

## STANFORDIAN THOUGHTS

A periodical series of reflections on recorded and unrecorded works by Stanford  
by Christopher Howell

### 24. Stanford and the Irish Choral Society of Chicago

In my previous article in this series<sup>1</sup>, I discussed three part-songs that, though published in the USA in 1923, had fallen from view until rediscovered by David Anderson, who has transcribed and typeset them for ChoralWiki. I mentioned in a footnote that Robertson has likewise unearthed and made available a further two, also published only in America, by Ditson in 1904. These are both SATB arrangements of songs from “Moore’s Irish Melodies”: “Sing, Sweet Harp” and “Come o’er the Sea”. I have not found copies of the original publications, which must be very rare, but I have found an advertisement page from another Ditson publication which shows that three songs were actually issued – the third being “Song of the Battle Eve”. These pieces were written for the Irish Choral Society of Chicago. The story of this organization, and Stanford’s marginal involvement with it, is fascinating and worth telling.

#### The Irish Choral Society of Chicago

Research among the newspapers and journals available via the Internet Archive has enabled me to piece together an outline history of the Irish Choral Society of Chicago. To some extent, these extracts could speak for themselves, so I have reduced additional comment to a minimum.

The society was founded in 1902 but in its first years performed in smaller, out-of-town venues. Press notices, such as the following, were few and sporadic:

*The Irish Choral Society, which is the only Irish singing society in America, closed its musical season with a concert in Association Hall Tuesday evening. The club consists of a mixed chorus of over a hundred trained voices, under the direction of Thomas Taylor Drill. The chief part of the program consisted of Irish songs and ballads, in which the society did exceedingly effective work. Mrs. Ada Sheffield and William A. Willett were the assisting soloists.*

Musical Courier, 6 May 1903

By 1905, the society was ready to perform in a more central Chicago venue. The first of these reports contains the only mention I have found of a performance of two of the part-song arrangements Stanford wrote for them:

| SONG OF DELIVERANCE. S. Coleridge-Taylor<br>(Part Song for Mixed Voices) |                         |   |     |
|--|-------------------------|---|-----|
| NEW SERIES. No. 2  |                         |   |     |
|  |                         | PRICE   |     |
| 11,528   | Andrews, Addison F.     | SLEEPER SONG . . . . .  | .10 |
| 11,533   | Arns, Dr. Thomas        | WHERE THE BEE SUCKS. (Arr. by W. G. Ows) . . . . .  | .12 |
| 11,078   | Ascher, Joseph          | ALICE, WHERE ART THOU? (Arr. by Hans Lichter) . . . . .   | .16 |
| 11,234   | Boscoe, Edward          | HOET THE SAIL . . . . .   | .16 |
| 11,283   | do.                     | SLOWLY THE DAY IS DYING . . . . .   | .16 |
| 11,294   | Bunch, Carl             | WHEN THE HEART IS YOUNG . . . . .   | .12 |
| 11,266   | Calhoun, Alfred J.      | WITH HORSE AND HOUND . . . . .  | .06 |
| 11,549   | Carey, Harry            | SALLY IN OUR ALLEY. (Arr. by W. G. Ows) . . . . .   | .12 |
| 11,193   | Challiner, F. A.        | DOWN THE RIPPLING RIVER . . . . .   | .12 |
| 11,113   | Conant, Grace Wilbur    | PACK CLOUDS AWAY . . . . .  | .12 |
| 11,277   | Coutzke, Arthur F. M.   | AN OPEN SECRET . . . . .  | .12 |
| 11,492   | Ford, James S.          | DING-A-LING . . . . .   | .12 |
| 11,490   | do.                     | SLUMBERLAND . . . . .   | .10 |
| 11,491   | do.                     | THREE WISE MEN OF GOTHAM, THE . . . . .   | .12 |
| 11,494   | do.                     | WHY? . . . . .  | .06 |
| 11,288   | Foster, Stephen C.      | COME WHERE MY LOVE LIES DREAMING . . . . .  | .12 |
| 11,288   | do.                     | MASSA IN DE COLD, COLD GROUND . . . . .   | .10 |
| 11,289   | do.                     | (Arr. by Frank J. Smith)  |     |
|  |                         | MY OLD KENTUCKY HOME . . . . .  | .12 |
| 11,208   | Gaul, Alfred R.         | (Arr. by Frank J. Smith)  |     |
| 11,202   | Gaul, Harvey B.         | HAIL TO THE BEAUTIFUL MORNING OF MAY . . . . .  | .10 |
| 11,234   | Gilchrist, W. W.        | STARS OF THE SUMMER NIGHT . . . . .   | .12 |
| 11,234   | Gilchrist, W. W.        | WHAT IS MORE GENTLE . . . . .   | .12 |
| 11,232   | Glosson, Frederic Grant | MY MIND TO ME A KINGDOM IS . . . . .  | .10 |
| 11,229   | Hutton, J. L.           | BUGLE SONG. (Arr. by N. Clifford Page) . . . . .  | .12 |
| 11,221   | Howell, Charles T.      | SLEEP TIME, MAI HONEY . . . . .   | .12 |
|  |                         | (Arr. by N. Clifford Page)  |     |
| 11,500   | Hullah, John            | THREE FISHERS WENT SAILING . . . . .  | .12 |
| 11,493   | Kinkel, Johanna         | (Arr. by W. G. Ows)   |     |
| 11,511   | Kissas, Nelson          | SOLDIER'S FAREWELL . . . . .  | .06 |
| 11,494   | Loh, Frederic H.        | BEN BOLT. (Arr. by J. C. Macy) . . . . .  | .12 |
| 11,273   | Matthews, Harry Alex.   | A SLUMBER SONG . . . . .  | .10 |
| 11,236   | Mayhew, Grace           | GOOD MORROW . . . . .   | .10 |
| 11,522   | Molloy, J. L.           | SHOOY-SHOY, THE. (Arr. by Hans Lichter) . . . . .   | .12 |
| 11,495   | do.                     | FERRY DANCE, THE. (Arr. by N. Clifford Page) . . . . .  | .16 |
|  |                         | LOVES OLD, SWEET SONG . . . . .   | .12 |
|  |                         | (Arr. by N. Clifford Page)  |     |
| 11,155   | Ows, W. G.              | WEARY WIND OF THE WEST . . . . .  | .16 |
| 11,207   | Pilo, Harry Hale        | A MIDSUMMER DAY . . . . .   | .12 |
| 11,217   | Rabinstein, Anton       | VOICES OF THE WOODS. (Arr. by Hans Lichter) . . . . .   | .10 |
| 11,965   | Selby, Bertram Leonard  | BLOW, BLOW, THOU WINTER WIND . . . . .  | .12 |
| 11,094   | do.                     | TAKE, OH, TAKE THOSE LIPS AWAY . . . . .  | .10 |
| 11,093   | do.                     | WHEN ICICLES HANG BY THE WALL . . . . .   | .12 |
| 11,191   | Stewart, H. J.          | THE BROOK . . . . .   | .12 |
| 11,187   | Strass, Johann          | GREETING TO SPRING. (Arr. by Hans Lichter) . . . . .  | .16 |
| 11,092   | Thomson, Sydney         | CHARM ME ASLEEP . . . . .   | .16 |
| 11,249   | do.                     | HAG, THE . . . . .  | .16 |
| 11,081   | do.                     | LOVE LIKE A BEGGAR CAME TO ME . . . . .   | .12 |
| 11,212   | Unknown                 | COME O'ER THE SEA. (Old Irish Air) . . . . .  | .10 |
| 11,233   | Unknown                 | LOCH LOMOND. (Traditional Scottish Melody) . . . . .  | .12 |
|  |                         | (Arr. by H. Clough-Leichter)  |     |
| 11,213   | Unknown                 | SING, SWEET HARP. (Irish Folk Song) . . . . .   | .10 |
|  |                         | (Arr. by Charles Villiers Stanford)   |     |
| 11,214   | Unknown                 | SONG OF THE BATTLE EVE. (Irish Air, "The Cruiskeen<br>Lanes") (Arr. by Charles Villiers Stanford) . . . . . | .12 |
| 11,219   | Ward, Frank E.          | IN NICOTINA . . . . .   | .12 |
| 11,232   | West, John E.           | LOVE AND SUMMER . . . . .   | .05 |

<sup>1</sup> <https://musicwebinternational.com/2024/06/stanfordian-thoughts-23-stanford-chadwicks-book-of-choruses/>

*The Irish Choral Society will give a concert this evening in the Studebaker. It will be the first appearance of this organization in a downtown concert of large proportions. The program will be made up almost wholly of Irish music and will include two part songs which were written for the club and dedicated to it by the Irish composer Sir Charles Villier[s] Stanford. The club is the only one of its kind in the United States and has as its object the awakening of increased interest in the folk and art music of Ireland. The chorus numbers 125 voices and is under the direction of Thomas Taylor Drill. ... The club will sing "The Wine Cup Is Circling," by Stewart, "Believe Me If All Those Endearing Young Charms," by Balfe, the two new songs by Stanford – "Come O'er The Sea" and "Song On The Battle Eve" – a "Hunting Song" by Benedict and Stanford's "Phaudrig Crohoore"<sup>2</sup>. Chicago Sunday Tribune, 5 March 1905*

*Sunday evening, May 28, two concerts will take place. One, the last concert for the season of the Irish Choral Society, Thomas Taylor Drill, director, at the Studebaker Hall. This is a chorus of some 100 mixed voices, and will have the assistance of William Beard, basso, and Anna V. McDonald, contralto.*

Musical Courier, 31 May 1905

Placing advertisements costs money and this in the Chicago Daily Tribune of 26 May 1906 is the only one I have found.

The English-American composer, teacher and critic Felix Borowski (1872-1956), who wrote a regular column for the Musical Courier, took considerable, if not uncritical, interest in the society and the Irish movement generally:

**Irish Choral Society**  
 Thomas Taylor Drill, Director.  
**THOMAS MOORE**  
**ANNIVERSARY CONCERT.**

Hear Mr. JOSEPH F. SHEEHAN, late tenor soloist of Castle Square Opera Co. and Savage Grand Opera Co.

**ORCHESTRA HALL,**  
**Sunday, May 27, 8:15 p. m.**

Soloists: Mr. Joseph F. Sheehan, tenor; Mr. Clarence Dickinson, organist; Mr. Walfried Singer, harpist.

**Tickets, \$1.00, 75c, 50c.**  
 at Box Office, Carroll's Book Store and Lanterbach's Drug Store.

*On Sunday evening the Irish Choral Society gave a concert in Orchestra Hall. The object of the society is, according to a statement in the program, to cultivate and make better known the music of Ireland. Such a purpose is worthy of all encouragement, and if it is pursued in the right way can be productive of nothing but benefit and instruction. Unfortunately for art and for Ireland, the society is altogether mistaken in its plan of action, if one is to judge by the concert given on Sunday. An interested inquirer into the national music of the Gaels could have retained anything but an exalted opinion of that music after he had been presented with such stuff as "The Kerry Dance" by Molloy; "Maureen of Ballinloe," by Airlie Dix; the "Colleen Bawn" of Julius Benedict (who, by the way, was an Anglicized German!), and an awe-inspiring serio-comic composition entitled "The Donovans," by Alicia A. Needham.*

*If this is the best music Ireland can produce, then, indeed, is Erin in a parlous state. But Ireland can boast of a finer art; she has many a folk song which can compare favourably with those of other lands. She has composers, too, who have done "admirable things". Let the society investigate the "complete collection of Irish music" published by the Irish Literary Society of London<sup>3</sup>, and let it bring forth such composers as Charles Villiers Stanford, whose Irish music is charming and of the highest class.*

*The chorus numbers some hundred voices, directed by Thomas Taylor Drill. It sings correctly and with enthusiasm, but something is left to be desired in the matter of shading and expression. The music which it sung consisted of part songs, principally of Irish extraction, and arranged by*

<sup>2</sup> I discuss this work here: [https://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2018/May/Stanfordian\\_thoughts\\_1.pdf](https://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2018/May/Stanfordian_thoughts_1.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The reference is presumably to the Petrie Collection, edited by Stanford and published 1902-1905.

*different individuals who succeeded in eliminating all national color. Clarence Dickinson played on the organ a fantasia on Irish melodies, by Murphy. Mr. Dickinson is so fine an organist and so excellent a musician that one had to feel sorry for the necessity which deprived us of not hearing him play something worthy of his powers. ...*

*Anna McDonald sang three songs which would, perhaps, have sounded more satisfactory if they had contained something worth singing. Mr. La Berge played on the violin a succession of tunes from Wallace's "Maritana" ... The second part of the program contained an "Irish Song Cycle" by Alicia Adelaide Needham, but as this composer had been responsible for two of the worst songs in the first part, it became the merest prudence to take the merits of the cycle for granted without waiting to hear them.*

Felix Borowski, Musical Courier, 7 March 1906

By July of the same year, Borowski was happy to welcome a change of direction:

*Some months ago the writer took occasion to point out, in reviewing a concert of the Irish Choral Society, that the cause of Irish music, or indeed that of any nation, could be served only by bringing before the public such examples of it as represented the highest standard of artistic endeavor. It was intimated that, rather than play rubbishy fantasias on Hibernian tunes, or sing serio-comic songs in which the music vied with the text in its ineptitude, it would be to the advantage of Irish music in general and of the Choral Society in particular if a higher standard were set up and maintained. It would seem that the society has now recognized the expediency of such a policy. Last Monday Thomas Taylor Drill, the director of the Irish Choral Society, left for Europe with the object of enlisting the co-operation of Irish composers in the production of national works to be performed by the choral societies of the United States.*

*Mr. Drill will not, it is to be feared, discover a super-abundance either of Irish composers or of works, but if he gathers together those works that already exist – and there are some of undoubted worth – and is successful in inspiring the composers with ambition to write others, the mission will not have been in vain, and the cause of Irish music will have received an impetus which may carry it far. But let Mr. Drill beware of his methods of inducement. For if the Irish composer is to be beguiled into writing national music for hard cash, the Irish Choral Society of Chicago does not possess a waste paper basket large enough to hold the inspirations which will be likely to accrue from such persuasion.*

Felix Borowski, Musical Courier, 25 July 1906

On reading this last squelch, one feels for the Irish composer, and for Mr. Drill. According to Borowski's uncharitable assumption, if money is offered, Irishmen the world over, talented or not, will discover themselves to be composers. Yet, if the genuine composers are not to be paid "hard cash" for their work, how are they expected to live?

Still later in the year, Borowski expressed some bemusement at the growth of the Irish movement generally, and had little sympathy for the more traditional expressions of Irish music:

*Chicago, August 18, 1906. An authority upon that most irritating of sciences, statistics, once informed the writer that the influx of Irish into this country was so large that in the course of time the entire Irish nation would be contained in America. This information was imparted some time ago, so by this writing there must be a considerable number of Hibernians comfortably settled over here. As the Irish have ever been distinguished for their love of music, and as they doubtless take pride in the progress of their own music in America, as elsewhere, the writer makes this his excuse for bringing up the subject of Irish music once again.*

Three weeks ago it was stated in these columns that Thomas Taylor Drill, director of the Irish Choral Society of Chicago, had undertaken an expedition to Britain to interest Irish composers in the writing of national works to be sung by the Irish choral societies of America. Mr. Drill made Dublin his objective point, and from that city he arrived in London last Tuesday. He reports that the following persons have pledged themselves, by their work, to further the cause of Irish music: William H. Grattan Flood, Alfred P. Graves, Sir Charles Stanford, Michele Esposito, T. R. G. Joze, Dr. Charles Wood, Dr. P. W. Joyce and Alicia Needham. It will be perceived that not all these musicians are Irishmen. Mr. Esposito, for instance, is a Spaniard<sup>4</sup>, who has resided for some years in Dublin, and has been attracted to Irish music to the extent of writing an Irish cantata. Of all Mr. Drill's little company, Sir Charles Villiers Stanford is, by all odds, the most important figure. He has written a great deal of music which is very clever as well as very dull, but his "Irish" symphony, "Shamus O'Brien", the "Irish Rhapsodies" and other national works are of real beauty and worth. Mr. Drill's efforts in the cause of his country's music are evidently arousing much interest. Dr. Douglas Hyde, prominently before the American public as the leader of the Gaelic cause<sup>5</sup>, has addressed a letter to the Chicago musician, in which he applauds the new scheme and urges the need of societies formed on the broadest and most tolerant principles. But that the Irish music may need some saving from its friends may be gathered from a communication from Alfred P. Graves, one of the new band of Erin's musical apostles<sup>6</sup>. "I find," writes that enthusiast, "that ex-Chief of Police in Chicago Francis O'Neill has a priceless collection of dance music and quicksteps, hitherto scattered and unknown." Mr. Graves then goes on to suggest the exploitation of the Chicago policeman's "priceless" material; but it may be put down as a certainty that any such exploitation will do little good to a cause which has ever been impeded by perverted ideals<sup>7</sup>.

Mr. Drill returns to Chicago next week, and his plans include the formation of new choral societies in Worcester, Mass., Cincinnati, St. Louis and Cleveland. He proposes that the movement shall be prosecuted until Irish music is systematically published, sung and played throughout America, and that "trivial music shall be banished in favour of the cantata or oratorio, embodying the more dignified and nobler harmonies with which Ireland abounds." An ambition so worthy cannot but enlist the sympathies of all lovers of music, irrespective of creed or nationality.

Felix Borowski, Musical Courier, 22 August 1906

If Borowski had heard the hyperbolic claims Drill habitually made (assuming that the following is typical), he might have included the director of the society among the friends from whom Irish music needed to be saved:

*That Irish literature is the source of much of the literature of England and America, and that many of the plots of the stories of both nations were taken from Irish folklore, was the declaration of Thomas Taylor Drill at a luncheon of the Irish Fellowship club at the Union restaurant yesterday. Prof. Drill recently returned from a visit to Ireland, where he was sent by the Irish Choral Society of Chicago, to begin a movement for the revival of the music and folklore of Ireland. He is the musical director of the society.*

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<sup>4</sup> Michele Esposito (1855-1929) was actually born near Sorrento, Italy, and settled in Dublin in 1882.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas Hyde (1860-1949) was the first president of the Gaelic League, and much later (1938-1945) the first President of Ireland.

<sup>6</sup> Alfred Perceval Graves (1846-1931) was hardly one of the "new band". He had been publishing poetry with Irish themes since 1863 and provided the texts for Stanford's *Songs of Old Ireland* (1882) as well as for his later collections.

<sup>7</sup> *Pace* the "perverted ideals, O'Neill's publications of Irish tunes are generally counted among the major collections of their kind. Moreover, the first of them, *O'Neill's Music of Ireland*, containing 1,850 tunes, was published in 1903, so Borowski should have been aware of it in 1906.

*“Rip Van Winkle’ is a steal from an Irish legend,” said Prof. Drill. “There are innumerable stories in Ireland of the long sleeps of heroes and their adventures on awakening. At Killarney a man fell asleep and slept for 300 years. The peasants still show the marks in the rock worn by his arms and hips.”*

*Much of Prof. Drill’s address was given to the importance of finding fit musical expression for the mass of untranslated and little known songs and legends of the island. He characterized the movement of the Choral society as “the greatest musical movement ever known”.*

*“Ireland had battle hymns, marches, folk songs and chants in the fifth century,” he said. “The Irish people were the first to employ harmony and counterpoint. England had little or nothing in the form of musical expression until the fifteenth century. The music of Ireland helped the nation more than anything else in its wars, and to conquer the people England had to enact a law against the making and singing of songs.”*

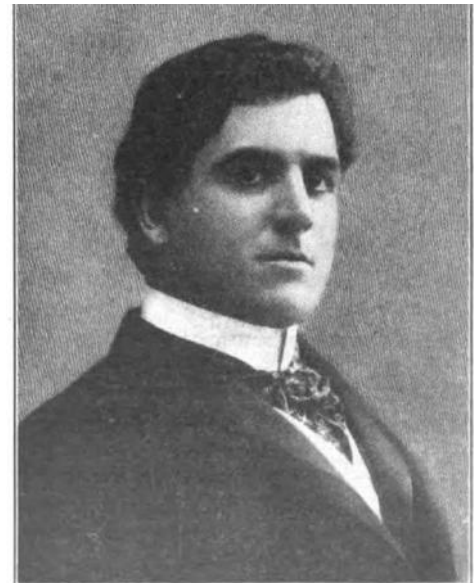
*There are known to be at least 1,000 songs in Ireland, and of these the music of only 200 has been written<sup>8</sup>. In spite of this, in its present condition Ireland is not a land of song. The musical and literary development of the country has been checked and thwarted, and it is only by help from America that the Irish can bring the music of their country to its true greatness.”*

Chicago Sunday Tribune, 16 September 1906

By 1907, the society was able to book the principal musical venue of the city, Orchestra Hall, but were still performing with piano/organ accompaniment:

*The next concert of the Irish Choral Society will be given on Sunday evening, Feb. 3<sup>rd</sup>, in Orchestra hall. Director Thomas Taylor Drill has arranged a program the principal feature of which will be the first American performance of Michael Esposito’s prize cantata “Deirdre”. Joseph F. Sheehan will sing the part of Naisi, Mme. Geneva Johnstone-Bishop that of Deirdre, and W. Cary Lewis that of Fergus. The organist for this occasion is Arthur Dunham, and Miss Mary Tracy will be at the piano. Besides the cantata the chorus will sing a number of part songs, and there will be special numbers in the way of song cycles by Mr. Sheehan and Mme. Johnstone-Bishop.*

Chicago Daily Tribune, 20 January 1907



JOSEPH F. SHEEHAN,

TENOR SOLOIST DURING TWO CONCERTS  
OF IRISH CHORAL SOCIETY OF CHICAGO.

*Chicago, Feb. 6. The Irish Choral Society established with a view to giving artistic value to Celtic music, opened its fifth season under the leadership of Thomas Taylor Drill, Sunday evening in Orchestra Hall. During the past Summer Director Drill made a trip to Ireland and secured some music that will have a hearing later and undoubtedly reflect distinction upon Ireland and the Irish composer. The choral body of 125 voices has been carefully selected and Mr. Drill deserves congratulation for securing such good ensemble results as he had meagre opportunities for rehearsals. On this occasion was presented for the first time in America the cantata “Dierdre” (sic!) by Michael Esposito. ... While the work is melodic and in a sense dramatic, musically it is not distinctively and nationally Irish, and consequently, not startlingly original. The single hearing*

<sup>8</sup> Stanford’s edition of the complete Petrie Collection, in three volumes, was published between 1902 and 1905 and consisted of 1,582 melodies. Several other collections had previously appeared, so Drill’s figures are hardly accurate.

*Sunday evening, however, is not a fair basis for judgment, as the orchestra was lacking and the accompaniment was confided to piano and organ. It was interesting and a tentative success.*

Musical America 9 February 1907

The society's growing reputation inspired a major article by Marguerite Donegan in the Catholic magazine "The Rosary". This included the fullest account I have found of the society's first years.

*Just now there is a new Keltic movement in most of the large cities of the United States. Irish Choral Societies are being organized for the preservation and advance of Irish music. In some respects the movement is a development of the Gaelic League now dominating Ireland and filling all classes with new hope and noble purposes.*

*The Irish Choral Society movement began in this country in 1902. In November of that year some fifty ardent young Irish-Americans organized the Irish Choral Society of Chicago. At first progress was slow, but gradually the organization won its way into public favor. The active members gave their time and talent; associate members contributed five dollars a year each for the purpose of supplying the necessary music, halls, heat, light and such like. As time went by first-class soloists were procured to add interest to the program. This took money, but the money was always found, much of it coming from men and women who were poorly off in this world's goods, but rich in their love for the songs of their ancestors. Now the Irish Choral Society has several people worth millions standing back of it, and more than one hundred of wealth and distinction. From a humble beginning it is so developed artistically that when it gave its concert last May, the press of the city unanimously declared that as a high class musical organization it stood second to none in Chicago or the West. ... The membership has grown so that this year there are 500 trained voices in the Choral Society, and these are financially supported by an equal number of associate members. Some of the compositions rendered have been "Phadraig [Phaudrig] Crohoore", "Brian Bory" and "Maelduim"<sup>9</sup>, and this season has witnessed the presentation of "Deirdre," by the famous Dublin composer, Esposito. On April 28 King Eonor<sup>10</sup> will be presented. Sir Charles Villiers Stanford and other Irish composers have generously written music for the society during the last two years. It should be stated, in passing, that the success of the Chicago experiment has encouraged the Irish in other cities to take up the cause of Irish music, and now similar societies are being organized in New York, Syracuse, Canton, Ohio, Louisville, Kentucky, Denver, Colorado, and Worcester, Mass. The Ancient Order of Hibernians has approved the movement and is doing much to encourage it. [Donegan now traces the history of Irish music from the mid third century to her own days. She makes only passing reference to Stanford].*

*... We have such musicians as Sir Charles Villiers Stanford (now residing in London) whose arrangements of ancient Irish songs are so well known and appreciated.*

Marguerite Donegan: *Irish Music, Past and Present*, The Rosary Magazine, conducted by the Dominican Fathers, vol. XXX, January-June 1907, Somerset, Ohio.

Further light on the society's fundraising activities is offered here:

*On a motion of P. H. O'Donnell a committee was appointed to arrange for an "Irish songfest", as Mr. O'Donnell put it, the proceeds to be divided among Professor William Ludwig, the Irish Choral Society and Joseph Sheehan, the entertainment to be held in Orchestra hall on the evening of May 19.*

Chicago Sunday Tribune, 19 April 1908

<sup>9</sup> I have found no trace of the latter two cantatas, whether performed in Chicago or elsewhere. "Maelduim" may refer to Stanford's "The Voyage of Maeldune", though this was not performed until the following year.

<sup>10</sup> Presumably "King Conor", by Joseph H. Adams. Published by Novello 1904.

Neither of the following two reports makes it clear whether the society was employing an orchestra by the time it gave the American première of Stanford's "The Voyage of Maeldune". This is a symphony-length cantata in a single span, requiring complex dovetailing of soloists, chorus and orchestra, with a taxing part for the tenor soloist. A performance with only piano accompaniment would not be very effective<sup>11</sup>.

*An audience of 2,500 lovers of Irish music heard last night in Chicago the first American performance of Villiers Stanford's dramatic cantata "The Voyage of Maeldune", sung by the Irish Choral Society.*

The Evening Post, New York, 20 April 1908

The following account omits to name the composer:

*The Irish Choral Society gave the most successful concert of its career last night in Orchestra hall. More than 2,300 people attended. Every number on the program was encored enthusiastically. "The Voyage of Maeldune," a dramatic cantata founded upon an Irish legend, was given for the first time in America, and received much favorable comment.*

*The singing of Mme. Guthrie-Moyer, Miss Maude Earl Burdette, Homes Cowper and Gustav Holmquist was especially pleasing to the audience and the directing of Prof. Thomas Taylor Drill showed why he was presented with a silver and gold loving cup by the active members of the organization.*

Chicago Daily Tribune, 20 April 1908

Later this same year, an orchestra was definitely engaged:

*The Irish Choral Society, whose conductor is Thomas Taylor Drill, is preparing for this season's concerts, and for its trip abroad in June. ... In the Spring will be given "King Connor" by T. D. Sullivan<sup>12</sup>, with full orchestral accompaniment, and many old Irish part-songs. The concert trip of the society to the "old country" next Summer is already being widely discussed, and it is planned to give concerts next Summer in leading cities of America, leaving New York for Ireland about June.*  
Musical America, 10 October 1908

Another Catholic journal took stock of the society's achievements to date and its ambitions for the future. It also provides the only hint of Stanford's involvement with the society, as an honorary member:

*The Irish Choral Society of Chicago starts this year its seventh season. It was started in 1902, under the magnetic leadership of Thomas Taylor Drill. Beyond a tendency to regard the new organization with the tolerance of spectators at a slap-stick exhibition, there was little enough interest. The society has had the ordinary fortunes of new music clubs, of which the more heart-breaking is not an unresponsive exchequer, but a deadening lack of interest from the public.*

*Moreover the literature existed only in a language of the past, and its terms of expression must go first to the translator's hands. Naturally Celtic music could not be sung to an English audience with the original text ... Yet in spite of many laborious steps, this non-religious, non-political band of the faithful has forged ahead ...*

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<sup>11</sup> This cantata, op. 34, had been premiered at the Leeds Festival in 1889.

<sup>12</sup> "King Conor". T. D. Sullivan was the poet, not the composer. See note 9.



*The standard has been set up in Syracuse, in St. Louis, in Scranton, Albany, Brooklyn – in Boston even – and, though there is yet no national organization to direct the crusade, two seasons are expected to unite these vigorous offsprings with the parent society. ...*

*No less a man than Charles Villiers Stanford, an honorary member of the society, has given of his art to the cause. ...*

*One of the first difficulties to be met, as has been suggested, was the formation of a repertory. Of traditional melodies, folksong and adaptation there was enough, but of compositions, of large calibre which could be used for the most telling blows for the new evangelism there was almost nothing. Not a decade ago three distinctly Irish songs by one of the most widely recognized composers in England went begging<sup>13</sup>. No publisher could be found to take the chances of bringing out even a meritorious work for which there was not already an established public. So the new society began at the beginning by creating a public, with the conviction that once the demand existed the works would come.*

...

*Mr. Drill hopes to take on tour about forty voices from the Chicago society, visiting other cities, ... He has in mind a convention of all these clubs to take place within a couple of years, during which a chorus of 1,000 voices shall give several concerts of works sung before and well prepared for the occasion.*

The Catholic Columbian, 31 October 1908

These reviews and announcements do not state whether an orchestra was employed, but Esposito's "Deirdre" gets a better press:

*Chicago, Dec. 14. The Irish Choral Society inaugurated its seventh season at Orchestra Hall last Tuesday evening under the baton of its originator and enthusiastic director, Thomas Taylor Drill. The chorus, which has been well schooled for a number of seasons under his baton, shows the results of that admirable training and the singing on this occasion was far smoother, more evenly balanced, more artistically shaded than it ever has been before.*

*The weightiest feature was the cantata, "Deirdre", by Michael Esposito. The music of this work is extremely suggestive of Celtic atmosphere, consequently in line with the melodic ambition of the organization ...*

*The first part of the program consisted of part-songs, such as Foote's "Irish Folk Song", Elgar's "My Love Dwelt in a Northern Land", and several others, done in a style that reflected credit upon the vocal quality and the drill of the organization.*

*... The audience was large and very enthusiastic.*

Musical America, 19 December 1908

*Chicago, April 26. The Irish Choral Society gave the final concert of its eighth season under the direction of its able and enthusiastic director, Thomas Taylor Drill, last Thursday evening in Orchestra Hall. ... The second portion of the program was dedicated to an Irish cantata, "King Conor", words by the ancient Irish patriot and music by Joseph H. Adams. C.E.N.*

Musical America, 1 May 1909

*The Irish Choral Society of Chicago, of which Thomas Taylor Drill is director, will give two concerts at Orchestra Hall during the season. At the first concert, on December 15, "Voyage of Maeldune,"*

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<sup>13</sup> It would be interesting to know which composer this was. It seems at least a possible inference that the three part song arrangements written by Stanford for the society had been rejected by London publishers before Ditson of Boston issued them.



*by C. Villiers Stanford will be given. At the second concert, March 28, "Connla", by Henry Smirton, will be sung<sup>14</sup>.*

Musical America, 16 October 1909

*The Irish Choral Society, under the direction of Thomas Taylor Drill, has in rehearsal "The Voyage of Maeldune," to be given in Orchestra Hall on December 15.*

Musical America, 13 November 1909.

The following more detailed account of the society's aims and future programmes makes it clear that, at least by 1909, an orchestra was regularly engaged, though maybe with minimum numbers.. The Thomas Orchestra, named after its founder Theodore Thomas, was renamed the Chicago Symphony orchestra in 1913.

*The Irish Choral Society has decided to make a four months' tour of Europe. The society will give its last Chicago concert of this season in Orchestra Hall on March 28 and immediately afterward will start on the long journey. A series of concerts will be given in the eastern cities, beginning at Cleveland and covering a period of about six weeks. A short trip to Canada may be taken prior to sailing for Ireland.*

*There will be 60 singers for the chorus, an orchestra of 35 pieces, several soloists and a number of relatives of the musicians. The entire party will number about 150.*

*The first concert in Europe will be given in London. The other large cities of England will be visited and the singers will cross to Ireland where they will be heard in all the important towns<sup>15</sup>.*

*Thomas Taylor Drill, musical director of the society, will have personal charge of the trip as well as the direction of the concerts. The programs will be in two parts, the first made up of folk songs, solos and modern compositions, and the second an Irish cantata. Between the two parts there will be a short address either by Mr. Drill or by J. W. Donohue, to explain that the pilgrimage is for the purpose of stimulating interest in Irish music.*

*Director Drill says there is much that is meritorious in Irish music about which the public knows little or nothing because there has been no demand for it and it has not been published. Wherever the society goes the local singers will be urged to organize choral societies to encourage Irish composers.*

*The Irish Choral Society was organized in 1902 and gives two concerts each year in Orchestra hall accompanied by a large portion of the Thomas orchestra. P. H. O'Donnell is the president of the society.*

The Christian Science Monitor, 8 December 1909

The society's second performance of "The Voyage of Maeldune" certainly had orchestral accompaniment. It is a pity the reporter offered no assessment of the music.

*The Irish Choral Society's first concert this season attracted to Orchestra hall last evening an audience of the usual good size and kindly disposition. The program consisted of a first half made up of part songs and selections by soloists and a second devoted to Sir Charles Villiers Stanford's cantata "The Voyage of Maeldune". The cantata enlisted the services of some forty members of the Thomas orchestra and of Mrs. Grace Brune-Marcusson, soprano; Mrs. Rose Lutiger-Gannon, contralto; John B. Miller, tenor; and Frank J. Flood, baritone.*

<sup>14</sup> Probably, the work in question was by John More Smieton (1857-1904), who wrote a cantata of that name, op. 25. Though the subject was Irish, Smieton was a Scot. The work was not new – Smieton had conducted the first performance in Dundee in 1900 (see Musical Times, 1 May 1900, p.329).

<sup>15</sup> The Musical Times, at least, does not appear to have reported on any of the concerts by the visiting choir.

Chicago Daily Tribune, 16 December 1909

Elsewhere in the same number, the paper reported the society's president in free-wheeling form:

*A new Irish music, symbolical of triumph and glory, was advocated last night by Patrick H. O'Donnell, president of the Irish Choral Society, at a supper given by the organization at the La Salle hotel.*

*Mr. O'Donnell declared that the time had come for the Irish people to replace the old time, pathetic music, which bespeaks sorrow and grief, with music such as the "Marseillaise".*

*"What we need now is triumphal music", said the speaker. "We have long sung the old hymns of sorrow – those songs which came out of the sorrow and suffering of the Irish people. There is no question but what it is the prettiest in the world. It stands out today as the most melodious of all music. All nations sing it. But they sing it because of its sorrow and its pathos.*

*"But we are through with the sorrowful and the pathetic now. The Irish nation is about to come into its own. Already we have made England recognize our power. And it is only a beginning. Greater triumphs are to come, and the Irish nation one day will lead the world."*

Chicago Daily Tribune, 16 December 1909

Triumphal or not, in 1910 the concerts increased from two to three.

*As usual, the Irish Choral Society will give three concerts in Orchestra Hall  
Musical America, 8 October 1910*

However, Thomas Taylor Drill apparently felt the need to move on:

*Thomas Taylor Drill, who organized and brought into a high state of efficiency the Irish Choral Society, recently took charge of the Mursurgia Choral Society, which was organized last season while he was away from the Irish Choral Society. This organization gave a very creditable performance of "The Creation" lately at the North Shore Congregational Church.*

Musical America, 3 June 1911

It is not clear whether "The Creation" was sung by the Irish or the Mursurgia Choral Society. Either way, the society seems to have subsequently lost sight of its strictly Irish vocation, unless the fact that "Messiah" had its first performance in Dublin was felt to qualify it as Irish music:

*The Irish Choral Society presented "The Messiah" on Palm Sunday at Orchestra Hall. ... The Irish Choral Society did itself proud by a magnificent rendition of the score ...*

*To the conductor<sup>16</sup> is due in large measure the splendid results produced by that worthy body of singers ... the coloring, shading and climaxes gave joy to the listeners and the Irish Choral Society now will be looked upon as one of Chicago's best musical assets.*

Musical Courier, 15 April 1914

The Irish Choral Society seems to have slipped from view thereafter, though in 1919, *What of the City?* by Walter D. Moody<sup>17</sup> still listed it among Chicago's "notable" musical organizations.

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<sup>16</sup> Named as Daniel Protheroe in a report in Musical America of 18 April 1914.

<sup>17</sup> A. C. McClurg & Co., Chicago, 1919, p. 226.

From 1911, we find fairly frequent references to Drill conducting massive choirs in “normal” repertoire in Los Angeles. Previously, in the 1890s, as a solo bass singer, he had been a frequent recitalist in Chicago. He is mentioned from time to time in the 1920s as a voice teacher. For all his proclamations and attempts to assemble an Irish repertoire, the inference is that his period with the Irish Choral Society was a stepping-stone in his career towards his ambition of conducting huge choirs.

He may, of course, have become disillusioned with his search for a world-beating Irish repertoire. He had gone some way towards creating the demand, but the supply he found, so far as one can tell without hearing the works in question, was not such as to shake the world. Esposito’s “Deirdre” seems to have been enjoyed, but it never took root even in Ireland itself. But what of the man who, in the years from 1902 to 1911, had produced much fine music, even masterpieces? Apart from the three specially arranged part-songs, only two major works by Stanford seem to have been performed, “Phaudrig Crohoore” and “The Voyage of Maeldune”, both of them far from new,



THOMAS TAYLOR DRILL,  
MUSICAL DIRECTOR IRISH CHORAL  
SOCIETY OF CHICAGO.

though the latter was new to America. Looking at Stanford’s catalogue of works up till that time, if the requirement was a cantata on an Irish subject by an Irish composer, then he had nothing else to offer. Even “Maeldune”, though based on an Irish legend, drew on a poem by Queen Victoria’s beloved poet laureate, Tennyson. Could Stanford not have written something new? Presumably he could, so we can only speculate on why he did not. One possibility is that, however venal Felix Borowski might have thought the idea, he expected a regular commission with a fee for a large-scale work. Another is that no suitable text was available. For all his choral-orchestral works, Stanford used pre-existing poems or worked with a poet he knew and trusted. He made a clean break with the Victorian-style cantata relying on a hack librettist like Chorley or Joseph Bennett. More fundamentally, though he accepted honorary membership, he may have felt increasingly at odds with the ideals of the society – and the feeling may have been mutual. Staunch Unionist that he was, the apparent belief of the society’s President that Ireland need only declare independence to become the leading world power, and populated with great composers to boot, must have been anathema to him. His own not unsuccessful bid to become an Irish composer with an international reputation was based, not so much on a deliberate attempt to write consistently Irish-tinted music, though he did this when the mood came to him, as on an ambition to create good music, great if it could be managed, with a universal appeal. If they tried badgering him for a cantata based on an Irish legend, he could have countered that much of the best of himself was in his Mass in G, his Requiem and, when it appeared in 1907, his Stabat Mater, and that an Irishman had written them. Time seems to have proved him right. We increasingly remember Stanford today. Drill left the Chicago Irish Choral Society for other things, while his successor apparently preferred Handel, till the society faded from view. There are organizations in Chicago today that present Irish traditional music, but it seems unlikely they rose from the ashes of this long-distant early 20<sup>th</sup> century experiment. As for the Irish Choral Societies that were to be formed in other American cities, and maybe were, the only references I have found, to that in Cleveland, suggests they kept to purely popular repertory:

*The Cleveland Irish Choral Society presented a motley program Wednesday night that scarcely deserves to be classed as a choral concert. Irish songs, Irish dances by young men and women, harp playing and other musical novelties were given. As a vaudeville performance little fault could be found with the work. The chorus, drilled by Charles Haverdill, performed creditably ...*

Musical Courier, 28 December 1910

*[John] McCormack and the Irish Choral Society drew four thousand to the Hippodrome the night before. It really was a great Irish celebration. The familiar Irish melodies, as sung in Mr. McCormack's sweet lyric tenor, kept the house in a tumult of applause, while Victor Herbert's "Love Laid His Sleepless Head" was awarded a triple encore.*

Musical America, 8 April 1911

### **Stanford's part-songs for the Irish Choral Society of Chicago**

It is obviously possible that Stanford wrote or arranged more short pieces for the Irish Choral Society than the three published. It is not all that likely, though, because in those days before photocopying, let alone computer typesetting, it would have been impractical to make copyist's scores to kit out a choir of over a hundred. If we make the assumption that the three scores by a "widely recognized composer" rejected by London publishers were these three by Stanford, then the society successfully persuaded Ditson to take them up, and presumably would have persuaded them again if there had been others. The only definite report we have of a performance of any of these part-songs names two of the published ones.

"Sing, Sweet Harp" and "Come O'er the Sea" had both appeared in voice and piano versions in "Moore's Melodies Restored", op. 60 (1895). Stanford's treatment of them for SATB is very different. "Sing, Sweet Harp" in the earlier arrangement had a harp-like accompaniment, not an option available for an unaccompanied choir. It also had, in its later stages, some jarring chromatic touches. The SATB setting concentrates on noble simplicity. The harmony is warm, full and convincing. Both versions have the same music for all three verses.

"Come o'er the Sea" in 1895 had a flowing quaver (eighth note) accompaniment that draws it uncomfortably close to the world of the German Lied. The choral setting is handled with considerable imagination. There is imitation between the voices and the melody passes from voice to voice, allowing the sopranos to sing a descant over it at several points. Whereas previously the same music served for both verses, here the second stanza becomes increasingly urgent as well as considerably varied. This has more the feel of a composition than a mere arrangement, and is all the better for it.

"Song of the Battle Eve" is a lively piece in the 1895 volume. Presumably the SATB setting is lively too so, if it could be found, we should have an attractive set of three contrasting arrangements.

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