

1 One of the 'Frankfurt Group'

1877–1901

Somewhere on a ridge of the North Dorset Downs a young oak marks the place where the ashes of one of British music's truest friends lie buried among the trees that he himself planted. Frederick Delius said of him, 'He is one of my oldest friends and one of the very few people I trust and admire implicitly.'¹ Arnold Bax wrote of his 'unfailing friendship and generosity',² and that fine choral trainer Charles Kennedy Scott spoke of him as 'an original splendid soul who did more good than he was aware of'.³

There is no plaque to identify this last resting place; its occupant is anonymous in death as he was self-effacing during his life-time, and the spot will be passed unnoticed by the casual walker through the woods. Reputations may rise and fall, but, when in the autumn of 1940 Gerald Finzi was visiting his fellow-composer Robin Milford at the latter's home near Newbury, he met for the first time someone who to him was almost a mythical figure. The genial but shy man staying with the Milfords, dressed in thick Norfolk tweeds, with the kindest pale blue eyes and a halo of white hair surrounding his beaming ruddy face, was Henry Balfour Gardiner. In those war-torn days stories of Gardiner's generosity and his early championing of British music clung to him like a legend. Here was a composer who for some personal reason had given up music and devoted his time instead to forestry work, a man who before the First World War had been at the very hub of English musical life and had been personally acquainted with most of its leading figures. Sadly, three of them – Gustav Holst, Frederick Delius and Norman O'Neill – had been dead for some six years, and a second world war was now sweeping away any remnants that the first had not already destroyed of an age to which he spiritually belonged.

In common with his close friend Frederick Delius, Balfour Gardiner was born into a family of merchants, though like Delius he was to take little part in the running of the business. His ancestral line can be traced back to the early seventeenth century, to the Merchant Venturers of Bristol. His grandfather Henry Gardiner, born there in 1809, worked in the woollen drapery business, a trade that developed into wholesale clothing with many connections in the West of England and South Wales. On its limited profits he lived in Bristol a very economical life

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until, as luck would have it, the sudden flow of emigrants occasioned by the Australian gold rush of the 1850s brought unexpectedly a considerable increase in trade and with it a commensurate fortune. He retired in 1862, purchasing an estate at Caterham in Surrey, and he died in 1884 leaving assets totalling about £70,000. He was a quiet, unassuming man of great integrity with a reputation in his earlier days for strictness and severity, but with one commendable trait in later life that Balfour Gardiner was to inherit in great measure: benevolence.

Margaret Henderson, who became his wife, gave birth to six children of which Balfour's father, Henry John Gardiner, was the only boy. He was born in Bristol in 1843 and after receiving a somewhat limited education left school before the age of sixteen and went to Liverpool, where for two years he 'learned the trade' in a woollen warehouse. He entered his father's business just prior to Henry Gardiner's retirement. Some years of travel followed, after which he returned to Caterham and began gradually expanding his many business concerns. He established his own import-and-export merchant company, H.J. Gardiner & Co., and took much interest in various other financial undertakings, including some collieries. This led in turn to several positions of importance: he became a director and later chairman of Bradbury Greatorex (a wholesale warehousing firm now a subsidiary of Courtaulds), and he was for some years chairman of both the Blackwell Colliery Company and the Holborn Viaduct Land Company as well as being director of the Atlas Assurance Company, the Canadian Bank of Commerce and the Bolsover Colliery Company.

In 1870 he married Clara Elizabeth Honey, one of three daughters of an accountant. According to a delightful if apocryphal story,⁴ Henry John could not decide which of the three attractive Miss Honeys he wished to marry. But playing croquet with them one day he chanced to notice as they bent low to make their strokes that the hems of their petticoats showed beneath their skirts and that, while two of these visible hems were frilly, Miss Clara's was plain. It was to her that he proposed. Their married life began in London near Hyde Park at 6 Orsett Terrace, where on 7 November 1877 Clara gave birth to their first child, Henry Balfour Gardiner. They then moved to Eltham in Kent and on 29 March 1879 their other child, Alan Henderson Gardiner, was born.

Tragically, a few days after giving birth to her second son, Clara died at the early age of twenty-seven. The two boys' maternal needs were attended to by a Miss Sophie Hopkins who came to keep house for their father, and when his sons were safely launched on their schooling Henry John Gardiner moved to 25 Tavistock Square, London. He also had the use of a house known as 'Moody's Down' in the heart of Hampshire at Sutton Scotney, Barton Stacey, where it became his custom to spend

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three days each week entertaining his shooting friends and other guests. In 1920 he had to give up this house when the landlord took possession, so for his country seat he looked elsewhere. After first renting a house in Newbury, in 1921 he took Hazel Cottage at Wonston in Hampshire until he finally acquired twenty acres locally on which he had Upton House built; it was completed in time for the Christmas of 1923.

In 1919 he added to his already impressive list of offices that of high sherriff of the County of London. Three years later, on the death of his partner, his own firm was liquidated, though certain business connections with Nyasaland tea plantations were retained in another form through the Cholo Land and Rubber Estate Company. Balfour in time became a director, under sufferance of duty if for no other reason, though he resigned soon after his father's death in 1940. Regarded by those in the business as the 'Grand Old Man'⁵ of the wholesale trade, outwardly Henry J. Gardiner had, like his father, that typically Victorian air of austerity which his imposing appearance enhanced and his manner on occasion could sustain. He was a stickler for punctuality, and, when dinner was once delayed because of the late arrival of relatives, he quietly informed them, 'You have wasted three minutes of my life.' Money wasted could be made again but time lost was lost for ever. For all his immense wealth, and without being extravagant with large sums, he was sometimes excessively 'penny-wise'. Once when giving a case of wine as a present to one of the family, he asked for the bottles to be returned in due course as there was money to be reclaimed on the 'empties'. Even when his sons were much older he was still held slightly in awe by them. Yet this apparent air of austerity is in part a tint that the perspective of time has placed on an era of rigid etiquette, something that the young Balfour inwardly reacted against, for he was always one to want his own way. As a consequence of Henry J.'s lack of easy intimacy in his dealings with his children, the father-son relationship was not as close as it might have been. Both love and respect were present, but they were restrained. How infuriated the young Balfour would be at his father's constant enquiry, 'How is my busy Bee today?' When Balfour was more independent the customary 'dinner on Sunday with father' had the ring of an ordeal about it and his visits were made partly out of a sense of obligation.

But there was a much warmer side to Henry J. Gardiner, a kindness, affection and consideration that like so many of his characteristics were to emerge in Balfour. He was certainly not lacking a sense of humour. When on one memorable occasion he had invited two friends to 'Moody's Down' for a week-end's shooting, he had the idea of taking each of them quietly aside beforehand, informing him that as the other was deaf he would have to speak twice as loud as normal to make himself

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heard. The outcome was worthy of P.G. Wodehouse. Henry John was a dutiful father and, although the loss of their mother was a severe blow to the children, with loving care he saw that they lacked nothing throughout their childhood – and indeed their later life. Financially he made it possible for them to indulge their own pursuits without the burdensome necessity of following a trade or profession. This helping hand was not wasted on Balfour, who became a skilful manipulator on the stock market and so in time was able to use his resources to the benefit of not only himself but, more importantly, others.

Although he had been christened Henry Balfour Gardiner, the ‘Henry’ was soon reduced to a mere initial which he invariably used when signing his name. To his friends he was simply Balfour, a name possibly derived from a distant relative, Colonel Henry Balfour (1767–1818) of the Bengal Artillery who had married into the Gardiner family. Both Balfour and Alan took full advantage of the free rein their father allowed them in their careers, and, although there were hopes that they might follow in the family business, Balfour chose music while Alan became an eminent Egyptologist. Alan’s chief claim to fame in the layman’s eyes was to be working at Luxor in 1922 at the time of the discovery of Tutankhamen’s tomb. His work there mainly concerned the deciphering of inscriptions, and it was as a philologist that he made his greatest contribution to Egyptology. In 1949, at the age of seventy, Alan (by then Sir Alan) was one of those cited by the press as having outwitted the ‘Pharaoh’s Curse’, supposedly responsible for the deaths of several archaeologists involved in the tomb’s opening. He died in 1963.

Balfour Gardiner showed inclinations towards music at an early age. Although his father was not very musical, he did attempt the cello and occasionally held instrumental ‘at homes’ which were responsible for Balfour’s musical awakening. It was listening to Corelli trios while only four that prompted the desire to learn the piano. This he was allowed to do as a special treat on his fifth birthday, for his father gave every assistance and encouragement to his sons’ interests, and by the age of nine Balfour was composing small pieces for violin and piano. His schooling began at a day school in Eltham and he went on to private schools at Margate and Folkestone and later to Temple Grove, East Sheen (the setting of M.R. James’s supernatural tale *A School Story*); from there he won a junior scholarship to Charterhouse which he entered in the winter term of 1891, his brother Alan joining him a year later. While at Eltham he had for several years studied the organ with a Mr T.C. Guyer, whom he affectionately remembered as a ‘musician of pure and refined taste who developed my feeling for tone-colour’.⁶ At Charterhouse, where he also won a senior scholarship, he came under the guidance of Mr A.G. Becker for the piano. Vaughan Williams, a Carthusian five years

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1 Balfour Gardiner with his brother Alan (right), 6 August 1884

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Gardiner's senior whom he missed by a year, spoke of Becker as being a very remarkable man and a fine teacher, regretting that he himself had not come directly under his influence.⁷ Through Becker, Gardiner grew familiar with the classical piano repertoire and fostered an ambition to become a concert pianist. From his Charterhouse days comes his earliest surviving work – a setting for voice and piano of *The Banks of Calm Bendemeer* from Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh* (verses already set by Stanford in his grand opera *The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan* and published separately as *There's a Bower of Roses*).

From public school the next logical step for Gardiner to take would seem to be either Oxford or Cambridge. But instead of progressing straight to university, he chose first to continue his musical education abroad at a conservatory at Frankfurt-am-Main that enjoyed a considerable reputation. So, on leaving Charterhouse a little earlier than was the custom, at the end of the Cricket Quarter of 1894, he proceeded to Germany. There was nothing unusual about this decision because it was a generally held opinion at the time that musical education on the Continent was superior to that available at home, a belief underlined by the many famous names the German establishments could boast on their teaching staffs. There were a number of excellent training schools to be found abroad, outstanding ones being at Berlin, Cologne, Dresden, Frankfurt, Leipzig and Munich, most of them dating from around the middle of the century. If for English students the expense was often an obstacle, the appeal was still strong. Elgar had wanted to study at Leipzig but was prevented by insufficient funds. However, Delius went there in 1886 for an eighteen-month period with his father's financial backing. (One may speculate what might have happened had Elgar's father been a man of wealth and resource like Delius's and Gardiner's.) Many of the previous generation of British composers had furthered their studies abroad: Sullivan at Leipzig, Corder at Cologne, Stanford and Cowen at both Leipzig and Berlin, and Mackenzie at Sondershausen. Even the ebullient Dame Ethyl Smyth had taken Leipzig and Berlin in her stride (and won much operatic success abroad) before assailing the English musical scene. For them the choice of an English music college had been very limited. The senior institution at home was the Royal Academy of Music, founded in 1822 (whose successive principals of Macfarren, Mackenzie and McEwen once earned it the apt nickname of 'The MacAdemy'), and then came a long gap before the appearances of the Trinity College of Music in 1872, the Guildhall School of Music in 1880, and the Royal College of Music in 1882 which absorbed the earlier National Training School of Music set up in 1873.

Gardiner's choice of Frankfurt proved in several ways to be a happy one. He was fortunate in his professor of composition, he was to form

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2 Balfour Gardiner at the time of beginning his studies at Frankfurt in 1894

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lasting friendships amongst his fellow students, and his residence there engendered a deep love of Germany and the Continent. In later years he often looked back with much affection on his Frankfurt days. The Frankfurt Conservatory (Dr Hoch's Conservatoire as it was known and advertised in the English musical press) had been founded in the year of Gardiner's birth, 1877, and its building financed from the proceeds of a substantial legacy left by a well-known Frankfurt citizen after whom it was named. The first director was the Swiss composer Joachim Raff who held the post until his death in 1882. Raff's death in fact prefaced quite an upheaval. The Conservatory's staff could then be broadly grouped into two camps: the older conservative group (amongst whose number the name of Clara Schumann was prominent as head of the pianoforte department from 1878 until illness and increasing deafness forced her to resign in 1892) and the younger radicals who had mostly been pupils of either Liszt, von Bülow or Raff. Thus, in keeping with the schism then prevalent in nineteenth-century music, the Conservatory was evenly split between the proponents of Brahms and Schumann on the one hand and the Wagner-Liszt school on the other. The appointment of Dr Bernhard Scholz from Breslau as the new director gave fuel to the revolt within the Conservatory, for he was a signatory of the Brahms-Joachim manifesto denouncing the 'New Germans'. (In 1880, when Scholz was director of music at Breslau, it had been at his instigation that Brahms came to write his *Academic Festival Overture* in acknowledgement of the honorary degree conferred on him by the university.) Clara Schumann wrote in her diary on 21 January 1883: 'Herr v Mumm called on me and told me of the revolution in the School (one can call it nothing else). Three have given notice and three others have been given notice. There is a complete transformation – but it was needed. The lack of discipline was incredible.'⁸

The younger dissenting faction broke away to establish a new institute in Frankfurt which rather confusingly was called the Raff Conservatory, appointing Hans von Bülow (himself once a Liszt pupil) as honorary president. On taking up the directorship at the Hoch Conservatory, Scholz generally created a favourable impression and by the end of 1883 the internal troubles there had died down, so that Brahms could write to Clara Schumann: 'You never mention the school, and that is a good sign, because it shows that under Scholz things are getting better and more comfortable every day.'⁹ By the following July Clara was able to write:

So far things are going well at the school and we have much to thank Scholz for. In many respects he makes a good Director, but he is very fidgety and seems always to be trying to make us stand out (as regards the other Conservatoires). At the smallest sign from the other side he gets excited, and then I always have to urge him to forge calmly ahead and take no notice of other people . . . But even if they really did do something good, that need not affect us. Frankfurt is big

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enough for two or three good institutions. I am much more concerned about the fact that there is so little real ability in the Raff Conservatoire . . .¹⁰

Seen through the eyes of Gardiner's fellow student Cyril Scott, Scholz was 'an imposing and awe-inspiring old gentleman with a very florid face and longish white hair, who walked with a slow shuffling gait and usually wore a black frock coat quite incongruous with the rest of his attire, which was of a bile-coloured texture without any pattern'.¹¹ Scholz was not the only member of the Frankfurt staff whose dress appeared somewhat peculiar to Scott (whose own flamboyant attire was anything but conventional) for the renowned professor of composition, Iwan Knorr, came in for some critical remarks as well:

He was of slender build, of sallow complexion, wore his iron grey hair *en brosse*, and had a short non-pointed and rather mangy-looking beard. His mode of dress was unaesthetically striking: he invariably wore elastic-sided boots with false buttons, and a cravat which looked as if two pieces of nondescript stuff had been glued on to a bit of cardboard . . . Furthermore, brownish-yellow trousers of a distinctly bilious shade, and far too full in the seat – which used to hang down in a very curious manner suggestive, if the simile be permitted, of the posterior of an elephant.¹²

Knorr was an outstanding personality on the Frankfurt staff, and the greatest influence on Gardiner. Although not actually born in Russia, he had spent a large part of his life there and his sympathies were similarly directed. He had been a close friend and biographer of Tchaikovsky and when the composer visited Frankfurt in 1889 Knorr's was one of the friendships he was pleased to renew. Knorr married a Russian, studied at Leipzig and later returned to Russia to teach before joining the Frankfurt staff in 1883 on the recommendation of no less a figure than Brahms. Knorr had sent him one of his compositions, asking for an opinion. The work, a set of orchestral variations on Ukrainian folk-songs, much impressed Brahms and in 1877 Knorr joined the senior composer on a two-day walking tour.

Knorr had an enviable reputation as one of the finest teachers of composition. His strength, one that was highly appreciated by his pupils, was that his teaching was free from much of the rigidity common in a more academic approach. He fostered his pupils' individual talents instead of merely moulding them to an academic conformity. Placid, good-humoured and retiring by nature, he was not one to discourage originality providing it was in good taste. As he wrote himself: 'I have endeavoured to respect the individual and taken care not to impose my taste or my tendency on him.'¹³ One of his precepts was that the rules of composition should first be learned so as to know how to break them later on. In this way his teaching ensured a firm foundation for the most forward-looking of his pupils, which included Oskar Fried, Hans

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Pfitzner and Ernst Toch. Knorr's methods were not those of Scholz who also taught composition and was one of 'the old school'. There was some friction between the two men, each no doubt eyeing the other with a degree of disapproval. On Scholz's resignation in 1908 Knorr succeeded him as director, a post he held until his death in 1916.

The Hoch Conservatory generally lived up to its excellent name, offering a wide range of musical subjects at an annual fee of between 360 and 450 marks. Most of the instrumental tuition was given by members of the Frankfurt Opera orchestra and by each of the internationally acclaimed Frankfurt String Quartet whose leader, Hugo Heermann, was also in charge of the city's Museum concerts. Heermann remained at the Conservatory until 1904 when, according to Cyril Scott, having been indiscreet enough on more than one occasion to kiss his female pupils, he was asked to leave. The story goes that his wife protested to Scholz: 'Really, Herr Director, it is too absurd to make such a fuss about a mere kiss – in *our* circle, *everybody* kisses!' Unfortunately the girl in question had complained and such protestations were in vain. Whatever the truth of the story, Heermann went on to found a violin school of his own.¹⁴

Other prominent figures included the Frankfurt Quartet's cellist, Hugo Becker, acknowledged as one of the leading instrumentalists of his day, who spent many years at Frankfurt before moving in 1909 to the Hochschule at Berlin. In the piano department were Lazzaro Uzielli, James Kwast and Ernst Engesser. But of wider, lasting renown was the composer Engelbert Humperdinck who taught composition at the Conservatory from 1890 until 1896. While at Frankfurt he achieved fame on the strength of a single work, his opera *Hansel and Gretel* which he had written at his sister's request as a Christmas entertainment for her children. Knorr encouraged him to bring it before the public, which he did with great success at Weimar in 1893, and the opera has retained its popularity to this day. But as a teacher Humperdinck was much less successful. Originally engaged out of charity, he became known for his absent-mindedness and lack of punctuality. In 1900 he was appointed director of the Berlin Akademische Meisterschule.

Of the 250 or so students on roll at Frankfurt, over half were women, and during Gardiner's time there was a significant proportion of students from English-speaking countries, the greater number coming from Great Britain. Gardiner and his contemporaries were by no means the first British students at Frankfurt. Two British pianists famous in their day had studied there previously. Frederic Lamond had arrived in 1882 to study with Heermann and Schwarz, and with the shake-up that followed Raff's death he moved to the new conservatory of which Schwarz was the nominal director. Lamond was a protégé of Liszt and enjoyed the rare privilege of the master's presence at one of his London recitals.