; but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of His hands.

The mirth of tabrets ceaseth, the noise of them that rejoiceth endeth; the joy of the harp ceaseth.

Isaiah v. 11, 12; xxiv. 8

No. 8. SONG (*Contralto*)

Love not the world, nor the things that are in the world: for the world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. *I John ii. 17.*

No. 9. RECITATIVE (*Soprano*)

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled himself

with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him.
Luke xv. 14-16.

No.10. ARIA (Soprano)

O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been like a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea. Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?
Isaiah xivii. 18.

No.11. SOLO (Tenor)

How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and I am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.'" (*Luke xv. 17 - 19.*)

No.12 CHORUS

There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.
Luke xv. 10; Psalm li. 17.

**No.13. RECITATIVE (Soprano)
AND DUET (Tenor and Bass)**

And he arose and came to his father, but when he was yet a great way off his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him. *Luke xv. 20.*

DUET (Tenor and Bass)

Son. Father, I have sinned against Heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.
Father. My son is yet alive! Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, and thou art yet alive.
Luke xv. 21; Gen. xiv. 28; xlvi. 30.

**No.14. RECITATIVE AND ARIA
(Bass)**

Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. Like a father pitieth his own children, even so is the Lord merciful to them that fear Him. Blessed be God who hath heard my prayer, and not turned his mercy from me. *Luke xv. 2; Psalms ciii. 13; lxvi. 20.*

No.15. CHORUS

O that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men.
Let them give thanks whom the Lord hath redeemed. They went astray in the wilderness out of the way; hungry and thirsty their souls fainted in them; yet when they cried unto the Lord in their trouble He delivered them out of their distress.
O that men would therefore praise the Lord for His goodness, and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men.
Psalm cvii. 4 - 6, 8.

**No.16. RECITATIVE AND ARIA
(Tenor)**

No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness; for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.
Come, ye children, and hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Lo, the poor crieth, and the Lord heareth him; yes and saveth

him out of all his troubles.
Heb. xii. 11, 6; Psalm xxxiv. 6, 11.

No.17. QUARTETT

(unaccompanied)

The Lord is nigh unto them that are of contrite heart, and will save such as be of an humble spirit. Thus saith the Lord, I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also,

and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners. *Psalm xxxiv. 18; Isaiah lvii. 18.*

No.18. CHORUS

Thou, O Lord art our Father, our Redeemer; Thy name is from everlasting. Hallelujah! Amen.

Isaiah lxiii. 16.

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The Prodigal Son

No. 1: INTRODUCTION

Andante tranquillo (♩ = 132)

The musical score is written for piano and consists of five systems. The first system includes dynamic markings: *p*, *f*, and *p*. The music is in 6/8 time and B-flat major. The first system shows a series of chords in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand. The second system continues with similar textures, featuring some melodic movement in the right hand. The third system has a more active right hand with eighth-note patterns. The fourth system features a prominent bass line with sustained notes. The fifth system concludes with a final chord in the right hand and a sustained bass line.

The Prodigal Son

First system of the musical score. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The first measure is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The music features a mix of chords and moving lines in both hands.

Second system of the musical score. It continues the piece with similar melodic and harmonic textures. The bass line shows some chromatic movement.

Third system of the musical score. It includes dynamic markings: *dim.* (diminuendo) in the middle and *pp* (pianissimo) towards the end. The texture becomes more sparse in some measures.

Fourth system of the musical score. It features a *cresc.* (crescendo) marking and a *f* (forte) dynamic. The music becomes more active and louder.

Fifth system of the musical score. It continues with a *cresc.* (crescendo) marking, showing a steady increase in volume and intensity.

Sixth system of the musical score. It begins with a *ff* (fortissimo) dynamic. The music is at its loudest and most intense in this section.

The Prodigal Son

dim. *p*

The first system of the score consists of two staves. The upper staff features a melodic line with a series of eighth notes and quarter notes, starting with a dynamic marking of *dim.* and a piano (*p*) dynamic. The lower staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving bass lines.

dim. *pp*

The second system continues the musical piece. The upper staff has a melodic line with a *dim.* dynamic marking. The lower staff features a more complex accompaniment with some chords marked with a sharp sign (#). The dynamic marking *pp* (pianissimo) is indicated.

The third system shows the continuation of the melody in the upper staff and the accompaniment in the lower staff. The lower staff has some notes marked with a sharp sign (#) and a fermata-like symbol.

The fourth system continues the musical development. The upper staff has a melodic line with a fermata-like symbol, and the lower staff has a steady accompaniment.

sempre pp

Red. *

The fifth system features a *sempre pp* (pianissimo) dynamic marking. The lower staff has a *Red.* (ritardando) marking and a star symbol (*).

rall.

Red. *attacca il coro* *

The sixth system concludes the piece with a *rall.* (rallentando) dynamic marking. The lower staff has a *Red.* marking and the instruction *attacca il coro* with a star symbol (*).

The Prodigal Son

No. 2:

CHORUS

’There is joy in the presence of the angels of God’

Allegro moderato e tranquillo (♩ = 100)

SOPRANO

mf

There is joy in the pres-ence of the

ALTO

TENOR

BASS

Allegro moderato e tranquillo (♩ = 100)

p

And. * *And.* * *And.* * *And. sempre.*

an - gels of God o - ver one sin - ner that re - pent-

The Prodigal Son

First system of musical notation for 'The Prodigal Son'. It features four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is two sharps (D major). The lyrics are: '-eth, there is joy in the pres - ence of the an - gels of' (Soprano), 'There is joy in the pres - ence of the an - gels of' (Alto), 'There is joy in the pres-ence of the an - gels of God o - ver' (Tenor), and 'There is joy in the pres - ence of the an - gels of' (Bass). The piano part includes a *pp* dynamic marking and a *ped.* (pedal) marking. A small asterisk is present in the bass line of the piano part.

Second system of musical notation for 'The Prodigal Son'. It features four vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: 'God o - ver one sin - ner that re - pent - eth, there is' (Soprano), 'God o - ver one sin - ner that re - pent - eth, there is' (Alto), 'one sin - ner that re - pent - eth, there is joy' (Tenor), and 'God o - ver one sin - ner that re - pent - eth, there is' (Bass). The piano part includes a *p* dynamic marking and a section labeled 'A' with a fermata over the final note. The key signature remains two sharps.

The Prodigal Son

joy in the pres-ence of God, there is joy in the
joy in the pres-ence of God, there is joy in the
in the pres - ence of God, there is joy in the
joy in the pres-ence of God, there is joy in the

cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.

This system contains five staves of music. The first four staves are vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) with lyrics. The fifth staff is the piano accompaniment. The key signature is two sharps (D major). The lyrics are: 'joy in the pres-ence of God, there is joy in the'. The word 'cresc.' is written above the vocal staves and below the piano staff at the end of each line.

pres - ence of the an - gels of God o - ver one sin - ner that re-
pres - ence of the an - gels of God o - ver one sin - ner that re-
pres - ence of the an - gels of God o - ver one sin - ner that re-
pres - ence of the an - gels of God o - ver one sin - ner that re-

f *dim.*
f *dim.*
f *dim.*
f *dim.*
f *dim.*

This system contains five staves of music. The first four staves are vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) with lyrics. The fifth staff is the piano accompaniment. The key signature is two sharps (D major). The lyrics are: 'pres - ence of the an - gels of God o - ver one sin - ner that re-'. The dynamic markings *f* and *dim.* are written above the vocal staves and below the piano staff.

The Prodigal Son

B

-pent - eth, there is joy in the pres - ence of the

-pent - eth, there is joy in the pres - ence of the

-pent - eth, there is joy in the pres - ence of the

-pent - eth, there is joy in the pres - ence of the

p

p

p

p

ped. * *ped.* * *ped.* * *ped.* *

an - gels of God o - ver one sin - ner that re - pent-

an - gels of God o - ver one sin - ner that re - pent-

an - gels of God o - ver one sin - ner that re - pent-

an - gels of God o - ver one sin - ner that re - pent-

dim.

ped. * *ped.* * *ped.* *

The Prodigal Son

C

eth.

eth.

eth.

-pent eth.

eth.

p

cresc.

mf

Like as a fa - ther

sf

p

The Prodigal Son

pit - ieth his own chil - dren, e - ven so is the Lord merciful to

The first system of the musical score consists of six staves. The top three staves are vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, and Tenor) and are currently empty. The fourth staff is the bass line for the vocal part, containing the lyrics: "pit - ieth his own chil - dren, e - ven so is the Lord merciful to". The fifth and sixth staves are the piano accompaniment, with the right hand on the fifth staff and the left hand on the sixth staff.

Like as a fa - ther

them that fear Him, like as a

mf

cresc.

The second system of the musical score consists of six staves. The top three staves are vocal staves. The fourth staff is the bass line for the vocal part, containing the lyrics: "Like as a fa - ther" and "them that fear Him, like as a". The fifth and sixth staves are the piano accompaniment. The right hand of the piano part has a dynamic marking of *mf* and the left hand has a dynamic marking of *cresc.*

The Prodigal Son

pit - ieth his own chil - dren, e - ven so is the Lord mer-ci - ful to

fa - ther pit - ieth his own chil - dren, e - ven

The first system of the musical score consists of five staves. The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics. The second staff is a vocal line with lyrics. The third staff is a vocal line with lyrics. The fourth staff is a vocal line with lyrics. The fifth staff is a piano accompaniment with lyrics. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 4/4.

Like as a fa - ther *cresc.*

them that fear Him, like as a

so is the Lord mer - ci - ful to them that fear

sempre cresc.

The second system of the musical score consists of five staves. The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics. The second staff is a vocal line with lyrics. The third staff is a vocal line with lyrics. The fourth staff is a vocal line with lyrics. The fifth staff is a piano accompaniment with lyrics. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 4/4. The system includes dynamic markings: *f* and *cresc.* above the first vocal line, and *sempre cresc.* above the piano accompaniment.