

DELIUS SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

NEWSLETTER  
of the  
DELIUS SOCIETY

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## EDITORIAL

This issue of the Newsletter begins with an article by a most distinguished contributor: Delius himself. I am very grateful to Dr. Carley, Archivist to the Delius Trust, for making this available to me and not least for sending it to me in his own excellent English translation. It originally appeared in Musikblätter des Anbruch (Vienna) Vol. 1., No. 1., dated November 1919 (pp.18-19). Of this publication, Dr. Carley says:

"Anbruch was quite an interesting journal, as you will probably know, and carried quite a lot on Delius over the years - indeed it followed contemporary English music with some interest, and the names of Delius' friends cropped up fairly regularly in its pages during the 1920's. It published a short article by Percy Grainger in January, 1923, entitled 'Das Genie Delius', (Vol.5, No.1, p.p.23-24), for example."

Dr. Carley considers the piece to be very little known and it is, therefore, all the more welcome to the Newsletter. All composers' writings on music are interesting, more for the light they throw on the composer himself than for their validity as objective criticism (if such a thing exists). Delius reminds me of Debussy, who was similarly lacking in charity, particularly towards his contemporaries, but who was able to deliver his shafts with greater wit, even if with equivalent sarcasm. Delius' phrase "Just a few of our mediocre composers" will not escape notice.

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Dr. Gibson has written to me about the 'Midland's Branch Report' which appeared in the last issue. In this he was quoted as saying that "Delius could only be regarded as a progressive up to 1905" and he felt that this remark might be misinterpreted. I cannot do better than let him continue in his own words:

"As you know, I like Delius' later works more than the earlier. I am particularly enthusiastic about 'Song of the High Hills', 'North Country Sketches' and 'Summer Night on the River'. I certainly did not want to imply, in my talk, that Delius did not develop beyond his 1905 position. My point was that from 1900 to about 1905, Delius was as avant-garde as anybody in the world, but that after that, with the rise of atonality à la Schoenberg, Stravinsky's mature work, and Debussy's gradual move away from impressionism, etc., etc., that relative to new developments, Delius was not avant-garde after about 1905.

"Also, I did mention that Mahler, Berg and Bartok were impressed with Delius' scores, in particular the 'Mass of Life'.

"I ended my talk with remarking that it was because Delius' music captured nostalgia so wonderfully and because it had 'the sunset glow of the end of an era' (Burnett James) that Delius was my favourite composer."

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The editorial in the last Newsletter contained the text of a letter from Mr. Fenby on the subject of the use of separate vocal parts in Delius' choral music. I have now heard from Mr. Tony Noakes on the same matter, and quote his remarks below: it will be seen that they substantiate what has already been said.

"As a member of the London Philharmonic Choir who has just taken part in the Prom. performance of Mahler's 8th Symphony from inadequately cued single-part score, I should like to reinforce the appeals from Eric Fenby and the editor in the Summer 1971 Newsletter. I was also in the disastrous 1968 Royal Choral Society rendering of Sea Drift; use of part-scores as well as lack of rehearsal time contributed to the inadequacy of the performance. All choral singers hate these scores; the often-heard excuse that orchestral musicians always play from similar material is irrelevant, as the musical fluency and experience of professional instrumentalists exceeds that of even the most practised of amateur choralists. Could any benefactor help in facilitating Delius performances by making vocal scores more readily available? (The limited amount of choral music in 'Song of the High Hills' would surely make for a relatively inexpensive vocal score - if this could increase performances of this marvellous work, it would surely be the ideal starting-point for a campaign to stamp out vocal part-scores of Delius' music.)"

One would have thought that Mahler would have been better served in view of his enormous popularity. Has anyone considered the extent to which publishers are to blame for poor standards of musical performance? Of course, the use of choral part-music is standard practise (as operatic societies know to their cost) but if money is not spent on provision of adequate scores then it will have to be spent on much additional, and laborious, rehearsal, or the performance will suffer. It is difficult to see how bad performances of Delius are in anybody's interest.

On the same subject, I have received an interesting note from Mr. Robert Threlfall regarding misprints in the scores of 'Songs of Sunset', long 'out of print', and draw your attention in particular to the publisher's remark that no reprint of these scores was anticipated 'in the foreseeable future'. This is not a situation that can be dismissed lightly by this Society. It is unquestionable that the scores of Delius' finest works - and this is one of them - should be made available to the musical public.

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Members who have read Robert Threlfall's article on the Delius Piano Concerto in the August 1970 issue of Musical Opinion, or who attended the talk he gave to the Society, will be particularly interested to know that he has written a further article, 'Delius' Piano Concert - A Postscript', which appears in the October, 1971, number of the same journal. The importance of this contribution to Delius scholarship is all the greater in that it illuminates a particularly obscure period in his development.

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I conclude with a further extract from Mr. Noakes' letter:

"I was also interested in the reviews of the Washington 'Koanga' Performances. In both the recent London performances of Fennimore and Gerda, the pasteboard scenery hindered rather than helped my appreciation and also broke the continuity by scene-shifting pauses. I thought then that the subtle and frequent shifts of mood in Delius' Operas need a much more flexible physical setting and that modern techniques of lighting and staging would ideally match the music. It seems that a start has been made in America; what chance of getting Frank Corsaro involved when Village Romeo and Juliet or Koanga next gets performed in England?"

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The final pages of the Newsletter are taken up with some personal thoughts on 'Koanga' and the Delius operas generally. Please write in with your own views on the questions discussed, especially if you disagree with what has been said. It will be seen that I have made no mention of the new staging techniques used in Washington: without having seen them, I feel it would be premature to make any detailed comment myself.

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Please send all contributions for the Newsletter to the Editor,  
at 19 Maple Avenue, Maidstone, Kent.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

7th January, 1972.

Delius Society Meeting, Holborn Library,  
Theobalds Road, London, W.C.1.  
A Musical Quiz, by Charles Barnard.  
(Mr. Barnard assures me that this will be a light-  
hearted affair; no reprisals will be taken against  
members who do not get their answers right!)

8th, 9th and 10th  
February.

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society.  
R.L.P. Orchestra conducted by Charles Groves.  
Nocturne, Paris; The Song of a Great City.

16th February.

Royal Festival Hall. Royal Philharmonic Orchestra  
conducted by Rudolf Kempe.  
Dance Rhapsody No. 1.

16th March.

Delius Society Meeting, Holborn Library,  
Theobalds Road, London, W.C.1.  
Rodney Meadows will present 'Koanga' prior to  
the performance of this Opera in the Camden  
Festival.

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MUSIC IN ENGLAND DURING THE WAR

by Frederick Delius, England.

I was in France when the war broke out and in November 1914 I left for London, where I spent a year. I then went back to Grez-sur-Loing and stayed there, returning again in September 1918 to England where I have since remained.

Musical life has been exceptionally active in England. Perhaps the one most gratifying thing during the war has been to see how little affected musicians and the great concert-going public have been by chauvinism. An attempt to boycott all German music, including Wagner, was completely unsuccessful. When the usual Saturday Wagner evenings in the Queen's Hall Promenade Concerts were replaced by another programme the hall stayed quite empty, with the result that the management was obliged to put on a Wagner programme the following Saturday and the hall was sold out.

Living German composers have, however, not been performed; but I know that Strauss's Rosenkavalier is to be given in London next season.

Just a few of our mediocre composers made a great deal of propaganda for all-British music and British programmes, but the public showed not the slightest desire to follow their lead.

Sergo Diaghileff, the Russian ballet-master, who had a very successful season at the Alhambra Theatre in London with his ballet, distinguished himself by some very silly newspaper articles against German music in which he reproaches the English for being thoroughly 'pro-Boche' in music. Whereupon Ernest Newman, the distinguished English musical writer, put him in his place with a few well-written, very logical and sarcastic articles. Diaghileff's reproach was doubly unwarranted, since an enormous amount of purely French and Russian music had been performed; so much so in fact that the public had eventually become satiated with it, and it became obvious that the content of this music was not on its own substantial enough to capture and hold the attention of the public.

The performances of opera in English, which through Sir Thomas Beechan's initiative have periodically taken place in London, Manchester, Birmingham, etc., with ever-growing success, have greatly enriched English musical life. I myself attended a very good performance of Tristan in London when the house was sold out.

In summing up I should like to add that neither musicians nor audiences in England will tolerate nationalism and chauvinism in music in spite of all the agitation in the Press.

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## ERRORS IN THE SCORES OF 'SONGS OF SUNSET'

During intensive study of the Delius Trust music archive with Rachel Lowe in 1965-6, we were both intrigued and at first perplexed by a half-sheet of notepaper, written in German 'schrift' in an unidentified hand, which listed what appeared to be a number of corrections to the vocal and full scores of a choral work. By a process of elimination this was ultimately found to refer to Songs of Sunset. Some time later I sent a copy of this list with some further corrections to the present owners of the publishing rights in this work, Universal Edition. They acknowledged this information with pleasure and subsequently informed me that copies thereof had been filed in both their London and Vienna archives; as regards a reprint, however, they told me they did not 'anticipate that a reprint of the vocal or full score of this work will be necessary in the foreseeable future'. Members who possess their own scores, therefore, may be interested to read the following list of corrections and mark up their copies accordingly. Most of these errors would no doubt be 'silently corrected' in reading or performance, but some are less obvious; and all are irritating when it is realized that for all these years this list of corrections, evidently prepared at the time of publication, has been filed unknown while the original material still circulates unaltered, and apparently without much hope of an authoritative revision and reprint.

### Songs of Sunset

#### Misprints in the full score (Universal 6915, Leukart 6736)

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Page 6, bar 5     | Second violins, 5th crotchet should be A.  |
| 7                 | Bass oboe part to be in treble clef.   |
| 13, bar 5         | G flat in 2nd bassoon and 4th horn clashes with G natural in baritone solo and violas. |
| 14, bar 3         | Dot missing in Bass.   |
| 16, bar 1         | Cellos to be in tenor clef.  |
| 28, bar 6         | Flat missing before B in cello part.   |
| 41, bar 1         | Shouldn't the B natural in the Bass voice be D?  |
| 46, bar 1         | First violins, natural missing before A.   |
| 47, lower system, | bar 6. Flat missing before A in Bass voice.  |
| 49, lower system, | bar 4. 3rd note in Alto should be dotted quaver.                                       |

Misprints in the vocal score (Universal 6928, Leuckart 6738)

- Page 5, bar 11            Natural missing before A in fifth beat in piano R.H.  
9, 2nd bar               Soprano solo F instead of E.  
                         after fig.6.
- 18, lower                bar 1.    Sharp missing before F in Alto.  
     system,
- 20, upper                bar 1.    Flat missing before G in Bass voice.  
     system,
- 27, 6th bar              In piano L.H. instead of Semibreve A flat, two  
                         after fig.34. minims A flat and G.
- 28, bar 3                Flat missing from piano bass.
- 29, bar 2                After fig. 38, Tempo I missing in piano part.
- 30, bar 3                D in place of B natural in Bass voice?
- 33, bar 2                Last quaver in piano R.H. should be B (flat).
- 36, bar 3                Flat missing before A in (upper) Bass voice.
- 39, bar 2                Treble clef missing in second piano stave
- 39, bar 3                Second beat in piano L.H. should read A, F instead  
                         of C, A.

Robert Threlfall.

A POSTSCRIPT TO THE WASHINGTON PERFORMANCES OF 'KOANGA'.

by John White

The generous coverage given to the Washington performances of Koanga in the American press has drawn attention to some of the problems that arise in the production of a Delius opera. Most of the difficulties are intrinsic to the nature of opera, although they may be found in a more accentuated form in the Delius stage works and it is, therefore, necessary to examine the type of theatrical experience provided by opera in greater detail before considering specific examples.

As music is an abstract art, concerned with differing states of mind and emotion, the use of music focusses attention on psychological rather than physical action. The musical forms of recitative, aria, duet and ensemble, inherited from Baroque opera, allow the characters, either singly or together, to describe their thoughts and emotions at length. Physical action generally takes place between the musical numbers, but remains static whilst the music is in motion; we therefore expect to wait for the end of the aria, etc., before the lovers can kiss, the villain be unmasked or the heroine die. This characteristic of opera is its strength, not its weakness; the development of plot, in a series of starts and stops, allows the music time to make its unique contribution to the experience. The producer who goes to considerable trouble to devise stage 'business' during arias, to avoid the static effect, is acting against the music rather than assisting it, but we are so used to depending on sight rather than sound that these crutches to our understanding are supplied to prevent our minds from wandering from the matter in hand.

It is a paradox of operatic history that Wagner's reforms, which were aimed at the intensification of the operatic experience, by the removal of anachronistic conventions and formulae, succeeded in producing a type of opera in which physical action is even less evident than in stylised opera. In Wagner's 'music drama', the orchestra has become the vehicle for the expression of the psychological states of the characters; a 'stream of consciousness' so to speak, and since there are no breaks in the music, physical action tends to be pushed to the end of an entire act, rather than at the end of an aria or ensemble. An extreme example is 'Tristan and Isolde', where the 'action' takes place in the final twenty minutes of the three acts, each lasting an hour and a half! 'Tristan and Isolde' could be condensed into an hour-long opera without losing any essential incident, but anyone who would prefer it that way has evidently wandered into the wrong theatre.

Consider, again, the first act of 'The Valkyrie'. Fifteen minutes would suffice to deal with the action and to describe the motives of the characters, but the music demands a time scale six times as large. By these standards, it could be thought that there is too much activity in 'Koanga', rather than too little, but such considerations are beside the point, as I have tried to show. 'Koanga', like any other opera, only becomes static when we close our ears.

Wagner's influence at this time, though slow in gaining momentum, grew, like an immense tidal wave, to such proportions that eventually almost the whole musical world was engulfed and swept along in its irresistible currents. The effect on literature and painting was also far-reaching, so that it would be unthinkable that a young artist of the late nineteenth century could escape the spell of Wagnerianism. That Delius succumbed is hardly surprising; that he was able to work through Wagner's influence and emerge as a distinct individuality, witnesses to the strength of his artistic personality and originality. It should be remembered that Debussy never fully outgrew the fascination that Wagner exerted upon him in his formative years; even as a mature artist (and despite all the ridicule he poured upon Wagner's operas in his articles in the press) he could still 'shake with emotion' at a performance of 'Tristan'. The debt of Debussy's earlier works is very plain, and even 'Pelleas and Melisande' was dismissed by Richard Strauss - sourly but with some justification - as being 'just Parsifal' all over again'. A Wagnerian style is, therefore, to be expected in early Delius and, indeed, it is difficult to feel any sympathy with the school of criticism that considers his influence on young composers to have been little more than a disaster. A great deal of music written during the period deserves to be investigated and revived now that we have no further need to react against Wagner.

The critics principal objection to the Wagnerian style in 'Koanga' is that it is inappropriate to the subject. In a strict sense this is true, although it is somewhat pedantic to labour the point. An 'appropriate' style would entail considerable research - the period of the story is long before the emergence of a distinctive American Negro folk-art - and even if an authentic style could be adopted, the resulting pastiche would be an artificial fusion of mutually exclusive art forms. This does not mean that the use of folk material is wrong in a sophisticated work, but merely that the folk material becomes 'translated' in the process and, like Bottom, takes on a new appearance.

However, no sane operatic composer has cared two straws about authenticity of this kind. How authentic is the music of 'The Seraglio', 'Aida', 'Turandot', or 'The Nightingale'? Nor will he introduce 'local colour' where it is not wanted: I can recall no insidious Spanish rhythms in 'Parsifal'. Where such effects are used, they will necessarily be artificial because an opera is an artifice. If we want to listen to genuine folk music that is another matter: we would not go to the Opera-house to find it. Delius was undoubtedly right in dealing with his subject in his own subjective and idiosyncratic way; he was creating a work of art, not a documentary tract.

The vicissitudes undergone by the libretto can be traced in part to this basic problem. The reader is referred to the article by Dr. William Randel ('Koanga' and its Libretto': 'Music and Letters', April 1971) for an absorbing account of the matter, and it is clear from this that the spirit,

as well as the letter, of the original has undergone a change. This need astonish nobody: operatic history is full of such examples. It is justifiable to complain - as Dr. Randel does, in effect, in the article referred to - that the result is a piece of literary vandalism, but there can be few composers who would allow their 'literary consciences' to interfere in similar circumstances. When a musician is inspired by a piece of literature, whether it is a novel, a play, or a poem, the resulting composition will be a transformation of the original into something new (and possibly strange). There have been many examples of authors protesting at the enormity of the crime (as in the Maeterlinck/Debussy quarrel over 'Pelleas and Melisande') but two powerful creative imaginations are unlikely to agree, and it has always been the composers practice to take what he wants and leave the rest. In many instances the result is a travesty of the original, as a comparison of Merimees's 'Carmen' with the opera by Bizet will show, but the changes in this opera were not just arbitrary. Once the subject had been chosen it was necessary to construct a viable musico/dramatic plot, and this in turn meant the introduction of new characters and changing the emphasis on those already in the story. The demands of fashion and of the theatrical management also had their place: only a Wagner writes operas for an Opera-house that does not even exist. Despite all this, the result was a masterpiece, but one which need not reduce our pleasure at reading the original story in the slightest.

The story of 'Koanga' was altered in no less drastic a manner but what emerged was a well varied plot in which the composer was given the opportunities he required. On a less prosaic level, the changes represent a need arising from identification with the main character. It is a misunderstanding to suppose that the operatic story is basically concerned with racial issues. The link is clear between Koanga, the dispossessed Prince, and Delius, separated from his family and origins, not so much by physical distance - a comparatively trivial matter - but by an infinite gulf of incomprehension. Sir Thomas Beecham, in his biography of the composer, says that "we feel the absence of an underlying basis of emotional sincerity as compared with the two predecessors of 'Koanga'" - a judgment with which it is difficult to disagree, since few have heard 'Irmelin' and no one at all has ever heard 'The Magic Fountain'.

Sir Thomas further finds that the 'Voodoo' scene in 'Koanga' is 'as likely to provoke risibility as arouse terror' (remark that could apply with equal justice to passages in a number of masterpieces that regularly re-appear in Opera-houses throughout the world.) However, Sir Thomas quotes the plot of Delius' first opera, 'Irmelin' without any similar adverse comment and, stranger still, devotes a whole chapter to 'The Magic Fountain' - an opera not without incidents 'likely to provoke risibility', - such as the war dance of Indian braves and squaws - with obvious approval. Not only this, but he quotes long sections of a text which belongs to a species of sub-Wagnerian English of appalling banality. The text of 'Koanga', however much it may trip "over 'alas', 'nay' and Milton's grave" (Mr. Carman Moore) can hardly be worse in this respect than its predecessors.

One must sympathise with Delius, who was driven into writing his own text, as many composers are, because literary men will be literary first and foremost (consider Strauss and Hoffmansthal) and cannot understand - how could they - the demands made upon the composer by the music. Not only the librettist, but the composer also, is the servant of the music in the creation of an opera. According to Sir Thomas Beecham (who was no stranger to this defect) the text of 'Koanga' was of a 'high flown redundancy wholly obnoxious to (Koary's) musical partner' and it underwent several revisions before reaching its present state, the last of these being at the hands of Sir Thomas himself and Edward Agate. It is, doubtless, perfectly true that no African slave ever spoke - or rather, sang - as they do in 'Koanga'; this is at least partly intentional as it is traditional for the text to be 'heightened' into 'poetry' to bring it into a workable relationship with the music. If the result is unconvincing, then so it is in most operas, sad to say. Musicians face these problems with magnificent disregard. A performance of a repertory opera may have each of the principals singing his or her, preferred translation of the text, or even in different languages, without anyone being in the least concerned. The most sensible attitude is to regard the text of 'Koanga' as 'a period piece' (Mr. Harold C. Schonberg) and to expect that in performance, amendments will have to be made.

The experience of 'Koanga' seems to have decided Delius against seeking the collaboration of a librettist in future operas. The text of 'A Village Romeo and Juliet', is in a plainer and more economical style, a tendency which is taken to an extreme in 'Fennimore and Gerda'. In both operas, Delius has ruthlessly pruned away from the original story everything that was extraneous to his purpose. This has caused bewilderment amongst most commentators who, besides blaming Delius for his cavalier treatment of the text of acknowledged masterpieces, find it impossible to understand why he should throw away so many dramatic opportunities in the original versions, and often retain what appear to be less powerful and important episodes and ideas. Had Puccini, for example, taken these subjects, he would no doubt have chosen the very material which Delius rejected. It is essential to accept that Delius is making his own contribution in his own way: as Sir Thomas expressed it, opera does not necessarily have to consist of such spectacles as 'a gentleman vigorously chasing a lady round the room'. Delius remained true to his own purpose. Had he ever written a 'Tosca' the aforementioned episode would have been omitted.

Post-Wagnerian operatic developments are prefigured in Delius' last two operas. The story of 'A Village Romeo and Juliet' is condensed into brief scenes, either isolated or linked by orchestral interludes, as in 'Pelleas and Melisande', although it is extremely unlikely that Delius knew anything of Debussy's opera when working on his own. This concision is intensified in 'Fennimore and Gerda' so that the terseness of the text and shortness of the scenes demands a great deal of the concentration of both singers and audience. Despite Delius' pronouncements about reducing staging to a minimum, the assistance of effective sets is required. Over-simplified presentation gives a meagre, even an absurd, impression - a few

red leaves do not make an Autumn - although it must be admitted that it has become established practice to use sets in opera which merely suggest the scene and leave the rest to lighting and the imagination. The copious stage directors in Wagner and indeed in Delius, are felt to hamper the effect of the music and to disguise the underlying symbolism of the drama.

One must sympathise with these views: music is an abstract art and Wagnerian music - drama an art form based on an elaborate symbolism. In Delius, although the characters are no longer mythical Gods and heroes, and are based on ordinary human beings, they carry a considerable symbolic significance as well. However, to rely on suggestion in stage presentation is to heap abstraction upon abstraction: rather than assisting the music, the effect is to draw attention to the inadequacy and superfluity of the stage spectacle. The obvious thing is to close one's eyes. The issue cannot be got round in this way: artificiality must be accepted as part of a convention which has to be assimilated as a total experience.

'Fennimore and Gerda' points the way to 'Wozzeck' and it would benefit by an expressionistic setting, in the style of Munch, to convey a suitably brooding atmosphere, in character with much of the music. As with the other Delius operas, the text seems to have excited considerable misgivings, but now for the opposite reason: it is found to be too commonplace and out of keeping with the poetry of the music. It has also been pointed out that the vocal lines are not, in general, as memorable and expansive as in 'A Village Romeo and Juliet'. We can, therefore, assume, since text and vocal parts match in a certain flatness of expression, that this was precisely as Delius wanted it (why should we always suppose that we know better than the composer?) and not a defect of workmanship or inspiration. It can be seen as an attempt at a more natural mode of declamation, as in other contemporary experiments, from Debussy to Janacek, the 'sprechgesang' of Schoenberg being the ultimate extreme in this style. In parenthesis, it is suggested that in 'Fennimore and Gerda' we have an ideal Television opera. The filming of the work in authentic locations (as an alternative to the style suggested above) and with unexaggerated acting would not stress sight at the expense of sound but rather leave the music free to communicate in its own way.

It remains to be said that in the stage works of almost every composer, there are passages of a naivete that cause embarrassment if viewed in the wrong light. Whether the opera is 'The Magic Flute', 'The Midsummer Marriage' or anything between, it has to be born in mind that the composer selected his material with a deliberate intention in mind and it is the task of the interpreter to discover and communicate this intention. If we adopt the attitude that the composer was sadly lacking in intellect and taste and that his work has to be approached from above, rather than from within, then we should leave others to treat it with the necessary respect; it is certainly not for us. The artist, for all his possible outward sophistication, lives

in a world closer to that of childhood than is the case with the uncreative, and he sees no barriers because none exist except to the comparatively closed mind of the adult. He knows where the 'magic fountain' lies, and also that we spend most of our lives walking away from it.

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