Edvard Grieg

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Henry Theophilus Finck

With an Introductory Note by Lothar Feinstein

Cambridge Scholars Press Ltd.
Adelaide, London, and Washington

Edvard Grieg
by Henry Theophilus Finck, with an introductory note by Lothar Feinstein
The main body of this book first published in 1905 by John Lane, London
The introductory note first published 2002 by

Cambridge Scholars Press
79a Manor Waye, Uxbridge UB8 2BG, UK
26028 Iverson Drive South Riding, VA 20152 USA
21 Desaumarez Street, Kensington Park, South Australia 5068, Australia

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

A Library of Congress catalogue record for this book has been requested

A National Library of Australia catalogue record for this book has been requested

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ISBN 190430320X

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Introductory Note

Though one might well argue that Grieg's reputation was at a peak in the early days of this century, his music is certainly not missing from our concert halls today. Peer Gynt is as regularly performed as any orchestral suite, and the piano concerto is in virtually every pianist's repertoire. Decisions to record the works are incessantly encouraged by recording firms, a sign, surely, that listeners are still buying, despite the huge numbers of recordings which are available at most record stores.

So Grieg is still heard widely, probably by more people today than a hundred years ago. But do we hear him in the same way as his contemporary listeners? Probably not entirely. Much has changed in the way we perceive music, and of course, in the contexts in which we hear the music. Whether or not our contexts are better or worse than the contexts in which the music was originally heard is subject to argument. But there is no question that the more we know about the composer's circumstances and the situation in which a piece of music was born, the better we are equipped to extract a heightened appreciation from this piece of music.

What is the best way to learn more about these circumstances? Again, this is a matter on which much debate has been centred, but the question of how one might acquaint oneself with the circumstances of composers and their creations is unresolved. What the present work does not fail to offer, however, is a passionate account by someone who lived at roughly the same time as Grieg himself, and in some ways, in very similar circumstances.

Henry Theophilus Finck was born in 1854 (eleven years Grieg's younger) and died in 1926, and he wrote widely on music. His interests seemed to range from Chopin to Wagner, and the scope of his subject matter is always admirable. Though he is primarily remembered as a music critic, his university studies were in sociology and physiological psychology. Like Grieg, he spent several

years in Germany, and like Grieg, he was an ardent admirer of Wagner.

Finck's value as a biographer of Grieg and analyst of Grieg's music may well be surpassed today by Grieg scholars, but in certain respects, he could not possibly be rivalled by the latter. Finck's information is, despite his ample inclusion of secondary material, first hand; and his circumstances ideal for conveying a picture of Grieg's world to us. It is for such reason, that the re-appearance of this work is highly welcome and useful.

Chapter I

Ancestry and Childhood—Ole Bull

IT may sound paradoxical to say that Norway owes its greatest composer to the outcome of a battle fought in the eighteenth century in Scotland, but such is the case. It was in July 1745 that the Pretender Charles Edward Stuart landed in the Scottish county of Lorne, and on April 16 of the following year his fate was decided at the battle of Culloden, a few miles east of Inverness. It was an unequal contest, in which the Scotch were foredoomed to failure. There were only six thousand of them, whereas the Duke of Cumberland had twice that number; and while the English soldiers were well trained, well fed, and headed by experienced commanders, the Highlanders were ragged, starving, exhausted, and unofficered. In vain they valiantly flung themselves on the English front. Their undisciplined courage was opposed to the trained enemy's guns and bayonets and heavy charges of horse. In an hour all was over. The Pretender fled with his officers, and of his soldiers who escaped the carnage many were taken as prisoners to England, where the common men were permitted to cast lots, one in every twenty to be tried and hanged; the rest to be transported. The English were determined to subdue the spirit of the vanquished mountaineers, and in pursuit of this purpose they went so far as to prohibit the Highland garb.

In these troublous times, when everything seemed lost, many Scotchmen left their native country to seek a home elsewhere. Among these was a merchant named Alexander Greig, of Aberdeen, a city which to this day harbours families bearing that name. Like others, he chose to emigrate to Norway, which in climate

and general aspect sufficiently resembled Scotland to seem an acceptable substitute for home. He established himself at Bergen, and changed his name to Grieg in order to make it correspond in Norwegian to its proper pronunciation.[1] He did not sever all connection with his native country, however. A member of the Scotch Reformed Church, he was so strong in his adherence to his faith that he made an annual trip to Scotland to partake of the communion. He married Margretha Elisabeth Heitman.

Their son, John Grieg, continued the mercantile pursuit while serving at the same time as British Consul at Bergen, which was then, as it is now, of all Norwegian cities second in importance only to the capita), Christiania. He married Maren Regine Haslund, who presented to him a son, in whom there was thus already more Norwegian than Scotch blood. This son, Alexander Grieg, who also served as British Consul, married the Norwegian Gesine Judith Hagerup, and unto them was born the hero of our book, Edvard Grieg.[2]

Schopenhauer's doctrine that men of genius inherit their gifts from their mothers is borne out in Edvard Grieg's case, as in so many others. His father was a man of excellent character, of intelligence and culture; but from him Edvard could have never derived his musical genius and the love of wild nature with which it is so closely associated. The elder Grieg did manifest some interest in music; he even played the pianoforte a little, but the music he liked was not such as his son liked and wrote. When the two made a trip into the mountains together, the same difference was manifested in their love of nature. To cite Otto Schmid's obviously authentic remarks:

"Wherever the landscape presented evidence of human toil in one of those level fertile fields which are infrequent in the mountainous North, Alexander Grieg was pleased and apt to become imbued with an enthusiasm which his son, however, did not share. Where, on the other hand, nature revealed its grandeur and sublimity; where snowy solitudes, amid towering, precipitous cliffs,

sent their rivers of ice, their glaciers, down into the valley; where the ice-coloured streams, after devious toilsome paths, thundered as cataracts over disintegrating rocks, the father was displeased by the sternness of the scenery, the rugged charms of which did not appeal to him; whereas the son, overwhelmed by thrills of delight, was struck dumb in deep admiration."

From his mother Edvard Grieg inherited not only his Norwegianism, but his artistic taste and his musical gifts. Her pedigree has been traced back as far as the beginning of the seventeenth century, to the famous Kjeld Stub.[3]

Oddly enough, as the subjoined genealogical table shows, this remarkable personage was born in Sweden; to say, however, that Edvard Grieg, in view of this, and his Scotch paternal descent, was not a real Norwegian after all, would be to forget the intermarriages of two centuries and a half, which were usually with natives, and finally left the Norwegian element far preponderant.[4] Kjeld Stub appears to have been an astonishingly "strenuous" individual. He was engineer, teacher, parson, and army officer at different times, and betrayed qualities which Schjelderup thinks would, under other circumstances, have made a prominent artist of him. From him the composer may have possibly inherited his fiery temperament, his faculty for organising, and his power over the masses. The large admixture of clerical blood in Grieg's maternal pedigree is also noticeable; the word parish-parson occurs repeatedly.

Apart from Kjeld Stub, the most important of Grieg's ancestors was his grandfather Edvard Hagerup. As Stiftamtmand of Bergen, the second city in Norway, he held one of the highest positions in the country. He lived till 1853, and as little Edvard was at that time already nine years old and had spent many a day in his ancestor's home, he still remembers him well. The Amtmand's funeral made a particularly deep impression on him, partly because of the pomp and solemnity attending it, partly because of the dirge, a funeral march composed by a Swedish Prince, Gustav,

who died in his youth. This march was played by a military band, and parts of it stirred the boy so deeply that they became indelibly fixed in his memory.

Gesine Judith Hagerup was one of Edvard Hagerup's eight children (families were large in those days: Gunhild Stub had nineteen sons and daughters). She herself gave birth to three daughters and two sons, the composer Edvard, and John, who became a merchant in Bergen and who devoted his leisure moments to playing the violoncello. Most of the mother's musical talent was inherited by Edvard, and there was a good deal to inherit. Without in the least neglecting her household duties, Gesine Hagerup was able to devote much of her time to music. As a young girl she had received lessons in singing and pianoforte playing in Hamburg from Albert Methfessel, an excellent teacher and a composer of songs, some of which are still in favour. Subsequently she continued her studies in London, which she visited repeatedly with her husband, and thus she acquired a skill which enabled her to appear as soloist at concerts in Bergen. Grieg remembers particularly her splendid performance, with orchestra and chorus, of Beethoven's great Fantasia, opus 80. He also specially recalls the remarkable verve and rhythmic animation with which she always played the works of one of her favourites, Weber.

He could not have had a better teacher than his mother, she began to give him lessons when he was six years old.[5] More important than this instruction, however, was the musical atmosphere he was enabled to breathe at home. A boy who is destined to become a great genius can easily teach himself, but nothing can atone for the lack of that musical nutriment in childhood and youth which builds the very tissues of that part of the brain which is set aside for musical impressions. Madame Grieg not only played a great deal *en famille,* but once a week she invited those of her friends who were fond of the art to a musical soirée. On such occasions the place of honour was usually given to Mozart and Weber, from whose operas selections were performed, the

hostess playing the orchestral parts on the pianoforte, and on occasions also assuming a vocal role to complete the cast.[6] In a corner of the room sat a happy boy listening to this music; it was executed by amateurs only, but while amateurs may fail here and there in technical proficiency, they usually play with more zeal and enthusiasm than the average professional; and it is the zeal and enthusiasm of the player and singer that stir the listener's soul most deeply and make him eager to become a musician too.

What Edvard heard stimulated him to renewed diligence in his practice, and his mother was seldom too far away to hear and correct the errors perpetrated by his youthful fingers. She had set her mind on making him musical, and she succeeded beyond her fondest hopes. Not that it was all easy sailing at first. "Only too soon did it become clear to me," he writes, "that I had to practise just what was unpleasant. . . There was no trifling with her if I spent the time in dreaming at the piano instead of busying myself with the lesson set. . . But my unpardonable tendency to dreaming was already beginning to bring me the same difficulties which have accompanied me long enough throughout my life. Had I not inherited my mother's irrepressible energy as well as her musical capacity, I should never in any respect have succeeded in passing from dreams to deeds."

While Mozart and Weber were Mme. Grieg's favourites, she was by no means one of those amateurs who are deaf to the beauties of contemporary music. She appreciated not only the orthodox romanticist Mendelssohn, but the more radical and revolutionary Chopin, whose delightful and unique pieces were at that time understood by few, and therefore underrated. It is probable that Chopin's novel and audacious harmonies sowed the seeds from which subsequently sprang some of the loveliest flowers of Grieg's genius.

His first serious attempt to compose was made at the age of twelve or thirteen. One day he brought with him to school a music-book on which he had written: "Variations on a German

Melody for the Piano, by Edvard Grieg, Opus 1." He wanted to show it to one of his classmates. Unfortunately, the teacher caught sight of it and examined it; then he suddenly seized the boy by his hair till his eyes were black, and advised him gruffly to leave such rubbish at home. (Subsequently this Opus 1. was consigned to the flames.) The teacher had no reason to like Edvard, who had been neglecting his three "R's," and who now confesses that in school he was "just as idle as at the piano." He was ingenious in devising excuses for being late; for instance, he would stand in the rain or under a dripping roof till he was soaked through to the skin, and the teacher had to send him home. "The only excuse I will make for myself is that school-life was in the last degree unsympathetic to me; its materialism, its coarseness, its coldness were so abhorrent to my nature that I thought of the most incredible ways of escaping from it, if only for a short time. . . I have not the least doubt that that school developed in me nothing but what was evil, and left the good untouched." [7]

Up to this time it had never occurred to Edvard that he might become an artist. He wanted to be a pastor. To be able to preach to an interested congregation seemed to him something very lofty. To be a prophet, a herald, that was what he liked. He had at this time also a great passion for poetry, he knew all the poems in the reading-books by heart, and declaimed them to his parents and sisters. "And when my father, after dinner, wanted to take his little *siesta* in the armchair, I would not leave him in peace, but got behind a chair, which represented my pulpit, and declaimed away without any consideration."

From Edvard's tenth year on the Grieg family had lived at the fine estate of Landaas, a few kilometres from Bergen. One summer's day, when he was nearly fifteen years old, a rider at full gallop came up the road to Landaas. It was one of the idols of Grieg's dreams, Ole Bull. Something like an electric current seemed to pass through the boy when the world-famed violinist shook his hand: yet he was disenchanted to find one whom he

regarded almost as a god smiling and joking just like ordinary mortals. He listened speechless to the astounding stories of his journeys in America.

Inasmuch as Ole Bull on more than one occasion exerted a great influence on Grieg's artistic career, and paved the way for it by his persistent efforts to establish a Norwegian art centre, it is of interest and pertinent to recall a few incidents in his romantic life. He, also, was born at Bergen, thirty-three years before Grieg, but his experience in school when his musical proclivities were discovered was quite different from Grieg's. The old rector of the Latin school said to him, "Take your fiddle in earnest, boy, and don't waste your time here." He followed this advice, and became a violinist, concerning whom no less an authority than Joachim said: "No artist in our time has possessed his poetic power." He went to Germany to study the violin with the famous Spohr, but found his style too academic to suit him. The capricious, fantastic Paganini was more to his taste, and him he chose for a model, so far as any model he may be said to have had. He soon won a fame and popularity hardly second to the Great Italian's, and became an indefatigable traveller, giving concerts in the cities of Scandinavia, Russia, Germany, France, Italy, America. Once, in Paris, he tried to commit suicide by jumping into the river Seine, because his beloved violin had been stolen; but he was rescued, and a wealthy lady gave him another Guarneri. In 1853 his violin was again stolen by a Central American at Panama, when he was on the way to California with Mr. Strakosch. In trying to recover it he lost his steamer, and while waiting for the next fell a victim to yellow fever. A miniature revolution happening to be in progress, he was not only left unattended, but was obliged to leave his bed and lie on the floor to escape stray bullets. Some years later he was at Ohio river streamer which crashed into another that had a load of petroleum. Both the streamers were at once surrounded with a circle of fire, but Ole Bull *grasped his violin*, jumped overboard, and succeeded in swimming ashore.

Perhaps the most memorable of his concert tours was that which he undertook in 1853 with the girl soprano, Adelina Patti. Reports of the wonderful art of this child bad gone forth, and as one of the American critics remarked, "nothing short of the testimony we have seen could make us believe such a thing possible. Yet the whole artistic life of Ole Bull is a guarantee that nothing but sterling merit can take part in his concerts." Ole Bull's object in giving this particular series of concerts was to raise funds for carrying out a patriotic project of establishing a large Norwegian colony in Pennsylvania. "A New Norway," to cite his own words, "consecrated to liberty, baptised with independence, and protected by the Union's mighty flag." But he was too thoroughly an artist to be a good businessman. After the forests had been cleared and eight hundred settlers made their homes there, he found that he had been swindled; the title to the land he had paid for was fraudulent, and all that remained of his earnings was devoured by the resulting lawsuits.

His disappointment was aggravated by the attitude of his countrymen when he returned to his home. He was unjustly accused of having speculated ruthlessly at the expense of those who had confided in him. He had another cause for dissatisfaction with his neighbours.

In view of the fact that, up to that time, Norway had depended on Danish plays, Danish actors, and Danish musicians, he, an ardent patriot, wanted to found a National Theatre in Bergen—a Norse theatre with a Norse orchestra. Such a theatre was actually opened on January 2, 1850, but when he found, a year later, that he could no longer bear the cost, he asked the Storthing for a yearly appropriation. This was refused, and he was subsequently subjected to so many annoyances by his enemies[8] that after two years the theatre passed into other hands. In 1860, however, he resumed his direction of it, appointing Björnstjerne Björnson as dramatic instructor. Three years later he tried to found a Norse Music Academy in Christiania. This Academy, writes Jonas Lie,

was not founded; "but the seed—the thought—was at that time planted. Since then it has grown and matured, and to-day we have a body of artists and composers, and quite another musical culture ready to receive it."

When Ole Bull died in 1880 his patriotic aspirations and services were duly acknowledged. The King sent a telegram of condolence to the widow, expressing his personal as well as the national loss, and Björnstjerne Björnson said, in an address delivered before thousands of mourners: "Patriotism was the creative power in his life. When he established the Norse Theatre, assisted Norse art and helped the National Museum, his mighty instrument singing for other patriotic ends; when he helped his countrymen and others wherever he found them, it was not so much for the object, or the person, but for the honour of Norway."

Grieg played the organ at the funeral services, and his remarks, which followed Björnson's, must also be cited: "Because more than any other thou wast the glory of our land, because more than any other thou hast carried our people with thee up towards the bright heights of art, because thou wast more than any other a pioneer of our young national music; more, much more, than any other, the faithful, warm-hearted conqueror of all hearts, because thou hast planted a seed which shall spring up in the future, and for which coming generations shall bless thee, with the gratitude of thousands upon thousands—for all this, in the name of our Norse memorial art, I lay this laurel wreath on thy coffin. Peace be with thy ashes!"

When Edvard Grieg spoke these words, and for the last time gazed upon the features of his friend and benefactor, he was thirty-seven years old. When he first became acquainted with him he was, as already stated, a lad of about fifteen. The great violinist had returned from America for a temporary sojourn in his native town. He became a frequent visitor at the Grieg mansion, and he promptly discovered the gifts of Edvard, who improvised for him

at the piano, and told him about his dreams and hopes of himself becoming a musician.

To cite Grieg's own words: "When he heard I had composed music, I had to go to the piano; all my entreaties were in vain. I cannot now understand what Ole Bull could find at that time in my juvenile pieces. But he was quite serious, and talked quietly to my parents. The matter of their discussion was by no means disagreeable to me. For suddenly Ole Bull came to me, shook me in his own way, and said, 'You are to go to Leipzig, and become a musician.' Everybody looked at me affectionately, and I understood just one thing, that a good fairy was stroking my cheek and that 1 was happy. And my good parents! Not one moment's opposition or hesitation; everything was arranged, and it seemed to me the most natural thing in the world."

Chapter II
At the Leipsic Conservatory—Gade

BY an interesting coincidence, the Leipsic Conservatory had been established in the same year that Edvard Grieg was born—1843. But its founder, Mendelssohn, had died four years later, and Schumann, who had been appointed instructor in score-reading, had gone to Dresden after one year's service; he died in 1856. The Conservatory was thus, at the time of Edvard's arrival, shorn of its chief glory; but it still boasted the names of several musicians famed in the musical world, among them Moscheles, the eminent pianist and composer; E. F. E. Richter, author of the celebrated treatise on harmony, of which more than twenty editions have been printed; E. F. Wenzel, the noted piano teacher; Moritz Hauptmann, the eminent theorist; and Carl Reinecke, famed as Mozart player, composer, and conductor of the Gewandhaus concerts.

When Grieg was sent to Leipzig he felt "like a parcel stuffed with dreams." On arriving in the "mediaeval" city (Leipzig has changed very much since that time), the "dark, tall, uncanny houses and narrow streets" almost took away his breath. He continued to wear a short blouse with a belt, such as the boys wore at his own home; it was his only reminder of Norway, and he was very homesick. But soon he recovered, and he says. "Although I had not the slightest idea what it meant to study music, I was dead certain that the miracle would happen, and that in three years, when my course of studies came to an end, I should go back home a wizard-master in the kingdom of sounds." Great surprises and disappointments were, however, in store for him.

The first of his piano teachers was the renowned Plaidy, who used to play for his pupils the slow introductory movements of

Mendelssohn's Capricios, and then, when he reached the more difficult allegros, remark, as if casually: "And so on;" seriously imagining that the boys did not see through him! Some of the students, among them J. F. Barnett, nevertheless showed brilliant technical results under him. Grieg was much better pleased with his next teachers, E. F. Wenzel, the gifted friend of Schumann, who soon became his idol; and the famous Ignaz Moscheles. For him, also, Grieg stands up with the greatest warmth:

"It is true that he was naive enough to believe that he imposed on us by seizing every opportunity to run down Chopin and Schumann, whom I secretly adored; but he could play beautifully: and he did; often taking up the whole lesson. Especially his interpretations of Beethoven, whom he worshipped, were splendid. They were conscientious, full of character, and noble, without any straining after effect. I studied Beethoven's Sonatas with him by the dozen. Often I could not play four bars together without his laying his hands on mine, pushing me gently from my seat, and saying, 'Now listen how I do that.' In this way I learned many a little technical secret, and came to value his expressive interpretations at the very highest."

In the harmony class it was characteristic of Grieg that, as he confesses, he always wrote, to the given bass, harmonies which pleased himself, instead of those prescribed by the rules of thorough bass. But E. F. Richter was not the man to encourage these "harmonies of the future," as one might call them; with an indulgent smile he would say: "No! Wrong!" and correct them with thin pencil marks. His other harmony teacher, Robert Papperitz, gave him a freer rein, which encouraged him to go so far out of the beaten path in choral works as to introduce chromatic passages in the voice parts wherever he could. This was too much, even for Papperitz, who exclaimed one day: "No! this chromatic work won't do; you are becoming a second Spohr!" Inasmuch as Spohr was, in Grieg's opinion, "an academic pedant of the first rank," he did not enjoy this criticism. Very different were his feel-

ings when, one day, after he had played one of his own compositions, Moritz Hauptmann laid his hand on his shoulder, and said: "Good day, my lad; we must become friends." Furthermore, a fugue by Grieg on the name "Gade," which found no favour in the eyes of Richter, won Hauptmann's approval to such a degree that, against all custom, after he had read it through, he exclaimed: "That must sound very pretty—let me hear it;" and when the boy had finished, he said, with his gentle smile: "Very pretty, very musical."

In some departments of the Conservatory there seemed to be a curious lack of system. Before Edvard had received a single lesson in violin playing or score-reading Reinecke set him the task of writing a string quartet; nay, he even asked him to compose an overture, although he had been taught nothing about form and instrumentation. The quartet was, nevertheless, written— "a mediocre piece on the lines of Schumann, Gade, and Mendelssohn,"—but when it came to the overture he literally stuck in the middle, and could get no further. "There was no class in the Conservatorium in which one could get a grounding in these things."

While the untamed Norwegian lad found it hard to breathe the atmosphere of an institution in which Mendelssohn was the latest approvable composer, whereas his own idols, Chopin and Schumann, not to speak of Wagner, were looked at as rather dangerous revolutionists, he now declares that, if he made little progress, the fault was largely his own; part, it was, perhaps, national. "We Norwegians, especially, usually develop too slowly to show in the least at the age of eighteen what we are good for." There were other "foreigners" at the Conservatory who "made immense strides forward;" among them, by an interesting coincidence, as many as five boys who subsequently became leaders in the musical world of London. Grieg writes:

"Among these were Arthur Sullivan, afterwards so celebrated as the composer of the 'Mikado,' the pianists Franklin Taylor and

Walter Bache, and Edward Dannreuther—too early taken from us, so gifted and so unwearied as the champion of Liszt, and who was also one of the first to enter the lists on behalf of Wagner in England. He was an exceedingly able man, and an eminent player. Lastly there was the fine musician, John Francis Barnett, whom I have mentioned above, and who passed his life as a teacher in London. Sullivan at once distinguished himself by his talent for composition, and for the advanced knowledge of instrumentation which he has acquired before he came to the Conservatorium. While still a student he wrote the music to Shakespeare's "Tempest," a few bars of which he once wrote in my album, and which displays the practised hand of an old master. Although I did not come across him much, I one had the pleasure of passing an hour with him, which I shall not forget. It was during a performance of Mendelssohn's "St. Paul." We sat and followed the music with the score, and what a score! It was Mendelssohn's own manuscript, which Sullivan had succeeded in borrowing for the occasion from the Director of the Conservatorium. Conrad Schleinitz, who was, as is well know, an intimate friend of Mendelssohn's. With what reverence we turned from one page to another! We were amazed at the clear, firm notes which so well expressed the ideas of the writer,"

The truth gradually dawned on Grieg that if he would progress like these English boys he must, like them, submit patiently to drudgery. The pangs of conscience drove him from on extreme to the other; he worked day and night, scarcely allowing himself time to eat and sleep, and the result was a complete collapse, in the spring of 1860. As soon as his mother was informed of his condition she hastened from Bergen to his beside. The illness culminated in a severe case of pleurisy, or inflammation of the membrane enfolding the lungs. In those days physicians had not yet discovered modern methods of dealing with this serious malady, and the result was that Grieg's health remained impaired all his life; for more than four decades he has had only one lung—

the right—to breathe with. All the more must we marvel at his achievements! But genius cannot be curbed even by impaired vitality; if it could, the best works of Wagner and Chopin would never have been written.

Mme. Grieg took her son back with her to Bergen, where he slowly improved. In the hope that he might recover completely if he remained during the winter too, his parents were anxious to have him stay under their roof; but he preferred to return to Leipsic, where, even if the Conservatory was not quite to his liking, there was abundant opportunity to hear good music and meet prominent musicians. He applied himself diligently to his tasks, and was thus able, in the spring of 1862, to pass his examinations with credit; he played on this occasion the four pieces subsequently printed as his opus 1, and won applause and praise both as composer and performer.[9]

Returning to the North, he enjoyed a Norwegian summer at the country home of his parents at Landaas. In the following season he gave his first concert in Bergen, at which his Conservatory string quartet was produced, beside the piano pieces of opus 1, and the Four Songs for Alto, opus 2. With the net receipts, which were encouraging, he purchased a number of scores of orchestral and chamber music, and now, for the first time, applied himself diligently to score-reading, an important branch of his art to which the Leipsic Conservatory appears to have paid insufficient attention after the departure of Schumann. In the spring, 1863, he took up his sojourn in Copenhagen, which, being a much larger city than Bergen, offered better opportunities to an aspiring musician, and which, moreover, was the home of the head of the Scandinavian school, the famous Niels W. Gade.

It has often been said that Gade was at one time the teacher of Grieg. This is not strictly true, for Grieg never took lessons of him; yet he frequently asked the older master's opinion of his new works, and admits that he may have profited more by his hints than by the Conservatory course at Leipsic. Shortly after

arriving in the Danish capital (in May 1863), Grieg met Gade at Klampenborg, a popular summer resort near Copenhagen, and was asked if he had anything of his own composition to show. Now, while it is true that Schubert and Mendelssohn had written two of their masterworks—the "Erlking," and the "Midsummer Night's Dream" overture, as lads—most of the other masters, if asked that question at Grieg's age (he was not quite twenty), would have been obliged to answer as he did—that he had nothing of importance to show. "Very well then," retorted Gade, "go home and write a symphony." This suggestion caused Grieg to pull himself together, and a fortnight later he had actually composed and orchestrated the first movement of a symphony, which he submitted to Gade, who was much pleased with it, and spoke words of encouragement that fired the young man's ambition as nothing else had done theretofore.[10]

Gade has been called the chief of the Scandinavian romantic school, and such he was until Grieg came forward with his best works. Gade's compositions have been shelved too soon; his "Ossian" overture and one or two of his symphonies would even now give more pleasure to concert goers than most of the contemporary products of Germany and France, because he was a melodist as well as a colourist. Hans von Bülow likened his mastery of orchestration to Wagner's and Liszt's; he was pleased with the deliberateness with which Gade scored his works, and his conscientious regard for details, in reference to which he cites the English, "Trifles make perfection, and perfection is no trifle." But what made the eminent Danish composer especially interesting to his contemporaries was the Scandinavian local colour in his works. Concerning this, Robert Schumann wrote in one of the last essays that came from his suggestive pen:

"We have in him an entirely new artistic type. It appears, indeed, as if the nations bordering on Germany were trying to emancipate themselves from the leadership of German music; a chauvinist *(Deutschtümler)* might grieve thereat, but to a thinker and

student of mankind it will seem natural and gratifying. Thus Chopin represents his native country; Bennett, England; in Holland, J. Verhulst arouses hopes of becoming a worthy representative of his country; in Hungary, likewise, national efforts are being made. And while they all regard the German nation as their first and most esteemed teacher, no one should be surprised at their wishing to have a national musical language of their.own, without becoming faithless to the teachings of their mistress. . .

In the north of Europe, too, we have seen manifestations of national tendencies. Lindblad, in Stockholm (the teacher of Jenny Lind), translated for us the old folk-songs, and Ole Bull, though not a productive talent of the first rank, endeavoured to acclimate with us the strains of his native land. The new school of gifted Scandinavian poets must have stimulated the local musicians, in case they were not reminded by the mountains and lakes, the runes and the auroral displays, of the fact that *the North is most decidedly entitled to a language of its own.*

"Our young composer (Gade) also was educated by the poets of his fatherland; he knows and loves them all; the old fairy tales and legends accompanied him on his boyish walks, and Ossian's giant harp loomed up across the water from the English coast. Thus there is manifested in his music, beginning with the Ossian overture, for the first time a decided and specific Northern character."

Nearly all the biographic sketches of Grieg in encyclopaedias and elsewhere cite him as having said, after becoming acquainted with the young Norwegian composer Nordraak: "It was as though scales fell from my eyes; through him, for the first time, I became acquainted with the Northern folk-music and with my own bent. We abjured the Gade-Mendelssohn insipid Scandinavianism, and entered with enthusiasm on the new path which the Northern school is now following." But in private letters to the author of this volume Grieg has twice regretted if he should have uttered such a

sneer at Gade, whom he has always held in the highest esteem, both as a man and a composer.[11]

However, if he had made that remark it would not have been wide of the mark, for Gade certainly does show the influence of Mendelssohn and other German composers much more than that of the Scandinavian folk-music. Had Grieg followed his example he would not have become a specifically Norse composer, but—what some have foolishly reproached him for not being—a cosmopolite. Luckily there were two other Scandinavian musicians, Norwegians both, who led him back from the over-tilled German fields to the virgin forests, the peasants, the peaks, the fjords of Norway.

Chapter III

From Germany to Norway

THE two men referred to were Ole Bull and Richard Nordraak. It was stated on a previous page that Ole Bull on two occasions exerted a great influence on Grieg's career. The first was when he persuaded his parents to send him to Leipsic; with the second we are now concerned.

Ole Bull always, when possible, went home to spend the summer in his country house at Valestrand, on the Island Osteröen, about twenty miles east of Bergen. It was here that Grieg, beginning with the year 1864, formed an intimate friendship with the great violinist. They often played Mozart's sonatas and other duos together; sometimes John Grieg joined them with his violoncello, and they had trios. At other times Edvard Grieg and Ole Bull made excursions together into their favourite mountain regions, and these were particularly potent in directing the trend of Grieg's genius. Professor R. B. Anderson once asked Ole Bull what had inspired his weird and original melodies. "His answer was that from his earliest childhood he had taken the profoundest delight in Norway's natural scenery. He grew eloquent in his poetic description of the grand and picturesque flower-clad valleys, filled with soughing groves and singing-birds; of the silver-crested mountains, from which the summer sun never departs; of the melodious brooks, babbling streams, and thundering rivers; of the blinking lakes that sink their deep thoughts to starlit skies; of the far-penetrating fjords, and the many thousand islands on the coast. He spoke with special emphasis of the eagerness with which he had devoured all myths, folktales, ballads, and popular melodies; and all these things, he said, 'have made my music.'"

Sara Bull relates that "when, in early childhood, playing alone in the meadows, he saw a delicate blue-bell gently moving in the breeze, he fancied he heard the bell ring, and the grass accompany it with most enrapturing fine voices; *he fancied he heard nature sing,* and thus music revealed itself, or came to his consciousness as something that might be reproduced . . . He was never happier than when he could persuade his grandmothers to tell him strange ghost stories, and sing the wild songs of the peasantry." He soon formed the habit of visiting remote valleys, listening to the dances and other tunes of the peasants, and transferring them to his violin; and it was with these wild tunes—with the "Saeterbesoeget," the "Saeterjentens Sondag," "En Moders Boen," and the like, that he aroused the wildest enthusiasm of his audiences in all parts of Europe and America.

To hear such a man play, to play with him, to accompany him to the home of the peasants and hear their music there—these were the privileges of Edvard Grieg in his twenty-first year and later; and the consequences were inevitable. Ole Bull, whose motto was, "My calling is Norse music," was naturally pleased to have so sympathetic and talented a young companion, although there were reasons for disapproval of him. While both agreed in their love of Mozart, the violinist had no use for the modern composers of whom his young friend was enamoured. Wagner he positively detested: "he ought to be lodged in prison," he used to say. In Grieg's compositions, too, he could not fail to discover traces of heretical modernity, even at this early period, but he generously made allowance for these in view of other qualities that did appeal to his taste.

At this early period in Grieg's artistic career we already come across one of his noble traits. He may have been weakened in body, but his mind was sturdy and inflexible. Neither of his best friends—his father and Ole Bull—approved of what was most original and best in him, yet that did not prevent him from following whither his fancy led, regardless of consequences. Herein he

resembled Wagner, who, when his contemporaries found him too "Wagnerian," retorted by becoming more and more so.[12]

His determination to follow the bent of his own genius must have been greatly strengthened at this time by his friendship with Rikard Nordraak, a young Norwegian composer of rare talent, who might have done as much for his native country as Grieg himself, had not death carried him off before he had completed his twenty-fourth year. Even in this short span of life he created some notable works, among them pianoforte pieces, settings of his cousin Björnson's "Mary Stuart in Scotland," "Sigurd Slembe," and the patriotic song, "Ja vi elsker." Like Ole Bull, he was patriot to the verge of fanaticism, and Grieg, who had loved his fatherland above everything even before he knew these two men, had his glowing feelings fanned to a bright flame by intercourse with them, especially with Nordraak, who, being only a year older, was the more suitable companion for him. They first met in the winter of 1864, and it was a case of friendship at first sight. Nordraak accompanied Grieg to his home, and there, as on many subsequent occasions, they indulged in music to their hearts' content, and discussed patriotic topics.

The most important effect of the friendship with Nordraak was that it hastened Grieg's journey from Germany to Norway, musically speaking. Up to this point he had felt the Leipsic shackles—the need of being more or less German in his themes and modes of utterance. He had been in danger of being swallowed up in the great maelstrom of German music; but he saw his peril in time and steered back into the Norwegian branch of the ocean. He had been somewhat timid, but Nordraak's courage and enthusiasm proved contagious. He now dared to be himself and Norse. If he was proud of being a Norwegian by birth, why should he be ashamed to be Norwegian in his music? He wrote his four "Humoresken," opus 6, dedicated them to Nordraak, and the die was cast. Thenceforth he was free to do as he pleased, and in a short time the germs of individuality that are not absent even in

his first works grew and expanded until they formed a new kind of music differing from the classical German art somewhat as an exotic orchid of the forest differs from our no less beautiful but more regular garden flowers.

There are several ways of fostering national art: by discussion, by creation, and by public performance. Grieg and Nordraak adopted all of these methods. In the winter of 1864-65 they founded at Copenhagen the Euterpe Society, the object of which was to bring forward the works of young Northern composers. With them were associated the opera composer Hornemann and the organist and composer Matthison-Hansen. But the Euterpe lived only a few seasons. In the spring Nordraak left Copenhagen and went to Berlin, while Grieg spent the summer with the Danish author Benjamin Feddersen, in the village Rungsted. The following details are cited from the interview placed on record by the Rev. W. A. Gray, in *The Woman at Home:*

"Whether it was the lovely situation, or the invigorating air which inspired me, I won't pretend to say. At any rate, within eleven days I had composed my sonata for the pianoforte, and very soon after my first sonata for the violin. I took them both to Gade, who was living out at Klampenborg. He glanced through them with satisfaction, nodded, tapped me on the shoulder, and said:

'That's very nice indeed. Now we'll go over them carefully and look into all the seams.'

So we climbed a small steep staircase to Gade's studio, where he sat down at the grand pianoforte and played with absolute inspiration.

I had often been told that, when Gade was inspired, he drank copious draughts of water. That day the Professor emptied four large water-bottles.

Gade, however, wasn't always so good-humoured. When, for example, I brought him some time afterwards the score of my overture 'In Autumn,' he shook his head: