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ESSAYS ON SCANDINAVIAN LITERATURE

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ESSAYS ON SCANDINAVIAN LITERATURE

BY
HJALMAR HJORTH BOYESEN

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PREFACE

Some twenty years ago the ambition seized me to write a History of Scandinavian Literature. I scarcely realized then what an enormous amount of reading would be required to equip me for this task. My studies naturally led me much beyond the scope of my original intention. There was a fascination in the work which lured me perpetually on, and made me explore with a constantly increasing zest the great literary personalities of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. Thus my chapter on Henrik Ibsen grew into a book of three hundred and seventeen pages, which was published a year ago, and must be regarded as supplementary to the present volume. The chapter on Björnstjerne Björnson was in danger of expanding to similar proportions, and only the most heroic condensation saved it from challenging criticism as an independent work. As regards Norway and Denmark, I have endeavored to select all the weightiest and most representative names. The Swedish authors Johan Ludvig Runeberg, Mrs. Edgren, and August Strindberg, and the Dane Oehlenschlaeger, necessity has compelled me to reserve for a future volume.

COLUMBIA COLLEGE, NEW YORK,

February, 1895.

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BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSON

I

Björnstjerne Björnson is the first Norwegian poet who can in any sense be called national. The national genius, with its limitations as well as its virtues, has found its living embodiment in him. Whenever he opens his mouth it is as if the nation itself were speaking. If he writes a little song, hardly a year elapses before its phrases have passed into the common speech of the people; composers compete for the honor of interpreting it in simple, Norse-sounding melodies, which gradually work their way from the drawing-room to the kitchen, the street, and thence out over the wide fields and highlands of Norway. His tales, romances, and dramas express collectively the supreme result of the nation's experience, so that no one to-day can view Norwegian life or Norwegian history except through their medium. The bitterest opponent of the poet (for like every strong personality he has many enemies) is thus no less his debtor than his warmest admirer. His speech has stamped itself upon the very language and given it a new ring, a deeper resonance. His thought fills the air, and has become the unconscious property of all who have [Pg 4] grown to manhood and womanhood since the day when his titanic form first loomed up on the horizon of the North. It is not only as their first and greatest poet that the Norsemen love and hate him, but also as a civilizer in the widest sense. But like Kadmus, in Greek myth, he has not only brought with him letters, but also the dragon-teeth of strife, which it is to be hoped will not sprout forth in armed men.

A man's ancestry and environment, no doubt, account in a superficial manner for his appearance and mental characteristics. Having the man, we are able to trace the germs of his being in the past of his race and his country; but, with all our science we have not yet acquired the ingenuity to predict the man—to deduce him *a priori* from the tangle of determining causes which enveloped his birth. It seems beautifully appropriate in the Elder Edda that the god-descended hero Helge the Völsung should be born amid gloom and terror in a storm which shakes the house, while the Norns—the goddesses of fate—proclaim in the tempest his tempestuous career. Equally satisfactory it appears to have the modern champion of Norway—the typical modern Norseman—born on the bleak and wild Dovre Mountain,[1] where there is winter eight months of the year and cold weather during the remaining four. The parish of Kvikne, in Oesterdalen, where his father, [Pg 5] the Reverend Peder Björnson, held a living, had a bad reputation on account of the unruly ferocity and brutal violence of the inhabitants. One of the Reverend Peder Björnson's recent predecessors never went into his pulpit, unarmed; and another fled for his life. The peasants were not slow in intimating to the new pastor that they meant to have him mind his own business and conform to the manners and customs of the parish; but there they reckoned without their host. The reverend gentleman made short work of the opposition. He enforced the new law of compulsory education without heeding its unpopularity; and when the champion fighter of the valley came as the peasants' spokesman to take him to task in summary fashion, he found himself, before he was aware of it, at the bottom of the stairs, where he picked himself up wonderingly and promptly took to his heels.

[1] December 8, 1832.

During the winter the snow reached up to the second-story windows of the parsonage; and the servants had to tunnel their way to the storehouse and the stables. The cold was so intense that the little Björnstjerne thought twice before touching a door knob, as his fingers were liable to stick to the metal. When he was six years old, however, his father was transferred to Romsdal, which is, indeed, a wild and grandly picturesque region; but far less desolate than Dovre. "It lies,"

says Björnson, "broad—bosomed between two confluent fjords, with a green mountain above, cataracts and homesteads on the opposite shore, waving meadows and activity in the bottom of the valley; and all the way out toward the ocean, mountains with headland upon headland running out into the fjord and a large farm upon each." [Pg 6]

The feeling of terror, the crushing sense of guilt which Björnson has so strikingly portrayed in the first chapters of "In God's Way," were familiar to his own childhood. In every life, as in every race, the God of fear precedes the God of love. And in Northern Norway, where nature seems so tremendous and man so insignificant, no boy escapes these phantoms of dread which clutch him with icy fingers. But as a counterbalancing force in the young Björnson, we have his confidence in the strength and good sense of his gigantic father, who could thrash the strongest champion in the parish. He used to stand in the evening on the beach "and gaze at the play of the sunshine upon fjord and mountain, until he wept, as if he had done something wrong. Now he would suddenly stop in this or that valley, while running on skees, and stand spell-bound by its beauty and a longing which he could not comprehend, but which was so great that in the midst of the highest joy he was keenly conscious of a sense of confinement and sorrow."[2] "We catch a glimpse in these childish memories," says Mr. Nordahl Rolfsen, "of the remarkable character, we are about to depict: Being the son of a giant, he is ever ready to strike out with a heavy hand, when he thinks that anyone is encroaching upon what he deems the right. But this same pugnacious man, whom it is so hard to overcome, can be overwhelmed by an emotion and surrender himself to it with his whole being." [Pg 7]

[2] Nordahl Rolfsen: Norske Digtere, pp. 450, 451.

At the age of twelve Björnson was sent to the Latin school at Molde, where, however, his progress was not encouraging. He was one of those thoroughly healthy and headstrong boys who are the despair of ambitious mothers, and whom fathers (when the futility of educational chastisement has been finally proved) are apt to regard with a resigned and half-humorous regret. His dislike of books was instinctive, hearty, and uncompromising. His strong, half-savage boy-nature could brook no restraints, and looked longingly homeward to the wide mountain plains, the foaming rivers where the trout leaped in the summer night, and the calm fjord where you might drift blissfully along, as it were, suspended in the midst of the vast, blue, ethereal space. And when the summer vacation came, with its glorious freedom and irresponsibility, he would roam at his own sweet will through forest and field, until hunger and fatigue forced him to return to his father's parsonage.

After several years of steadily unsuccessful study, Björnson at last passed the so-called *examen artium*, which admitted him to the University of Christiania. He was now a youth of large, almost athletic frame, with a handsome, striking face, and a pair of blue eyes which no one is apt to forget who has ever looked into them. There was a certain grand simplicity and *naïveté* in his manner, and an exuberance of animal spirits which must have made him an object of curious interest among his town-bred fellow-students. But his University career was of brief duration. All the dimly fermenting powers of his rich nature were now beginning to clarify, the consciousness of his calling began to assert itself, and the demand for expression became imperative. His literary *début* was an historic drama entitled "Valborg," which was accepted for representation by the directors of the Christiania Theatre, and procured for its author a free ticket to all theatrical performances; it was, however, never brought on the stage, as Björnson, having had his eyes opened to its defects, withdrew it of his own accord. [Pg 8]

At this time the Norwegian stage was almost entirely in the hands of the Danes, and all the more prominent actors were of Danish birth. Theatrical managers drew freely on the dramatic treasures of Danish literature, and occasionally, to replenish the exchequer, reproduced a French comedy or farce, whose epigrammatic pith and vigor were more than half-spoiled in the translation. The drama was as yet an exotic in Norway; it had no root in the national soil, and could accordingly in no respect represent the nation's own struggles and aspirations. The critics themselves, no doubt, looked upon it merely as a form of amusement, a thing to be wondered and stared at, and to be dismissed from the mind as soon as the curtain dropped. Björnson, whose patriotic soul could not endure the thought of this abject foreign dependence, ascribed all the existing abuses to the predominance of the Danish element, and in a series of vehement articles attacked the Danish actors, managers, and all who were in any way responsible for the unworthy condition of the national stage. In return he reaped, as might have been expected, an abundant harvest of abuse, but the discussion he had provoked furnished food for reflection, and the rapid development of the Norwegian drama during the next decade is, no doubt, largely traceable to his influence. [Pg 9]

The liberty for which he had yearned so long, Björnson found at the International Students' Reunion of 1856. Then the students of the Norwegian and Danish Universities met in Upsala, where they were received with grand festivities by their Swedish brethren. Here the poet caught the first glimpse of a greater and freer life than moved within the narrow horizon of the Norwegian capital. This gay and careless student-life, this cheerful abandonment of all the artificial shackles which burden one's feet in their daily walk through a bureaucratic society, the temporary freedom which allows one without offence to toast a prince and hug a count to one's bosom—all this had its influence upon Björnson's sensitive nature; it filled his soul with a happy intoxication and with confidence in his own strength. And having once tasted a life like this he could no more return to what he had left behind him. [Pg 10]

The next winter we find him in Copenhagen, laboring with an intensity of creative ardor which he

had never known before. His striking appearance, the pithy terseness of his speech, and a certain *naïve* self-assertion and impatience of social restraints made him a notable figure in the polite and somewhat effeminate society of the Danish capital. There was a general expectation at that time that a great poet was to come, and although Björnson had as yet published nothing to justify the expectation, he found the public of Copenhagen ready to recognize in him the man who was to rouse the North from its long intellectual torpor, and usher in a new era in its literature. It is needless to say that he did not discourage this belief, for he himself fervently believed that he would before long justify it. The first proof of his strength he gave in the tale "Synnöve Solbakken" (Synnöve Sunny-Hill), which he published in an illustrated weekly, and afterward in book-form. It is a very unpretending little story, idyllic in tone, but realistic in its coloring, and redolent of the pine and spruce and birch of the Norwegian highlands.

It had been the fashion in Norway since the nation regained its independence to interest one's [Pg 11]
self in a lofty, condescending way in the life of the peasantry. A few well-meaning persons, like the poet Wergeland, had labored zealously for their enlightenment and the improvement of their economic condition; but, except in the case of such single individuals, no real and vital sympathy and fellow-feeling had ever existed between the upper and the lower strata of Norwegian society. And as long as the fellow-feeling is wanting, this zeal for enlightenment, however laudable its motive, is not apt to produce lasting results. The peasants view with distrust and suspicion whatever comes to them from their social superiors, and the so-called "useful books," which were scattered broadcast over the land, were of a tediously didactic character, and, moreover, hardly adapted to the comprehension of those to whom they were ostensibly addressed. Wergeland himself, with all his self-sacrificing ardor, had but a vague conception of the real needs of the people, and, as far as results were concerned, wasted much of his valuable life in his efforts to improve, edify and instruct them. It hardly occurred to him that the culture of which he and his colleagues were the representatives was itself a foreign importation, and could not by any violent process be ingrafted upon the national trunk, which drew its strength from centuries of national life, history, and tradition. That this peasantry, whom the *bourgeoisie* and the aristocracy of
culture had been wont to regard with half-pitying condescension, were the real representatives of [Pg 12]
the Norse nation; that they had preserved through long years of tyranny and foreign oppression the historic characteristics of their Norse forefathers, while the upper classes had gone in search of strange gods, and bowed their necks to the foreign yoke; that in their veins the old strong saga-life was still throbbing with vigorous pulse-beats—this was the lesson which Björnson undertook to teach his countrymen, and a very fruitful lesson it has proved to be. It has inspired the people with renewed courage, it has turned the national life into fresh channels, and it has revolutionized national politics.

To be sure all this was not the result of the idyllic little tale which marked the beginning of his career. But this little tale, although no trace of what the Germans call "tendency" is to be found in it, is still significant as being the poet's first indirect manifesto, and as such distinctly foreshadowing the path which he has since followed.

First, in its purely literary aspect, "Synnöve Solbakken" was strikingly novel. The author did not, as his predecessors had done, view the people from the exalted pedestal of superior culture; not as a subject for benevolent preaching and charitable condescension, but as a concrete phenomenon, whose *raison d'étre* was as absolute and indisputable as that of the *bourgeoisie* or the bureaucracy itself. He depicted their soul-struggles and the incidents of their daily life with a
loving minuteness and a vivid realism hitherto unequalled in the literature of the North. He did [Pg 13]
not, like Auerbach, construct his peasant figures through laborious reflection, nor did he attempt by anxious psychological analysis to initiate the reader into their processes of thought and emotion. He simply depicted them as he saw and knew them. Their feelings and actions have their immediate, self-evident motives in the characters themselves, and the absence of analysis on the author's part gives an increased energy and movement to the story.

Mr. Nordahl Rolfsen relates, *à propos* of the reception which was accorded Björnson's first book, the following amusing anecdote:

"'Synnöve Solbakken' was printed, and its author was anxious to have his friends read it. But not one of them could be prevailed upon. At last a comrade was found who was persuaded to attack it on the promise of a bottle of punch. He entered Björnson's den, got a long pipe which he filled with tobacco, undressed himself completely—for it was a hot day—flung himself on the bed, and began to read. Björnson sat in the sofa, breathless with expectation. Leaf after leaf was turned; not a smile, not a single encouraging word! The young poet had good reason to regard the battle as lost. At last the pipe, the bottle, and the book were finished. Then the merciless Stoic rose and began to dress, and the following little exclamation escaped him: 'That is, the devil take me, the best book I have read in all my life.'" [Pg 14]

Björnson's style was no less novel than his theme. It may or it may not have been consciously modelled after the saga style, to which, however, it bears an obvious resemblance. In his early childhood, while he lived among the peasants, he became familiar with their mode of thought and speech, and it entered into his being, and became his own natural mode of expression. There is in his daily conversation a certain grim directness, and a laconic weightiness, which give an air of importance and authority even to his simplest utterances. This tendency to compression frequently has the effect of obscurity, not because his thought is obscure, but rather because energetic brevity of expression has fallen into disuse, and even a Norse public, long accustomed to the wordy diffuseness of latter-day bards, have in part lost the faculty to comprehend the genius of their own language. As a Danish critic wittily observed: "Björnson's language is but one

step removed from pantomime."

In 1858 Björnson assumed the directorship of the theatre in Bergen, and there published his second tale, "Arne," in which the same admirable self-restraint, the same implicit confidence in the intelligence of his reader, the same firm-handed decision and vigor in the character-drawing, in fact, all the qualities which delighted the public in "Synnöve Solbakken," were found in an intensified degree.

In the meanwhile, Björnson had also made his *début* as a dramatist. In the year 1858 he had [Pg 15] published two dramas, "Mellem Slagene" (Between the Battles) and "Halte-Hulda" (Limping Hulda) both of which deal with national subjects, taken from the old sagas. As in his tales he had endeavored to concentrate into a few strongly defined types the modern folk-life of the North, so in his dramas the same innate love of his nationality leads him to seek the typical features of his people, as they are revealed in the historic chieftains of the past.

"Between the Battles" is a dramatic episode rather than a drama. During the civil war between King Sverre and King Magnus in the twelfth century, the former visits in disguise a hut upon the mountains where a young warrior, Halvard Gjaela and Inga, his beloved, are living together. The long internecine strife has raised the hand of father against son, and of brother against brother. Halvard sympathizes with Sverre; Inga, who hates the king because he has burned her father's farm, is a partisan of Magnus. In the absence of her lover she goes to the latter's camp and brings back with her a dozen warriors for the purpose of capturing Halvard, and thereby preventing him from joining the enemy. Sverre discovers the warriors, whom she has hidden in the cow-stable, and persuading them that he is a spy for King Magnus sends two of them to his own army for reinforcements. In the meanwhile he reconciles the estranged lovers, makes peace between them and Inga's father, and finally, in the last scene, as his men arrive, is recognized as [Pg 16] the king.

This is, of course, a venerable *coup de théâtre*. Whatever novelty there is in the play must be sought, not in the situations, but in the pithy and laconic dialogue, which has a distinct national coloring. This was not the amiable diffuseness of Oehlenschlaeger, who had hitherto dominated the Norwegian as well as the Danish stage; and yet it did not by any means represent so complete a breach with the traditions of the romantic drama as was claimed by Björnson's admirers. The fresh naturalness and absence of declamation were a gain, no doubt; but there are yet several notes remaining which have the well-known romantic cadence. "Between the Battles," though too slight to be called an achievement, was accepted as a pledge of achievement in future.

Björnson's next drama "Limping Hulda" ("Halte-Hulda") (1858) was a partial fulfilment of this pledge. If it is not high tragedy, in the ancient sense, it is of the stuff that tragedy is made of. Hulda is an impressive stage figure in her demoniac passion and tiger-like tenderness. Though I doubt if Björnson has, in this type, caught the soul of a Norse woman of the saga age, he has come much nearer to catching it than any of his predecessors. If Gudrun Osvif's Daughter, of the Laxdoela Saga, was his model, he has modernized her considerably, and thereby made her more intelligible to modern readers. Like her, Hulda causes the murder of the man she loves; and there [Pg 17] is a fateful spell about her beauty which brings death to whomsoever looks too long upon it. Though ostensibly a saga-drama, the harshness and grim ferocity of that sanguinary period are softened; and a romantic illumination pervades the whole action. A certain lyrical effusiveness in the love passages (which is alien to all Björnson's later works) hints at the influence of the Danish Romanticists, and particularly Oehlenschlaeger.

It would be unfair, perhaps, to take the author to task because this youthful drama exhibits no remarkable subtlety in its conception of character. It contains no really great living figure who stands squarely upon his feet and lingers in the memory. A certain half-rhetorical impulse carries you along; and the external effectiveness of the situations keeps the interest on the alert. For all that "Limping Hulda," like its predecessors and its successors, tended to stimulate powerfully the national spirit, which was then asserting itself in every department of intellectual activity. Thus a national theatre had, by the perseverance and generosity of Ole Bull, been established in his native city, Bergen; and it was almost a matter of course that an effort should be made to identify Björnson with an enterprise which accorded so well with his own aspirations. His connection with the Norwegian Theatre of Bergen was, however, not of long duration, for though your enthusiasm may be ever so great it is a thankless task to act as "artistic director" of a stage in a town which [Pg 18] is neither artistic enough nor large enough to support a playhouse with a higher aim than that of furnishing ephemeral amusement. From Bergen he was called to the editorship of *Aftenbladet* (The Evening Journal), the second political daily of Christiania, and continued there with hot zeal and eloquence his battle for "all that is truly Norse."

But a brief experience sufficed to convince him that daily journalism was not his *forte*. He was and is too indiscreet, precipitate, credulous, and inconsiderately generous to be a successful editor. If a paper could be conducted on purely altruistic principles, and without reference to profits, there would be no man fitter to occupy an editorial chair. For as an inspiring force, as a radiating focus of influence, his equal is not to be encountered "in seven kingdoms round." However, this inspiring force could reach a far larger public through published books than through the columns of a newspaper. It was therefore by no means in a regretful frame of mind that he descended from the editorial tripod, and in the spring of 1860 started for Italy. Previous to his departure he published, through the famous house of Gyldendal, in Copenhagen, a volume which, it is no exaggeration to say, has become a classic of Norwegian literature. It bears the

modest title "Smaa-stykker" (Small Pieces), but it contains, in spite of its unpretentiousness, some of Björnson's noblest work. I need only mention the masterly tale "The Father," with its [Pg 19] sobriety and serene strength. I know but one other instance[3] of so great tragedy, told in so few and simple words. "Arne," "En Glad Gut" (A Happy Boy), and the amusing dialect story, "Ei Faarleg Friing" (A Dangerous Wooing), also belong to this delightful collection. These little masterpieces of concise story-telling have been included in the popular two-volume edition of "Fortällinger," which contains also "The Fisher-maiden" (1867-68), the exquisite story, "The Bridal March" (1872), originally written as text to three of Tidemand's paintings, and a vigorous bit of disguised autobiography, "Blakken," of which not the author but a horse is the ostensible hero.

[3] Austin Dobson's poem, "The Cradle."

The descriptive name for all these tales, except the last, is idyl. It was, indeed, the period when all Europe (outside the British empire) was viewing the hardy sons of the soil through poetic spectacles. In Germany Auerbach had, in his "Black Forest Village Tales" (1843, 1853, 1854), discarded the healthful but unflattering realism of Jeremias Gotthelf (1797-1854), and chosen, with a half-didactic purpose, to contrast the peasant's honest rudeness and straightforwardness with the refined sophistication and hypocrisy of the higher classes. George Sand, with her beautiful Utopian genius, poured forth a torrent of rural narrative of a crystalline limpidity ("Mouny Robin," "La Mare au Diable," "La Petite Fadette," etc., 1841-1849), which is as far [Pg 20] removed from the turbid stream of Balzac ("Les Paysans") and Zola ("La Terre"), as Paradise is from the Inferno. There is an echo of Rousseau's gospel of nature in all these tales, and the same optimistic delusion regarding "the people" for which the eighteenth century paid so dearly. The painters likewise caught the tendency, and with the same thorough-going conscientiousness as their brethren of the quill, disguised coarseness as strength, bluntness as honesty, churlishness as dignity. What an idyllic sweetness there is, for instance, in Tidemand's scenes of Norwegian peasant life! What a *spirituelle* and movingly sentimental note in the corresponding German scenes of Knaus and Hübner, and, *longo intervallo*, Meyerheim and Meyer von Bremen. Not a breath of the broad humor of Teniers and Van Ostade in these masters; scarcely a hint of the robust animality and clownish jollity with which the clear-sighted Dutchmen endowed their rural revellers. Though pictorial art has not, outside of Russia (where the great and unrivalled Riepin paints the peasant with the brush as remorselessly as Tolstoï and Dostoyefski with the pen), kept pace with the realistic movement in literature, yet there is no lack of evidence that the rose-colored tinge is vanishing even from the painter's spectacles; and such uncompromising veracity as that of Millet and Courbet, which the past generation despised, is now hailed with acclaim in [Pg 21] such masters as Bastien-Lepage, Dagnan-Bouveret, and the Scandinavians, Kristian Krog and Anders Zorn.

Björnson is, however, temperamentally averse to that modern naturalism which insists upon a minute fidelity to fact without reference to artistic values. His large and spacious mind has a Southern exposure, and has all "its windows thrown wide open to the sun." A sturdy optimism, which is prone to believe good of all men, unless they happen to be his political antagonists, inclines him to overlook what does not fit into his own scheme of existence. And yet no one can say that, as presentations of Norwegian peasant life, "Synnöve," "Arne," "The Bridal March," etc., are untrue, though, indeed, one could well imagine pictures in very much sombrer colors which might lay a valider claim to veracity. Kielland's "Laboring People," and Kristian Elster's "A Walk to the Cross" and "Kjeld Horge," give the reverse of the medal of which Björnson exhibits the obverse. These authors were never in any way identified with "the people," and could not help being struck with many of the rude and unbeautiful phases of rural existence; while Björnson, who sprang directly from the peasantry, had the pride and intelligence of kinship, and was not yet lifted far enough above the life he depicted to have acquired the cultivated man's sense of condescension and patronizing benevolence. He was but one generation removed from the soil; and he looked with a strong natural sympathy and affectionate predilection upon whatever [Pg 22] reminded him of this origin. If he had been a peasant, however, he could never have become the wonderful chronicler that he is. It is the elevation, slight though it be, which enables him to survey the fields in which his fathers toiled and suffered. Or, to quote Mr. Rolfsen: "Björnson is the son of a clergyman; he has never himself personally experienced the peasant's daily toil and narrow parochial vision. He has felt the power of the mountains over his mind, and been filled with longing, as a grand emotion, but the contractedness of the spiritual horizon has not tormented him. He has not to take that into account when he writes. During the tedious school-days, his beautiful Romsdal valley lay waiting for him, beckoning him home at every vacation—always alluring and radiant, with an idyllic shimmer."

Hence, no doubt, his sunny poetic vision which unconsciously idealizes. Just as in daily intercourse he displays a positive genius for drawing out what is good in a man, and brushes away as of small account what does not accord with his own conception of him, nay, in a measure, forces him to be as he believes him to be, so every character in these early tales seems to bask in the genial glow of his optimism. The farm Solbakken (Sunny Hill) lies on a high elevation, where the sun shines from its rise to its setting, and both Synnöve and her parents walk about in this still and warm illumination. They are all good, estimable people, and their [Pg 23] gentle piety, without any tinge of fanaticism, invests them with a quiet dignity. The sterner and hardier folk at Granliden (Pine Glen) have a rugged honesty and straightforwardness which, in connection with their pithy and laconic speech, makes them less genial, but no less typically Norse. They have a distinct atmosphere and spinal columns that keep them erect, organic, and significant. Even reprehensible characters like Aslak and Nils Tailor (in "Arne") have a certain

claim upon our sympathy, the former as a helpless victim of circumstance, the latter as a suppressed and perverted genius.

In the spring of 1860 Björnson went abroad and devoted three years to foreign travel, spending the greater part of his time in Italy. From Rome he sent home the historical drama "King Sverre" (1861), which is one of his weakest productions. It is written in blank verse, with occasional rhymes in the more impressive passages. Of dramatic interest in the ordinary sense, there is but little. It is a series of more or less animated scenes, from the period of the great civil war (1130-1240), connected by the personality of Sverre. Under the mask, however, of mediæval history, the author preaches a political sermon to his own contemporaries. Sverre, as the champion of the common people against the tribal aristocracy, and the wily Bishop Nicholas as the representative of the latter become, as it were, permanent forces, which have continued their battle to the [Pg 24] present day. There can be no doubt that Björnson, whose sympathies are strongly democratic, permitted the debate between the two to become needlessly didactic, and strained historical verisimilitude by veiled allusions to contemporaneous conditions. Greatly superior is his next drama, "Sigurd Slembe"[4] (1862).

[4] An English version of "Sigurd Slembe" has been published by William Morton Payne (Boston, 1888).

The story of the brave and able pretender, Sigurd Slembe, in his struggle with the vain and mean-spirited king, Harold Gille, is the theme of the dramatic trilogy. Björnson attempts to give the spiritual development of Sigurd from the moment he becomes acquainted with his royal birth until his final destruction. From a frank and generous youth, who is confident that he is born for something great, he is driven by the treachery, cruelty, and deceit of his brother, the king, into the position of a desperate outlaw and guerilla. The very first scene, in the church of St. Olaf, where the boy confides to the saint, in a tone of *bonne camaraderie*, his joy at having conquered, in wrestling, the greatest champion in the land, gives one the key-note to his character:

"Now only listen to me, saintly Olaf!
To-day I whipped young Beintein! Beintein was
The strongest man in Norway. Now am I!
Now I can walk from Lindesnäs and on,
Up to the northern boundary of the snow, [Pg 25]
For no one step aside or lift my hat.
There where I am, no man hath leave to fight,
To make a tumult, threaten, or to swear—
Peace everywhere! And he who wrong hath suffered
Shall justice find, until the laws shall sing.
And as before the great have whipped the small,
So will I help the small to whip the great.
Now I can offer counsel at the Thing,
Now to the king's board I can boldly walk
And sit beside him, saying 'Here am I!'"

The exultation in victory which speaks in every line of this opening monologue marks the man who, in spite of the obscurity of his origin, feels his right to be first, and who, in this victory, celebrates the attainment of his birthright. Equally luminous by way of characterization is his exclamation to St. Olaf when he hears that he is King Magnus Barefoot's son:

"Then we are kinsmen, Olaf, you and I!"

According to Norwegian law at that time, every son of a king was entitled to his share of the kingdom, and Sigurd's first impulse is to go straight to Harold Gille and demand his right. His friend Koll Saebjörnson persuades him, however, to abandon this hopeless adventure, and gives him a ship with which he sails to the Orient, takes part in many wars, and gains experience and martial renown.

The second part of the trilogy deals with Sigurd's sojourn at the Orkneys, where he interferes in [Pg 26] the quarrel between the Earls Harold and Paul. The atmosphere of suspicion, insecurity, and gloom which hangs like a portentous cloud over these scenes is the very same which blows toward us from the pages of the sagas. Björnson has gazed deeply into the heart of Northern paganism, and has here reproduced the heroic anarchy which was a necessary result of the code permitting the individual to avenge his own wrongs. The two awful women, Helga and Frakark, the mother and the aunt of the earls, are types which are constantly met with in the saga. It is a long-recognized fact that women, under lawless conditions, develop the wildest extremes of ambition, avarice, and blood-thirstiness, and taunt the men with their weak scruples. These two furies of the Orkneys plot murder with an infernal coolness, which makes Lady Macbeth a kind-hearted woman by comparison. They recognize in Sigurd a man born for leadership; determine to use him for the furtherance of their plans, and to get rid of him, by fair means or foul, when he shall have accomplished his task. But Sigurd is too experienced a chieftain to walk into this trap. While appearing to acquiesce, he plays for stakes of his own, but in the end abandons all in disgust at the death of Earl Harold, who intentionally puts on the poisoned shirt, prepared for his brother. There is no great and monumental scene in this part which engraves itself deeply upon the memory. The love scenes with Audhild, the young cousin of the earls, are incidental and [Pg 27] episodical, and exert no considerable influence either upon Sigurd's character or upon the development of the intrigue. Historically they are well and realistically conceived; but

dramatically they are not strong. Another criticism, which has already been made by the Danish critic, Georg Brandes, refers to an offence against this very historical sense which is usually so vivid in Björnson. When Frakark, the Lady Macbeth of the play, remarks, "I am far from feeling sure of the individual mortality so much preached of; but there is an immortality of which I am sure; it is that of the race," she makes an intellectual somersault from the twelfth century into the nineteenth, and never gets back firmly on her pagan feet again. As Brandes wittily observes: "People who talk like that do not torture their enemy to death; they backbite him."

The third part opens with Sigurd's appearance at court, where he reveals his origin and asks for his share of the kingdom. The king is not disinclined to grant his request, but is overruled by his councillors, who profit by his weakness and rule in his name. They fear this man of many battles, with the mark of kingship on his brow; and they determine to murder him. But Sigurd escapes from prison, and, holding the king responsible for the treachery, kills him. From this time forth he is an outlaw, hunted over field and fell, and roaming with untold sufferings through the mountains and wildernesses. There he meets a Finnish maiden who loves him, reveals his fate to [Pg 28] him, and implores him to abandon his ambition and dwell among her people. These scenes amid the eternal wastes of snow are perhaps the most striking in the trilogy and most abounding in exquisite poetic thought. Sigurd hastens hence to his doom at the battle of Holmengra, where he is defeated, and, with fiendish atrocity, slowly tortured to death. The rather lyrical monologue preceding his death, in which he bids farewell to life and calmly adjusts his gaze to eternity, is very beautiful, but, historically, a trifle out of tune. Barring these occasional lapses from the key, the trilogy of "Sigurd Slembe" is a noble work.

A respectful, and in part enthusiastic, reception had been accorded to Björnson's early plays. But his first dramatic triumph he celebrated at the performance of "Mary Stuart in Scotland." Externally this is the most effective of his plays. The dialogue is often brilliant, and bristles with telling points. It is eminently "actable," presenting striking tableaus and situations. Behind the author we catch a glimpse of the practical stage-manager who knows how a scene will look on the boards and how a speech will sound—who can surmise with tolerable accuracy how they will affect a first-night audience.

"Mary Stuart" is theatrically no less than dramatically conceived. Theatrically it is far superior to Swinburne's "Chastelard" (not to speak of his interminable musical verbiage in "Bothwell") but it [Pg 29] is paler, colder, and poetically inferior. The voluptuous warmth and wealth of color, the exquisite levity, the *débonnaire* grace of the Swinburnian drama we seek in vain. Björnson is vigorous, but he is not subtile. Mere feline amorousness, such as Swinburne so inimitably portrays, he would disdain to deal with if even he could. Such a bit of intricate self-characterization as the English poet puts into the Queen's mouth in the first scene with Chastelard, in the third act, lies utterly beyond the range of the sturdier Norseman.

> *Queen*: "Nay, dear, I have
> No tears in me; I never shall weep much,
> I think, in all my life: I have wept for wrath
> Sometimes, and for mere pain, but for love's pity
> I cannot weep at all. I would to God
> You loved me less: I give you all I can
> For all this love of yours, and yet I am sure
> I shall live out the sorrow of your death
> And be glad afterwards. You know I am sorry.
> I should weep now; forgive me for your part.
> God made me hard, I think. Alas! you see
> I had fain been other than I am."

Add to this the beautifully illuminating threat, "I shall be deadly to you," uttered in the midst of amorous cooings and murmurings, and we catch a glimpse of the demoniac depth of this woman's nature. Björnson's "Mary Stuart" weeps more than once; nay, she says to Bothwell, when he has forcibly abducted her to his castle:

> "This is my first prayer to you,
> That I may weep."

[Pg 30]

Quite in the same key is her exclamation (in the same scene) in response to Bothwell's reference to her son:

"My son, my lovely boy! Oh, God, now he lies sleeping in his little white bed, and does not know how his mother is battling for his sake."

Schiller, whose conception of womankind was as honestly single and respectful as that of Björnson, had set a notable precedent in representing Mary Stuart as a martyr of a lost cause. The psychological antitheses of her character, her softness and loving surrender, and her treachery and cruelty—he left out of account.

Without troubling himself greatly about her guilt, which, though with many palliating circumstances, he admitted, he undertook to exemplify in her the beauty and exaltation of noble suffering. His Mary (which has always been a favorite with tragic actresses) is in my opinion as devoid of that insinuating, sense-compelling charm which alone can account for this extraordinary woman's career as is the heroine of Björnson's play. In fact Björnson's Mary lies

half-way between the amorous young tigress of Swinburne and the statuesque martyr of Schiller. She is less intricately feminine than the former, and more so than the latter. But she is yet a long way removed from her historical original, who must have been a strong and full-blooded character, with just that touch of mystery which nature always wears to whomsoever gazes deeply upon her. That subtile intercoiling of antagonistic traits, which in a man could never [Pg 31] coexist, is to be found in many historic women of the Renaissance—exquisite, dangerous creatures, half-doves, half-serpents, half-Clytemnestra, half-Venus, whose full-throbbing passion now made them soft and tender, over-brimming with loveliness, now fierce and imperious, their outraged pride revelling in vengeance and blood. If Björnson could have fathomed the depth and complexity of the historical Mary Stuart to the extent that Swinburne has done, he would, no doubt, also have devised a more effective conclusion to his play. There is no dramatic climax, far less a tragic one, in the dethronement of Mary, and the proclamation by John Knox, which is chiefly an assertion of popular sovereignty, and the triumph of the Presbyterian Church. The declaration of the final chorus, that

> "Evil shall be routed
> And weakness must follow,
> The might of truth shall pierce
> To the last retreat of gloom,"

seems to me rather to muddle than to clarify the situation. There is a wavering and uncertain sound in it which seems inappropriate to a triumphant strain, when the organist naturally turns on the full force of his organ. If (as is obvious) the Queen represents the evil, or at least the weakness, which has been routed, it would appear that she ought to have been painted in quite different colors. [Pg 32]

Björnson's next dramatic venture, which rejoices to this day in an unabated popularity, was the two-act comedy, "The Newly Married" (*De Nygifte*). Goethe once made the remark that he was not a good dramatist, because his nature was too conciliatory. Without intending disparagement, I am inclined to apply the same judgment to Björnson. His sunny optimism shrinks from irreconcilable conflicts and insoluble problems; and in his desire to reconcile and solve, he occasionally is in danger of wrenching his characters out of drawing and muddling their motives. Half a dozen critics have already called attention to the ambiguity of Mathilde's position and intentions in "The Newly Married." That she loves Axel, the husband, is clear; and the probability is that she meant to avenge herself upon him for having before his marriage used her as a decoy, when the real object of his attention was her friend Laura. But if such was her object, she lacked the strength of mind and hardness of heart to carry it out, and in the end she becomes a benevolent providence, who labors for the reconciliation of the estranged couple. She proves too noble for the ignoble *rôle* she had undertaken. Instead of wrecking the marriage, she sacrifices herself upon the altar of friendship. To that there can, of course, be no objection; but in that case the process of her mental change ought to have been clearly shown. In Ibsen's "Rosmersholm," Rebecca West, occupying a somewhat similar position, is subject to the same ennobling of [Pg 33] motive; but the whole drama hinges upon her moral evolution, and nothing is left to inference.

The situation in "The Newly Married" is an extremely delicate one, and required delicate handling. Axel, a young and gifted lawyer, has married Laura, the daughter of a high and wealthy official, who prides himself on his family dignity and connections. Laura, being an only child, has been petted and spoiled since her birth, and is but a grown-up little girl, with no conception of her matrimonial obligations. She subordinates her relation to her husband to that to her parents, and exasperates the former by her bland and obstinate immaturity. At last, being able to bear it no longer, he compels her to leave the home of her parents, where they have hitherto been living, and establishes himself in a distant town. Mathilde, Laura's friend, accompanies them, though it is difficult to conjecture in what capacity; and publishes an anonymous novel, in which she enlightens the young wife regarding the probable results of her conduct. She thrusts a lamp into the dusk of her soul and frightens her by the things she shows her. She also, by arousing her jealousy, leads her out of childhood, with its veiled vision and happy ignorance, into womanhood, with its unflinching recognition of the realities that were hidden from the child. And thus she paves the way for the reconciliation which takes place in the presence of the old people, who pay their daughter a visit *en route* for Italy. Mathilde, having accomplished her mission, [Pg 34] acknowledges the authorship of the anonymous novel, and is now content to leave husband and wife in the confidence that they will work out their own salvation.

A mere skeleton of this simple plot (which barely hints at the real problem) can, of course, give no conception of the charm, the color, and the wonderful poetic afflatus of this exquisite little play. It may be well enough to say that such a situation is far-fetched and not very typical—that outside of "The Heavenly Twins," *et id omne genus*, wives who insist upon remaining maidens are not very frequent; but, in spite of this drawback, the vividness and emotional force of the dialogue and the beautiful characterization (particularly of the old governor and his wife) set certain sweet chords in vibration, and carry the play to a triumphant issue.

As a school-boy I witnessed the first performance of "The Newly Married," at the Christiania Theatre (1865), (as, indeed, of all the Björnsonian dramas up to 1869); and I yet remember my surprise when, instead of mail-clad Norse warriors, carousing in a sooty, log-built hall, the curtain rose upon a modern interior, in which a fashionably attired young lady kissed a frock-coated old gentleman. It was a dire disappointment to me and my comrade, who had come thirsting for gore. But how completely the poet conquered us! Each phrase seemed to woo our

reluctant ears, and the pulse of life that beat in the characters and carried along the action awakened in us a delighted recognition. Truth to tell, we had but the very vaguest idea of what was the *prima causa malorum*; but for all that, with the rest of the audience, we were immensely gratified that the upshot of it all was so satisfactory. [Pg 35]

During the years 1865-67 Björnson occupied the position of artistic director of the Christiania Theatre, and edited the illustrated weekly paper, *Norsk Folkeblad* ("The Norwegian People's Journal"). As the champion of Norwegian nationality in literature, and on the stage, he unfolded an amazing activity. In 1870 he published "Arnljot Gelline," a lyrical epic, relating, in a series of poems of irregular metres, the story of the pagan marauder of that name, and his conversion to Christianity by King Olaf the Saint. Never has he found a more daring and tremendous expression for the spirit of old Norse paganism than in this powerful but somewhat chaotic poem. Never has anyone gazed more deeply into the ferocious heart of the primitive, predatory man, whose free, wild soul had not yet been tamed by social obligations and the scourge of the law. In the same year (1870) was published the now classical collection of "Poems and Songs" (*Digte og Sange*), which, it is no exaggeration to say, marks a new era in the Norwegian lyric. Among Björnson's predecessors there are but two lyrists of the first order, viz., Wergeland and Welhaven. The former was magnificently profuse and chaotic, abounding in verve and daring [Pg 36] imagery, but withal high-sounding, declamatory, and, at his worst, bombastic. There is a reminiscence in him of Klopstock's inflated rhetoric; and a certain dithyrambic ecstasy—a strained, high-keyed aria-style which sometimes breaks into falsetto. His great rival, Welhaven, was soberer, clearer, more gravely melodious. He sang in beautiful, tempered strains, along the middle octaves, never ranging high into the treble or deep into the base. There is a certain Tennysonian sweetness, artistic self-restraint, and plastic simplicity in his lyrics; just as there is in Wergeland's reformatory ardor, his noble rage, and his piling up of worlds, æons, and eternities a striking kinship to Shelley. But both these poets, though their patriotism was strong, were intellectually Europeans, rather than Norwegians. The roots of their culture were in the general soil of the century, whose ideas they had absorbed. Their personalities were not sufficiently tinged with the color of nationality to give a distinctly Norse cadence to their voices. Wergeland seems to me like a man who was desperately anxious to acquire a national accent; but somehow never could catch the trick of it. As regards Welhaven, he was less aware of his deficiency (if deficiency it was); but was content to sing of Norse themes in a key of grave, universal beauty. Of the new note that came into the Norwegian lyric with Björnson, I can discover no hint in his predecessors. Such a poem as, for instance, "Nils Finn," with its inimitably [Pg 37] droll refrain—how utterly inconceivable it would be in the mouth of Wergeland or Welhaven! The new quality in it is as unexplainable as the poem itself is untranslatable. It has that inexpressible cadence and inflection of the Norse dialect which you feel (if you have the conditions for recognizing it) in the first word a Norseman addresses to you. It has that wonderful twang of the Hardanger fiddle, and the color and sentiment of the ballads sung and the legendary tales recited around the hearth in a Norwegian homestead during the long winter nights. With Björnson it was in the blood. It was his soul's accent, the dialect of his thought, the cadence of his emotion. And so, also, is the touching minor undertone in the poem, the tragic strain in the half burlesque, which is again so deeply Norwegian. Who that has ever been present at a Norse peasant wedding has failed to be struck with the strangely melancholy strain in the merriest dances? And in Landstad's collection of "Norwegian Ballads" there is the same blending of humor and pathos in such genuine folk-songs as *Truls med bogin, Mindre Alf*, and scores of others. To this day I cannot read "Nils Finn," humorous though it is, without an almost painful emotion. All Norway, with a host of precious memories, rises out of the mist of the past at the very first verse:

> "Og vetli Nils Finn skuldi ut at gå,
> Han fek inki ski 'i tel at hanga på
> —'Dat var ilt' sa'd 'uppundir.'"

[Pg 38]

Neither Wergeland nor Welhaven nor any other poet has with all his rapturous description of fjord, valley, and mountain, this power to conjure up the very soul of the Norseland. The purely juvenile rhymes of Björnson, such as *Killebukken, Lokkeleg* and *Haren og Raeven* ("The Hare and the Fox"), are significant because of the masterly security with which they strike the national key and keep it. Not a word is there that rings false. And with what an exquisite tenderness the elegaic ballad strain is rendered in *Venevil* and "Hidden Love" (*Dulgt Kaerlighed*), and the playful in the deliciously girlish roguery of *Vidste du bare* ("If you only knew"), and the bold dash and young wantonness of "Marit's Song!"

It seems to me that every Norseman's life, whether he is willing to acknowledge it or not, has been made richer and more beautiful by this precious volume. It contains a legacy to the Norwegian people which can never grow old. If Björnson had written nothing else, he would still be the first poet of Norway. How brazen, hollow, and bombastic sound the patriotic lyrics of Bjerregaard Johan Storm Munch, S. O. Wolff, etc., which are yet sung at festal gatherings, by the side of Björnson's "Yes, we Love our Native Country," and "I will Guard Thee, my Land!" There is the brassy blare of challenging trumpets in the former; they defy all creation, and make a vast deal of impotent and unprofitable noise about "The roaring northern main," "The ancient Norway's rocky fastness," "Liberty's temple in Norroway's valleys," and "Norway's lion, whose [Pg 39] axe doth threaten him who dares break the Northland's peace."

Not a suggestion of this juvenile braggadocio is there to be found in Björnson. Calm, strong, and nobly aglow with love of country, he has no need of going into paroxysms in order to prove his sincerity. To those who regard the declamatory note as indispensable to a national hymn (as we

have it, for instance, in "Hail, Columbia," and "The Star-spangled Banner") the low key in which Björnson's songs are pitched will no doubt appear as a blemish. But it is their very homeliness in connection with the deep, full-throbbing emotion which beats in each forceful phrase—it is this, I fancy, which has made them the common property of the whole people, and thus in the truest sense national. I could never tell why my heart gives a leap at the sound of the simple verse:

"Yes, we love this land of ours,
Rising from the foam,
Rugged, furrowed, weather-beaten,
With its thousand homes."

Kjerulf's glorious music is, no doubt, in a measure accountable for it; but even apart from that, there is a strangely moving power in the words. The poem, as such, is by no means faultless. It is easy to pick flaws in it. The transition from the fifth and sixth lines of the first verse: "Love it, love it, and think of our father and mother," to the seventh and eighth, "And the saga night which [Pg 40] makes dreams to descend upon our earth," is unwarrantably forced and abrupt. And yet who would wish it changed? It may be admitted that there is no very subtle art in the rude rhyme:

"I will guard thee, my land,
I will build thee, my land,
I will cherish my land in my prayer, in my child!
I will foster its weal,
And its wants I will heal
From the boundary out to the ocean wild;"

but, for all that, it touches a chord in every Norseman's breast, which never fails to vibrate responsively.

As regards Björnson's prosody, I am aware that it is sometimes defective. Measured by the Tennysonian standard it is often needlessly rugged and eccentric. But a poet whose bark carries so heavy a cargo of thought may be forgiven if occasionally it scrapes the bottom. Moreover, the Norwegian tongue has never, as a medium of poetry, been polished and refined to any such elaborate perfection as the English language exhibits in the hands of Swinburne and Tennyson.

The saga-drama, "Sigurd the Crusader," which was also published in 1870, is a work of minor consequence. Its purpose may be stated in the author's own words:

> "'Sigurd the Crusader' is meant to be what is called a 'folk-play.' It is my intention to make several dramatic experiments with grand scenes from the sagas, lifting [Pg 41] them into a strong but not too heavy frame. By a 'folk-play' I mean a play which should appeal to every eye and every stage of culture, to each in its own way, and at the performance of which all, for the time being, would experience the joy of fellow-feeling. The common history of a people is best available for this purpose—nay, it ought dramatically never to be treated otherwise. The treatment must necessarily be simple and the emotions predominant; it should be accompanied with music, and the development should progress in clear groups....
>
> "The old as well as the new historic folk literature will, with its corresponding comic element, as I think, be a great gain to the stage, and will preserve its connection with the people where this has not already been lost—so that it be no longer a mere institution for amusement, and that only to a single class. Unless we take this view of our stage, it will lose its right to be regarded as a national affair, and the best part of its purpose, to unite while it lifts and makes us free, will be gradually assumed by some other agency. Nor shall we ever get actors fit for anything but trifles, unless we abandon our foreign French tendency as a *leading* one and substitute the national needs of our own people in its place."

It would be interesting to note how the poet has attempted to solve a problem so important and so difficult as this. In the first place, we find in "Sigurd the Crusader" not a trace of a didactic purpose beyond that of familiarizing the people with its own history, and this, as he himself admits in the preface just quoted, is merely a secondary consideration. He wishes to make all, irrespective of age, culture, and social station, feel strongly the bond of their common nationality; and, with this in view, he proceeds to unroll to them a panorama of simple but striking situations, [Pg 42] knit together by a plot or story which, without the faintest tinge of sensationalism, appeals to those broadly human and national sympathies which form the common mental basis of Norse ignorance and Norse culture. He seizes the point in the saga where the long-smouldering hostility between the royal brothers, Sigurd the Crusader and Eystein, has broken into full blaze, and traces, in a series of vigorously sketched scenes, the intrigue and counter-intrigue which hurry the action onward toward its logically prepared climax—a mutual reconciliation. The dialogue is pithy, simple, and sententious. Nevertheless the play, as a whole, makes the impression of incompleteness. It is a dramatic sketch rather than a drama. It marks no advance on Björnson's previous work in the same line; but perhaps rather a retrogression.

II

A period is apt to come in the life of every man who is spiritually alive, when his scholastic culture begins to appear insufficient and the traditional premises of existence seem in need of readjustment and revision. This period, with the spiritual crisis which it involves, is likely to occur between the thirtieth and the fortieth meridian. Ibsen was thirty-four years old (1862) when in "The Comedy of Love" he broke with the romanticism of his youth, and began to wrestle with the [Pg 43] problems of contemporary life. Goethe was thirty-seven when, in 1786, he turned his back upon the Storm and Stress, and in Italy sought and gained a new and saner vision of the world. This renewal of the sources which water the roots of his spiritual being becomes an imperative necessity to a man when he has exhausted the sources which tradition supplies. It is terrible to wake up one morning and see one's past life in a new and strange illumination, and the dust of ages lying inch-thick upon one's thoughts. It is distressing to have to pretend that you do not hear the doubt which whispers early and late in your ear, *Vanitas, vanitas, vanitas vanitatum*. Few are those of us who have the courage to face it, to rise up and fight with it, and rout it or be routed by it.

Björnson had up to this time (1870) built solely upon tradition. He had been orthodox, and had exalted childlike peace and faith above doubt and struggle. Phrases indicative of a certain spiritual immaturity are scattered through his early poems. In "The Child in our Soul," he says, for instance: "The greatest man on earth must cherish the child in his soul and listen, amid the thunder, to what it whispers low;" and again: "Everything great that thought has invented sprouted forth in childlike joy; and everything strong, sprung from what is good, obeyed the child's voice." Though in a certain sense that may be true enough, it belongs to the kind of half-truths which by constant repetition grow pernicious and false. The man who at forty assumes the [Pg 44] child's attitude of mere wondering acceptance toward the world and its problems, may, indeed, be a very estimable character; but he will never amount to much. It is the honest doubters, the importunate questioners, the indefatigable fighters who have broken humanity's shackles, and made the world a more comfortable abiding-place to the present generation than it was to the past. There is unquestionably a strain of Danish romanticism in Björnson's persistent harping upon childlike faith and simplicity and a childlike vision of the world. Grundtvig, with whom this note is pervasive, had in his early youth a great influence over him. The glorification of primitive feeling was part of the romantic revolt against the dry rationalism of the so-called period of enlightenment.

To account for the fact that so mighty a spirit as Björnson could have reached his thirty-eighth year before emerging from this state of idyllic *naïveté*, I am inclined to quote the following passage from Brandes, descriptive of the condition of the Scandinavian countries during the decade preceding 1870:

"While the intellectual life languished, as a plant droops in a close, confined place, the people were self-satisfied—though not with a joyous or noisy self-satisfaction; for there was much sadness in their minds after the great disasters [the Sleswick-Holstein War].... They rested on [Pg 45] their laurels and fell into a doze. And while they dozed they had dreams. The cultivated, and especially the half-cultivated, public in Denmark and Norway dreamed that they were the salt of Europe. They dreamed that by their idealism—the ideals of Grundtvig and Kierkegaard—and their strong vigilance, they regenerated the foreign nations. They dreamed that they were the power which could rule the world, but which, for mysterious and incomprehensible reasons, had for a long series of years preferred to eat crumbs from the foreigners' table. They dreamed that they were the free, mighty North, which led the cause of the peoples to victory—and they woke up unfree, impotent, ignorant."[5]

[5] Brandes: Det Moderne Gjennembrud's Maend, pp. 44, 45.

Though there is a good deal of malice, there is no exaggeration in this unflattering statement. Scandinavia had by its own choice cut itself off from the cosmopolitan world life; and the great ideas which agitated Europe found scarcely an echo in the three kingdoms. In my own boyhood, which coincides with Björnson's early manhood, I heard on all hands expressions of self-congratulation because the doubt and fermenting restlessness which were undermining the great societies abroad had never ruffled the placid surface of our good, old-fashioned, Scandinavian orthodoxy. How heartily we laughed at the absurdities of Darwin, who, as we had read in the newspapers, believed that he was descended from an ape! How deeply, densely, and solidly [Pg 46] ignorant we were; and yet how superior we felt in the midst of our ignorance!

All this must be taken into account, if we are to measure the significance, as well as the courage, of Björnson's apostasy. For five years (1870-74) he published nothing of an æsthetical character. But he plunged with hot zeal into political life, not only because he needed an outlet for his pent-up energy; but because the question at issue engaged him, heart and soul. The equal and co-ordinate position of Norway and Sweden under the union had been guaranteed by the Constitution of 1814; but, as a matter of fact, the former kingdom is by all the world looked upon as a dependency, if not a province, of the latter. The Bernadottes, lacking comprehension of the Norwegian character, had shown themselves purblind as bats in their dealings with Norway. They had mistaken a perfectly legitimate desire for self-government for a demonstration of hostility to Sweden and the royal house; and instead of identifying themselves with the national movement (which they might well have done), they fought it, first by cautious measures of repression, and later by vetoes and open defiance. Charles XV., and, later, Oscar II., kept the minority ministries, Stang and Selmer, in power, with a bland disregard of popular condemnation, and snapped their fingers at the parliamentary majorities which, for well-nigh a quarter of a century, fought persistently, bravely, and not altogether vainly, for their country's [Pg 47]

rights.

There is no doubt that Norway is the most democratic country in Europe, if not in the world. There is a far sturdier sense of personal worth, a far more fearless assertion of equality, and a far more democratic feeling permeating society than, for instance, in the United States. Sweden, on the other hand, is essentially an aristocratic country, with a landed nobility and many other remnants of feudalism in her political and social institutions. Two countries so different in character can never be good yoke-fellows. They can never develop at an even pace, and the fact of kinship scarcely helps matters where the temperaments and the conditions are so widely dissimilar. Brothers who fall out are apt to fight each other the more fiercely on account of the relationship. Björnson certainly does not cherish any hatred of Sweden, nor do I believe that there is any general animosity to the Swedish people to be found anywhere in Norway. It is most unfortunate that the mistaken policy of the Bernadottes has placed the two nations in an attitude of apparent hostility. In spite of the loud denunciation of Norway by the so-called Grand Swedish party, and the equally vociferous response of the Norwegian journals (of the Left) there is a strong sympathy between the democracy of Norway and that of Sweden, and a mutual respect which no misrepresentation can destroy.

It was Björnson who, in 1873, began the agitation for the actual and not merely nominal, equality [Pg 48] of the two kingdoms;[6] he appealed to the national sense of honor, and by his kindling eloquence aroused the tremendous popular indignation that swept the old ministry of Stang from power, and caused the impeachment and condemnation of the Selmer ministry. It would seem when the king, in 1882, charged the liberal leader, Mr. Johan Sverdrup, to form a ministry, that parliamentarism had actually triumphed. But unhappily a new Stang ministry (the chief of which is the son of the old premier) has, recently (1893) re-established the odious minority rule, which sits like a nightmare upon the nation's breast, checking its respiration, and hindering its natural development.

[6] I had the pleasure of accompanying Björnson on his first political tour in the summer of 1873, and I shall never forget the tremendous impression of the man and his mighty eloquence at the great folk-meeting at Böe in Guldbrandsdalen.

During this period of national self-assertion Björnson has unfolded a colossal activity. Though holding no office, and steadily refusing an election to the Storthing, he has been the life and soul of the liberal party. The task which he had undertaken grew upon his hands, and assumed wider and wider dimensions. As his predecessor Wergeland had done, and in a far deeper sense, he consecrated his life to the spiritual and intellectual liberation of his people. It is told of the former that he was in the habit of walking about the country with his pockets full of seeds of grass and trees, of which he scattered a handful here and a handful there; for, he said, you can never tell [Pg 49] what will grow up after it. There is to me something quite touching in the patriotism which prompted this act. Björnson, too, is in the same sense "a sower who went forth for to sow." And the golden grain of his thought falls, as in the parable, in all sorts of places; but, unlike some of the seed in the parable, it all leaves some trace behind. It stimulates reflection, it awakens life, it arouses the torpid soul, it shakes the drowsy soul, it shocks the pious soul, it frightens the timid soul, but it lifts them all, as it were, by main force, out of themselves, and makes healthful breezes blow, and refreshing showers fall upon what was formerly a barren waste. This is Björnson's mission; this is, during the second period of his career, his greatness and his highest significance.

Of course there are many opinions as to the value of the work he has accomplished in this capacity of political and religious liberator. The Conservative party of Norway, which runs the errands of the king and truckles to Sweden, hates him with a bitter and furious hatred; the clergy denounce him, and the official bureaucracy can scarcely mention his name without an anathema. But the common people, though he has frightened many of them away by his heterodoxy, still love him. It is especially his disrespect to the devil (whom he professes not to believe in) which has been a sore trial to the Bible-reading, hymn-singing peasantry. Does not the Bible say that [Pg 50] the devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour? Nevertheless Björnson has the hardihood to assert that there is no such person. And yet Björnson is a man who can talk most beautifully, and who knows as much as any parson. It is extremely puzzling.

The fact was, Björnson's abolition of the devil, and his declaration of a war against the orthodox miracle faith, were, as far as the Norwegian people were concerned, somewhat premature. The peasant needs the old scriptural devil, and is not yet ready to dispense with him. The devil is a popular character in the folk-stories and legends, and I have known some excellent people who declare that they have seen him. Creeds are like certain ancient tumuli, which now are but graves, but were once the habitations of living men. The dust, ashes, and bones of defunct life which they often contain, nourish in the dark the green grass, the fair flowers, the blooming trees, that shoot up into the light. You cannot dig it all up and throw it out without tearing asunder the net-work of roots which organically connects the living with the dead.

Björnson, though he is an evolutionist, is far removed from the philosophic temper in his dealings with the obsolete or obsolescent remnants in political and religious creeds. He has the healthful intolerance of strong conviction. He is too good a partisan to admit that there may be another [Pg 51] side to the question which might be worth considering. With magnificent ruthlessness he plunges ahead, and with a truly old Norse pugnacity he stands in the thick of the fight, rejoicing in battle. Only combat arouses his Titanic energy and calls all his splendid faculties into play.

Even apart from his political propaganda the years 1870-74 were a period of labor and ferment to

Björnson. The mightier the man, the mightier the powers enlisted in his conversion, and the mightier the struggle. A tremendous wrench was required to change his point of view from that of a childlike, wondering believer to that of a critical sceptic and thinker. In a certain sense Björnson never took this step; for when the struggle was over, and he had readjusted his vision of life to the theory of evolution, he became as ardent an adherent of it as he had ever been of the *naïve* Grundtvigian miracle-faith. And with the deep need of his nature to pour itself forth—to share its treasures with all the world—he started out to proclaim his discoveries. Besides Darwin and Spencer, he had made a study of Stuart Mill, whose noble sense of fair-play had impressed him. He plunged with hot zeal into the writings of Steinthal and Max Müller, whose studies in comparative religion changed to him the whole aspect of the universe. Taine's historical criticism, with its disrespectful derivation of the hero from food, climate, and race, lured him still farther away from his old Norse and romantic landmarks, until there was no longer any hope of [Pg 52] his ever returning to them. But when from this promontory of advanced thought he looked back upon his idyllic love-stories of peasant lads and lasses, and his taciturn saga heroes, with their predatory self-assertion, he saw that he had done with them forever; that they could never more enlist his former interest. On the other hand, the problems of modern contemporary life, of which he had now gained quite a new comprehension, tempted him. The romantic productions of his youth appeared as a more or less arbitrary play of fancy emancipated from the stern logic of reality. It was his purpose henceforth to consecrate his powers to the study of the deeper soul-life of his own age and the exposition of the forces which in their interdependence and interaction make modern society.

This is the significance of the four-act drama "Bankruptcy," with which, in 1874, he astounded and disappointed the Scandinavian public. I have called it a drama, in accordance with the author's designation on the title-page; but it is, in the best sense, a comedy of manners, of the kind that Augier produced in France; and in everything except the mechanics of construction superior to the plays of Sardou and Dumas. The dialogue has the most admirable accent of truth. It is not unnaturally witty or brilliant; but exhibits exactly the traits which Norwegians of the higher commercial plutocracy are likely to exhibit. All the poetic touches which charmed us in Björnson's saga dramas were conspicuous by their absence. Scarcely a trace was there left of [Pg 53] that peculiar and delightful language of his early novels, which can only be described by the term "Björnsonian."

"Dry, prosaic, trivial," said the reviewers; "Björnson has evidently worked out his vein. He has ceased to be a poet. He has lost with his childhood's faith his ideal view of life, and become a mere prosy chronicler of uninteresting everyday events."

This was, indeed, the general verdict of the public twenty years ago. Scarcely anyone had a good word to say for the abused play that marked the poet's fall from the idealism of his early song. But, for all that, "Bankruptcy" made a strong impression upon the boards. It not only conquered a permanent place in the *répertoires* of the theatres of the Scandinavian capitals, but it spread through Austria, Germany, and Holland, and has finally scored a success at the *Théâtre Libre* in Paris. There is scarcely a theatre of any consequence in Germany which has not made "Bankruptcy" part of its *répertoire*. At the Royal Theatre in Munich it was accorded a most triumphant reception, and something over sixty representations has not yet exhausted its popularity.

The effort to come to close quarters with reality is visible in every phrase. The denial of the value of all the old romantic stage machinery, with its artificial climaxes and explosive effects, is perceptible in the quiet endings of the acts and the entirely unsensational exposition of the [Pg 54] dramatic action. There is one scene (and by no means an unnatural one) in which there is a touch of violence, viz., where Tjaelde, while he hopes to avert his bankruptcy, threatens to shoot Lawyer Berent and himself; but there is a very human quiver in the threat and in the passionate outbreak which precedes it. Nowhere is there a breath of that superheated hot-house atmosphere which usually pervades the modern drama.

"Bankruptcy" deals, as the title indicates, with the question of financial honesty. Zola has in *Le Roman Sentimental* made the observation that "absolute honesty no more exists than perfect healthfulness. There is a tinge of the human beast in us all, as there is a tinge of illness." Tjaelde, the great merchant, exemplifies this proposition. He is a fairly honest man, who by the modern commercial methods, which, in self-defence, he has been forced to adopt, gets into the position of a rogue. The commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," seems at first glance an extremely simple injunction; but in the light of Björnson's searching analysis it becomes a complex and intricate tangle, capable of interesting shades and *nuances* of meaning. Tjaelde, in the author's opinion, certainly does steal, when, in order to save himself (and thereby the thousands who are involved in his affairs), he speculates with other people's money and presents a rose-colored account of his business, when he knows that he is on the verge of bankruptcy. But, on the other hand, it is [Pg 55] extremely difficult to determine the point where legitimate speculation ceases and the illegitimate begins. And if Tjaelde neglected any legitimate means of saving his estate he would be culpable. A stern code of morals (which the commercial world of to-day would scarcely exact), the poet enforces in the fourth act, where Tjaelde refuses to accept any concession from his creditors, but insists upon devoting the remainder of his life to the liquidation of his debts.

Admirably strong and vital is the exposition of the *rôle* and functions of money in the modern world, and the nearer and remoter psychological effects of the tremendous tyranny of money. A certain external *éclat* is required to give the great commercial house the proper splendor in the sight of the world. Thus Tjaelde speculates in hospitality as in everything else, and when he

virtually has nothing, makes the grandest splurge in order to give a spurious impression of prosperity. Though by nature an affectionate man, he neglects his family because business demands all his time. He defrauds himself of the happiness which knocks at his door, because business fills his head by night and by day, and absorbs all his energy. A number of parasites (such as the fortune-hunting lieutenant) attach themselves to him, as long as he is reputed to be rich, and make haste to vanish when his riches take wings. On the other hand, the true friends whom in his prosperity he hectored and contemned are revealed by adversity. There would be [Pg 56] nothing remarkable in so common an experience, if the friends themselves, as well as the parasites, were not so delightfully delineated. The lieutenant, with his almost farcical interest in the bay trotter, is amusingly but lightly drawn; but the awkward young clerk, Sannaes, who refuses to abandon his master in the hour of trial, is a deeply typical Norwegian figure. All the little coast towns have specimens to show of these aspiring, faithful, sensitively organized souls, who, having had no social advantages are painfully conscious of their deficiencies, but whose patient industry and sterling worth in the end will triumph. No less keenly observed and effectively sketched is the whole gallery of dastardly little village figures—Holm, Falbe, Knutson with an s, Knutzon, with a z, etc. Signe and Valborg, the two daughters of Tjaelde, have, in spite of their diversity, a common tinge of Norwegian nationality which gives a gentle distinctness and relief to the world-old types.

Björnson's next play,[7] "The Editor," grapples with an equally modern and timely subject, viz., the license of the press. With terrible vividness he shows the misery, ruin, and degradation which result from the present journalistic practice of misrepresentation, sophistry, and defamation. It is [Pg 57] a very dark picture he draws, with scarcely a gleam of light. The satire is savage; and the quiver of wrath is perceptible in many a sledge-hammer phrase. You feel that Björnson himself has suffered from the terrorism which he here describes, and you would surmise too, even if you did not know it, that the editor whom he has here pilloried is no mere general editorial type, but a well-known person who, until recently, conducted one of the most influential journals in Norway. The play is an act of retribution, and a deserved one. But its weaknesses, which it is vain to disguise, are also explained by the author's personal bias—the desire to wreak vengeance upon an enemy.

[7] All the literary histories and other authorities which I have consulted put the publication of "Bankruptcy," as well as that of "The Editor," in 1875. But my own copy of the latter play bears on its title-page the year 1874.

The situation is as follows: Mr. Evje, a rich and generally respected distiller, has a daughter, Gertrude, who is engaged to Harold Rein, a political leader of peasant origin. Mr. Rein's brother, Halfdan, from whom he has, in a measure, inherited the leadership, is dying from the persecution to which he has been exposed by the Conservative press and public. In his zeal for the Radical cause it is his consolation that he leaves it in such strong hands as those of his brother. The election is impending and a meeting of the electors has been called for the following day. Harold is the candidate of the Left. It now becomes a question with the party of the Right so to ridicule and defame him as to ruin his chances. His position as prospective son-in-law of the rich Mr. Evje [Pg 58] lends an air of importance and respectability to his candidacy. Mr. Evje must therefore be induced, or, if necessary, compelled, to throw him overboard. With this end in view the editor of the Conservative journal goes to Evje (whose schoolmate and friend he has been) and tries to persuade him to break the alliance with Rein. Evje, who prides himself on his "moderation" and tolerance, and his purpose to keep aloof from partisanship, refuses to be bullied; whereupon the editor threatens him with social ostracism and commercial ruin. The distiller, who is at heart a coward, is completely unnerved by this threat. Well knowing how a paper can undermine a man's reputation without making itself liable for libel, he sends his friend the doctor to the editor, suing for peace. Late in the evening he meets his foe outside of his house, and after much shuffling and parleying agrees to do his will. He surprises his daughter and Harold Rein in a loving *tête-à-tête*, and lacks the courage to carry out his bargain. He vainly endeavors to persuade them to break the engagement and separate until after the election.

In the meanwhile, John, a discharged servant of Evje (of whose drunkenness and political radicalism we have previously been informed), has overheard the parley with the editor, and in order to get even with his master countermands in the editor's name his order to the foreman of the printing-office; and the obnoxious article which was intended to be omitted appears in the paper. John also takes care to procure Evje an early copy, which, first utterly crushes him, then [Pg 59] arouses his wrath, convinces him that "holding aloof" is mere cowardice, and makes him resolve to bear his share in the great political battle. The meanness, the malice of each ingenious thrust, while it stings and burns also awakens a righteous indignation. He goes straight to the lodgings of Harold Rein and determines to attend the Radical meeting. Not finding him at home he goes to the house of his brother Halfdan, where he leaves the copy of the paper. The sick man picks it up, reads an onslaught on himself which in baseness surpasses the attack on Evje, starts up in uncontrollable excitement, and dies of a hemorrhage. The maid, who sees him lying on the floor, cries out into the street for help, and the editor, who chances to pass by, enters. He finds the Radical leader dead, with the paper clutched in his hand.

The fourth act opens with a festal arrangement at Evje's in honor of the great success of Rein's electoral meeting. There is no more "holding aloof." Everybody has convictions and is ready to avow the party that upholds them. All are ignorant of Halfdan Rein's death, until the editor arrives, utterly broken in spirit and asks Evje's pardon. He wishes to explain, but no one wishes to listen. When Evje wavers and is on the point of accepting his proffered hand, his wife and daughter loudly protest.

The editor declares his purpose to renounce journalism. The festivities are abandoned, and all betake themselves to the house of the dead leader. Thus the play ends; there is no tableau, no climax, no dramatic catastrophe. It is Zola's theory[8] and Maeterlink's practice anticipated. [Pg 60]

[8] "Naturalism on the Stage."

The journalistic conditions here described are, of course, those of the Norwegian capital nearly a quarter of a century ago. Few editors, I fancy, outside of country towns, now go about personally spreading rumors, with malice aforethought, and collecting gossip. But the power of the press for good and for ill, and the terrorism which, in evil hands, it exercises, are surely not exaggerated. But its most striking application has the drama in its exposure of the desperate and ignominious expedients to which a party will resort in order to defeat, defame, and utterly destroy a political opponent. The following passages may be worth quoting:

"Most of the successful politicians nowadays win not by their own greatness but by the paltriness of the rest."

"Here is a fine specimen of a fossil. It is a piece of a palm-leaf, ... which was found in a stratum of Siberian rock.... Thus one must become in order to endure the ice-storms. Then one is not harmed. But your brother! In him lived yet the whole murmuring, singing palm-forest.... As regards you, it remains to be seen whether you can get all humanity in you completely killed.... [Pg 61] But who would at that price be a politician?... That one must be hardened is the watchword of all nowadays. Not only army officers but physicians, merchants, officials are to be hardened or dried up; ... hardened for the battle of life, as they say. But what does that mean? We are to expel and evaporate the warmth of the heart, the fancy's yearning, ... before we are fit for life.... No, I say, it is those very things we are to preserve. That's what we have got them for."

Björnson's increasing Radicalism and his outspoken Socialistic sympathies had by this time alienated a large portion of the Scandinavian public. The cry was heard on all sides that he had ceased to be a poet, and had become instead a mere political agitator. I cannot deny myself the pleasure of quoting Björnson's reply when at his request a friend repeated to him the opinion which was entertained of him in certain quarters:

"Oh, yes," he cried, with a wrathful laugh, "don't I know it? You must be a poet! You must not mingle in the world's harsh and jarring tumult. They have a notion that a poet is a longhaired man who sits on the top of a tower and plays upon a harp while his hair streams in the wind. Yes, a fine kind of poet is that! No, my boy, I am a poet, not primarily because I can write verse (there are lots of people who can do that) but by virtue of seeing more clearly, and feeling more deeply, and speaking more truly than the majority of men. All that concerns humanity concerns me. If by [Pg 62] my song or my speech I can contribute ever so little toward the amelioration of the lot of the millions of my poorer fellow-creatures, I shall be prouder of that than of the combined laurels of Shakespeare, Milton, and Goethe."

This is the conception of a poet which was prevalent in Norway in the olden time. The scalds of the sagas were warriors as well as singers. They fought with sword and battle-axe, and their song rang the more boldly because they knew how to strike up another tune—the fierce song of the sword. In modern times Wergeland and Welhaven have demonstrated not only the pugnacity, but also the noble courage of their ancestry by espousing the cause of opposing parties during the struggle for national independence.

Those who demand that literature shall be untinged by any tendency or strong conviction will do well to eschew all the subsequent works of Björnson. They might perhaps put up with the brief novel "Magnhild," which is tolerably neutral in tone, though it is the least enjoyable of all Björnson's works. It gives the impression that the author is half afraid of his subject (which is an illicit love), and only dares to handle it so gingerly as to leave half the tale untold. The short, abrupt sentences which seemed natural enough when he was dealing with the peasants, with their laconic speech and blunt manners, have a forced and unnatural air when applied to people to whom this style of language is foreign. Moreover, these condensed sentences are often vague, [Pg 63] full of innuendo, and mysterious as hieroglyphics. It is as if the author, in the consciousness of the delicacy of his theme, had lost the bold security of touch which in his earlier works made his meaning unmistakable.

The drama "The King" (1877) is an attack upon the monarchical principle in its political as well as its personal aspect. It is shown how destructive the royal prerogative is and must be to the king as an individual; how the artificial regard which hedges him in, interposing countless barriers between the truth and him, makes his relations to his surroundings false and deprives him of the opportunity for self-knowledge which normal relations supply. Royalty is therefore a curse, because it robs its possessor of the wholesome discipline of life which is the right of every man that is born into the world.

Furthermore, there is an obvious intention to show that the monarchy, being founded upon a lie, is incapable of any real adaptation to the age, and reconciliation with modern progress. The king in the play is a young, talented, liberal-minded man, who is fully conscious of the anomaly of his position, and determined to save his throne by stripping it of all mediæval and mythological garniture. He dreams of being a "folk-king," the first citizen of a free people, a kind of hereditary president, with no sham divinity to fall back upon, and no "grace of God" to shield him from [Pg 64] criticism and sanctify his blunders. He resents the *rôle* of being the lock of the merchant's strong-box and the head of that mutual insurance company which is called the state. He goes about

incognito, first in search of love adventures, and later in order to acquaint himself with public opinion; and he proves himself remarkably unprejudiced and capable of profiting by experience. He falls in love with Clara Ernst, the daughter of a Radical professor, who, on account of a book he has written, has been sentenced for *crimen læsæ majestatis*, and in an attempt to escape from prison has broken both his legs. Clara, who is supporting her father in his exile by teaching, repels the king's advances with indignation and contempt. He perseveres, however, fascinated by the novelty of such treatment. He manages to convince her of the purity of his motives; and finally succeeds in winning her love. It is not a *liaison* he contemplates, but a valid and legitimate marriage for which he means to compel recognition. The court, which he has no more use for, he desires to abolish as a costly and degrading luxury; and in its place to establish a home—a model *bourgeois* home—where affection and virtue shall flourish. Clara, seeing the vast significance of such a step, is aglow with enthusiasm for its realization. It is not vanity, but a lofty faith in her mission to regenerate royalty, by discarding its senseless pomp and bringing it into accord with, and down to the level of, common citizenship—it is this, I say, which upholds her in the midst of [Pg 65] opprobrium, insults, and hostile demonstrations. For the king's subjects, so far from being charmed by his resolution to marry a woman out of their midst, are scandalized. They riot, sing mocking songs, circulate base slanders, and threaten to mob the royal bride on her way to her first public function. She is herself terribly wrought up, particularly by the curse of her father, who hates the king with the deep hatred of a fanatical Republican. A royal princess, who had come to insult her, is conquered by her candor and truth, and stays to sympathize with her and lend her the support of her presence. But just as the king comes to lead her out to face the populace, the wraith of her father rises upon the threshold and she falls back dead. It is learned afterward that Professor Ernst had died in that very hour.

The king's bosom friend, the Minister of the Interior, Gran, who is largely responsible for his liberalism, and whose whole policy it has been to rejuvenate and revitalize the monarchy, is challenged and shot by his old teacher, the Republican Flink; and the king himself, convinced of the futility of all his efforts to realize his idea of a democratic monarchy, commits suicide.

As a piece of sanguinary satire on royalty as an institution "The King" is most interesting—that is, royalty logically and speculatively considered, without reference to its historical basis and development. To me the postulate that it had its origin in a kind of conspiracy (for mutual benefit) [Pg 66] of the priest and the king seems shallow and unphilosophical. Björnson's fanatical partisanship has evidently carried him a little too far. For surely he would himself admit that every free nation is governed about as well as it deserves to be—that its political institutions are a reflection of its maturity and capacity for self-government. A certain allowance must, indeed, be made for the *vis inertiæ* of whatever exists, which makes it exert a stubborn and not unwholesome resistance to the reformer's zeal. This conservatism (which may, however, have more laudable motives than mere self-interest) Björnson has happily satirized in the scene before the Noblemen's Club in the third act. But, I fancy, it looks to him only as a sinister power, which for its own base purposes has smitten humanity with blindness to its own welfare. Though not intending to enter into a discussion, I am also tempted to put a respectful little interrogation mark after the statement that the republic is so very much cheaper than the monarchy. If the experience of the two largest republics in the world counts for anything, I should say that in point of economy there was not much to choose.

Strange as it may seem, Björnson did not intend "The King" as an argument in favor of the republic. In his preface to the third edition he distinctly repudiates the idea. The recent development of the Norwegian people, has, he says, made the republic a remoter possibility than [Pg 67] it was ten years before (1875). But he qualifies this statement with the significant condition, "If we are not checked by fraud." And I fancy that he would have a perfect right to justify his present position by demonstrating the fraud, trickery, if not treason, by which Norway has during the last decade been thwarted in her aspirations and checked in her development. That preface, by the way, dated Paris, October, 1885, is one of the most forceful and luminous of his political pronunciamientos. It rings from beginning to end with conviction and a manly indignation. His chief purpose, he says, in writing this drama was, "to extend the boundaries of free discussion." His polemics against the clergy are not attacks upon Christianity, though he contends that religion is subject to growth as well as other things. The ultimate form of government he believes to be the republic, on the journey toward which all European states are proceeding fast, or slow, and in various stages of progress. There is something abrupt, gnarled, Carlylese, in his urgent admonitions and appeals for fair-play. The personal note is so distinct that I cannot read the play without unconsciously supplying the very cadence of Björnson's voice.

A further attempt to extend the boundaries of free discussion is made in the two dramas, "Leonarda" (1879) and "A Glove" (1883), which both deal with interesting phases of the woman question, and both wage war against conventional notions of right and wrong. The former [Pg 68] elucidates the attitude of society toward the woman who has been compromised (whether justly or not), and the latter its attitude toward the man. I confess there is something a trifle hazy in his exposition of the problem in "Leonarda;" and I am unable to determine whether Leonarda really has anything to reproach herself with or not. In her conversation with the bishop in the second act, she appears to admit that she has much to regret. She begs him "help her atone for her past." She practically throws herself upon his mercy, reminding him that his Master, Christ, was the friend of sinners. But in the last act she appears suddenly with the halo of martyrdom. General Rosen, who has been the cause of her social ostracism, turns out to be her husband, whom she has divorced on account of his dissipated habits, and now keeps, in the hope of saving him, on a sort of probation. She believes that without her he would go straight to perdition, and

from a sense of duty she tolerates him, not daring to shirk her responsibility for the old reprobate's soul. Truth to tell, she treats him like a naughty boy, punishing him, when he has been drunk, with a denial of favors; and when he has been good, rewarding him with her company. I suppose there are men who might be saved by such treatment, but I venture to doubt whether they are worth saving. As for Leonarda, she has apparently no cause for encouragement. But she perseveres, heedless of obloquy, as long as her own affections are disengaged. She [Pg 69] presently falls in love, however, with a young man named Hagbart Tallhaug, who has insulted her and is now engaged to her niece, Agot. Hagbart is the nephew of the bishop of the diocese, who, after much persuasion is induced to receive Agot, on condition that her aunt will remove from the district and demand no recognition from the family. Having been informed of these conditions, Leonarda calls upon the bishop, uninvited, and vainly remonstrates with him. The young people are, however, unwilling to accept happiness on the terms offered by his reverence. At this point a new complication arises. Hagbart who had loved in Agot a kind of reflection of her aunt's character and manner, being now thrown into the company of the latter, discovers his mistake and transfers his affection to Leonarda. Exactly wherein the newness of Leonarda's type consists we are not fully informed, but we are led to infer that she represents a purer and truer humanity than the women bred in the traditions of feudalism, with their hypocritical arts and conventions. She is not meant to be seductive, but radiant, ravishing.

There is a candor in her speech, and an almost boyish straightforwardness, for which she is not indebted to nature but to the stanch idealism of her creator. She is, however, on that account no less impressionable, no less ready to respond to the call of love. She struggles manfully (or ought I not, in deference to the author's contention, to say "womanfully") against her love for Hagbart, [Pg 70] and at last has no choice but to escape from the cruel dilemma by accepting the bishop's demand. Though she cannot conquer her affection for the young man, she believes that he will, in the course of time, return to Agot, as soon as she is out of his way. The author evidently believes the same. It is a hard lot to be a man in these later dramas of Björnson.

With a slight violation of the chronological sequence I shall discuss "A Glove" in this connection, because of its organic coherence with "Leonarda." They are the obverse and reverse of the same subject—the cruelty of society to the woman of a blemished reputation, and its leniency to the man.

To those who worship the conventional ideal of womanly innocence "A Glove" will seem a very shocking book, for it fearlessly discusses, and, what is more, makes a young girl discuss—the standards of sexual purity as applied to men and women. The sentiments which she utters are, to be sure, elevated and of an almost Utopian idealism; and the author obviously means to raise, not to lower, her in the eyes of the reader by her passionate frankness.

The problem of the drama is briefly this: Society demands of women an absolute chastity, and refuses to condone the least lapse, either before or after marriage. But toward men it is indulgent. It readily overlooks a plenteous seed of wild oats, and would regard it as the sheerest [Pg 71] Quixotism to judge the bridegroom by the same standard of purity as it does the bride. It is easy enough, and perhaps also legitimate, to exclaim with Björnson that this is all wrong, and that a man has no right to ask any more than he gives. As a mere matter of equity a wife owes her husband no more fidelity than he owes her, and may exact of him, if she chooses, the same prematrimonial purity that he exacts of her. But questions of this kind are never settled on the basis of equity. The sentiments by which they are determined have long and intricate roots in the prehistoric past; and we are yet very far from the millennial condition of absolute equality between the sexes. According to Herbert Spencer there is a hereditary transmission of qualities which are confined exclusively to the male, and of others which are confined to the female; and these are the results of the primitive environments and conditions which were peculiar to each sex. Even the best of us have a reminiscent sense of proprietorship in our wives, dating from the time when she was obtained by purchase or capture and could be disposed of like any other chattel. Wives, whose prehistoric discipline has disposed them to humility and submission (I am speaking of the European, not the American species, of course), have not yet in the same degree acquired this sense of ownership in their husbands, involving the same strict accountability for affectional aberrations. And for this there is a very good reason, which is no less valid now than it [Pg 72] was in the hoariest antiquity. A husband's infidelity, though morally as reprehensible as that of the wife, does not entail quite such monstrous consequences. For if she deceives him, he may ignorantly bring up another man's children, toil for them, bestow his name and affection upon them, and leave them his property. One can scarcely conceive of a more outrageous wrong than this; and it is in order to guard against such a possibility that society from remote ages has watched over the chastity of women far more jealously than over that of men. It is as a result of this vigilance of centuries that women have, among civilized nations, a finer sense of modesty than men, and a higher standard of personal purity. Men are, as yet, as Mr. Howells remarks, "imperfectly monogamous;" and Björnson is, no doubt, in the main right in the tremendous indictment he frames against them in the present drama.

It may be expedient to give a brief outline of the action. Svava Riis, the daughter of prosperous and refined parents, becomes engaged to Alf Christensen, the son of a great commercial magnate.

Her father and mother are overjoyed at the happy event; she is herself no less delighted. Her *fiancé* has an excellent reputation, shares her interest in social questions, and supports her in her efforts to found kindergartens and to ameliorate the lot of the poor. Each glories in the exclusive [Pg 73] possession of the other's love, and with the retrospective jealousy of lovers, fancies that he has

had no predecessors in the affection of the beloved. Alf can scarcely endure to have any one touch Svava, and is almost ill when any one dances with her.

"When I see you among all the others," he exclaims, "and catch, for instance, a glimpse of your arm, then I think: That arm has been wound about my neck, and about no one else's in the whole world. She is mine! She belongs to me, and to no one, no one else!"

Svava finds this feeling perfectly natural, and reciprocates it. She ardently believes that he brings her as fresh a heart as she brings him; that his past is as free from contaminating experience as is her own. When, therefore, she obtains proof to the contrary, in an indignant revulsion of feeling, she hurls her glove in his face and breaks the engagement. This act is, I fancy, intended to be half symbolic. The young girl expresses not only her personal sense of outrage; but she flings a challenge in the face of the whole community, which by its indulgence made his transgression easy. She discovers that what in her would have been a crime is in him a lapse, readily forgiven. Her whole soul revolts against this inequality of conditions; and in terminating their relation, which has lost all its beauty, she wishes to cut off all chance of its future resumption. [Pg 74]

In order to determine whether this sentiment of passionate virginity (which in effect makes the marriage vow of fidelity retroactive) is not, in the present condition of the world, a trifle overstrained, I have submitted the question to two refined women for whom I have a high regard. To my surprise they both declared that Svava, whatever she may have said to the contrary, did not love her *fiancé*; that her sorrow and even her indignation were just and natural; but that her somewhat over-conscious purity—her *virginité savante*, as Balzac phrases it in "Modeste Mignon," and her inability to give due weight to ameliorating circumstances were unwomanly. I confess I am not without sympathy with this criticism. Svava, though she is right in her vehement protest against masculine immorality, is not charming—that is, according to our present notion of what constitutes womanly charm. It is not unlikely, however, that like Leonarda she is meant to anticipate a new type of womanhood, co-ordinate and coequal with man, whose charm shall be of a wholly different order. The coquetry, the sweet hypocrisy, nay, all the frivolous arts which exercise such a potent sway over the heart of man have their roots in the prehistoric capture and thraldom; and from the point of view of the woman suffragists, are so many reminiscences of degradation. I fancy that Björnson, sharing this view, has with full deliberation made Svava boldly and inexorably truthful, frank as a boy and as uncompromisingly honest as a man. [Pg 75]

She has sufficient use for this masculine equipment (I am speaking in accordance with the effete standards) in the battle which is before her. Dr. Nordan, the family physician, her parents, and those of her *fiancé*, take her to task and endeavor to demonstrate to her the consequences of her unprecedented demand. She learns in the course of this prolonged debate that she has been living in a fool's paradise. She has been purposely (and with the most benevolent intention) deceived in regard to this question from the very cradle. Her father, whom she has believed to be a model husband, proves to have been unworthy of her trust. The elder Christensen has also had a compromising intrigue of the same kind; and it becomes obvious that each male creature is so indulgent in this chapter toward every other male creature, because each knows himself to be equally vulnerable. There is a sort of tacit freemasonry among them, which takes its revenge upon him who tells tales out of school. It is a consciousness of this which makes Christensen, after having declared war to the knife against the Riises, withdraw his challenge and become doubly cordial toward his enemy. Alf, who in the second act has expressed the opinion that a man is responsible to his wife for his future, but not for his past, retracts, and does penance. Svava, in consideration of his penitence, gives him a vague hope of future reconciliation.[9]

[9] In the later acting version of the play, which ends with the throwing of the glove, this hope of reconciliation is definitely cut off. The author has evidently come to the conclusion that his argument is weakened by Svava's conciliatory attitude, and he enforces his moral by making the sin appear unpardonable. The acting version, which is more dramatically concise, differs in several other respects from the version here presented; but the other changes seem to be dictated by a stricter regard for the exigencies of theatrical representation. The play has been translated into English under the title, "A Gauntlet," London, 1894. [Pg 76]

It will be observed by every reader of "A Glove" that it is not a drama, according to our American notion. It has very little dramatic action. It might be styled a series of brilliant and searching debates concerning a theme of great moment. The same definition applies, though in a lesser degree, to "The New System" (1879), a five-act play of great power and beauty. By power I do not mean noise, but convincing impressiveness and concentration of interest. One could scarcely imagine anything farther removed from the ha! and ho! style of melodrama.

"The New System" is primarily social satire. It is a psychological analysis of the effect of the "small state" upon its citizens. It is an expansion and exemplification of the proposition (Act I., 1) that "while the great states cannot subsist without sacrificing their small people by the thousands, small states cannot subsist without the sacrifice of many of their great men, nay of the very greatest." The smooth, crafty man, "who can smile ingratiatingly like a woman," rises to the higher heights; while the bold, strong, capable man, who is unversed in the arts of humility and intrigue, struggles hopelessly, and perhaps in the end goes to the dogs, because he is denied the [Pg 77] proper field for his energy. Never has Björnson written anything more convincing, penetrating, subtly satirical. He cuts deep; every incision draws blood. A Norwegian who reads the play cannot well rid himself of a startled sense of exposure that is at first wounding to his patriotism. It is mortifying to have to admit that things are thus in Norway. And the worst of it is that there

appears to be no remedy. The condition is, according to Björnson, inherent in all small states which cripple the souls of men, stunt their growth, and contract their horizon.

The first act opens with a conversation between the civil engineers Kampe and Ravn, and the former's son Hans, who has just returned from a prolonged sojourn abroad. The keynote is struck in the sarcastic remark of Ravn, that in a small society only small truths can be tolerated—of the kind that takes twenty to the inch; but great truths are apt to be explosive and should therefore be avoided, for they might burst the whole society. This is *à propos* of a book which Hans Kampe has written, exposing the wastefulness and antiquated condition of the so-called "new system" of railway management introduced, or supposed to have been introduced, by Kampe's and Ravn's brother-in-law, the supervisor-general Riis. The way for Hans to make a career, declares the worldly wise Ravn, is not to oppose the source of promotion and power, but to be silent and marry the supervisor-general's daughter. Ravn has learned this lesson by bitter experience, and [Pg 78] hopes that his nephew will profit by it. All talk about duty to the state and society he pretends to regard as pure moonshine, and he professes not to see the connection between the elder Kampe's drunkenness and the artificial bottling up to which he has been subjected, the curbing and jailing of Titanic powers which once sought outlet in significant action. The same mighty force which in its repression drives the men to the brandy-bottle makes the women intoxicate themselves with fictitious narratives of high courage, daring rescues, and all kinds of melodramatic heroism. Extremely amusing is the scene in which Karen Riis (who loves Hans and is beloved by him) goes rowing with her friends Nora and Lisa, taking with her a stock of high-strung novels, and when a drowning man cries to them for help they row away posthaste, because the man is naked.

The second act shows us the type of the successful man of compromise, who takes the world as he finds it, and cleverly utilizes the foibles of his fellow-men. The supervisor-general is a sort of personification of public opinion. He is always correct, professes to believe what others believe, and conforms from prudent calculation to the religious customs of the community. He demands of his son Frederic that he shall abandon a young girl whom he loves and has seduced, and he requires of his daughter Karen that she shall, out of regard for her family, renounce her lover. He feigns all proper sentiments and emotions, while under the smooth, agreeable mask lurk malice [Pg 79] and cunning. When Hans Kampe's book reaches him, it never occurs to him to examine it on its merits; his only thought is to make it harmless by inventing a scandalous motive. The elder Kampe has just resigned from the railway service; the supervisor-general (with infamous shrewdness) demands an official inquiry into the state of his accounts. Then all the world will say that Hans Kampe has been used as a cat's-paw by his father, who, knowing that an investigation is inevitable, wishes to throw dust in the eyes of the public and save his own reputation by attacking that of his superior. It is needless to say that he has not a shadow of suspicion regarding Kampe's honesty, but merely chooses for his own defence the weapon which he knows to be the most effective.

In order to fortify his position and sound the sentiment of the profession, Riis gives a grand dinner to the engineers of the city, to which Kampe and his son are also invited. The chairman of the committee on railways (of the national diet) is present, and when it appears that Hans Kampe makes a favorable impression upon him, the friends of Riis concoct a scheme to injure him. They inform his father that he is suspected of embezzlement, and get him drunk, whereupon the old man scandalizes the company by a burst of uncomplimentary candor. When Hans arrives the mischief is done; though the pathetic scene between father and son convinces the chairman that, [Pg 80] whatever their failings, these men are true and genuine. Simply delicious is the satire in the scene where the ladies discuss the question at issue between Riis and Kampe. But this satire is deprived of much of its force by the subsequent development of the plot. The logical ending would seem to be the triumph of the supervisor-general's defensive tactics and the discomfiture of his critics. That would have given point to the criticism of the small state and invested the victims of progress with an almost tragic dignity. Björnson chooses, however, to let neither the one party nor the other triumph. In a small state, he says, no one is victorious; everything ends in compromise. If two parties championed two different plans of railway construction, the one of which was demonstrated to be superior in economy and safety to the other, such a demonstration would not be likely to result in its adoption. No, the two parties would come together, dicker and compromise, and in the end the diet would agree to build one road according to the one plan, and one according to the other. Agreeably to this principle Björnson leaves the honors between the combatants about easy; but Riis, deserted by his children, undergoes a partial change of heart and is seized with doubt as to the excellence of his philosophy of life.

That the satire of "The New System" struck home is obvious from the fierceness and virulence of [Pg 81] the criticism with which it was hailed. It has never become fairly domesticated on the Scandinavian stages, and probably never will be. In Germany, France, and Holland it has received respectful attention, and (I am informed) has proved extremely effective upon the boards.

In the same year as "The New System" (1879) appeared the delightful novelette "Captain Mansana," dealing with Italian life, and throwing interesting side-lights upon the War of Liberation. There is an irresistible charm in the freshness, the vividness, the extreme modernness of this little tale. The mingled simplicity and sophistication of the Italian character, the histrionic touch which yet goes with perfect sincerity, the author has apprehended and presented with happy realism.

In "Beyond their Strength" (*Over Aevne*) (1883) Björnson has invaded the twilight realm of psycho-pathological phenomena, and refers the reader for further information to *Leçons sur le*

système nerveux, faites par J. M. Charcot, and *Études cliniques sur l'hystéro-épilepsie ou grande hystérie, par le Dr. Richer*. As a man is always in danger of talking nonsense in dealing with a subject concerning which his knowledge is superficial, I shall not undertake to pronounce upon the validity of the theory which is here advanced. The play is an inquiry into the significance and authenticity of miracles. Incidentally the theme is faith-healing, the hypnotic effect of prayer, and kindred phenomena. [Pg 82]

Pastor Sang, a clergyman in a remote parish of Northern Norway, is famed far and wide as the miracle-priest, and it is popularly believed that he can work wonders, as the apostles did of old. He has given away his large fortune to the poor; in a fervor of faith he plunges into every danger, and comes out unscathed; he lives constantly in an overstrained ecstasy, and by his mere presence, and the atmosphere which surrounds him, forces his wife and children to live in the same state of high nervous tension and unnatural abstraction from mundane reality and all its concerns. His wife, Clara, who loves him ardently, is gradually worn out by this perpetual strain, which involves a daily overdraft upon her vitality; and finally the break comes, and she is paralyzed. For, like everyone who comes in contact with Sang, she has had to live "beyond her strength." She does not fully share her husband's faith, and though she feels his influence and admires his lofty devotion, there is a half-suppressed criticism in her mind. She feels the unwholesomeness of thus "living by inspiration, and not by reason." When he comes to her, "beaming always with a Sabbath joy," she would fain tune him down, if she could, into a lower key, "the C-major of every-day life," as Browning calls it. But in this effort she has had no success, for Sang's ecstatic elevation above the concerns of earth is not only temperamental; nature itself, in the extreme North, favors it. As Clara expresses it: [Pg 83]

"Nature here exceeds the limits of the ordinary. We have night nearly all winter; we have day nearly all summer—and then the sun is above the horizon, both day and night. Have you seen it in the night? Do you know that behind the ocean vapors it often looks three or four times as large as usual? And then the color-effects upon sky, sea, and mountain! From the deepest glow of red to the finest, tenderest, golden white. And the colors of the aurora upon the wintry sky!" etc.

It is the most ardent desire of Sang to heal his wife, as he has healed many others. But the doubt in her mind baffles him, and for a long time he is unsuccessful. At last, however, he resolves to make a mighty effort—to besiege the Lord with his prayer, to wrestle with him, as Jacob did of old, and not to release him, until he has granted his petition. While he lies thus before the altar calling upon the Lord in sacred rapture, a tremendous avalanche sweeps down the mountainside, but divides, leaving the church and parsonage unharmed. The rumor of this new wonder spreads like fire in withered grass, and among thousands of others a number of clergymen, with their bishop, on their way to some convention, stop to convince themselves of the authenticity of the miracle, and to determine the attitude which they are to assume toward it. Then follows a long discussion between the bishop and the clergy regarding the value of miracles, some maintaining that the church has outgrown the need of them, others that they are indispensable—that [Pg 84] Christianity cannot survive without them. For has not Christ promised that "even greater things than these shall ye do?" Is not this a case of the faith which verily can say to the mountain, "Rise up and cast thyself into the sea?"

The other miracle, scarcely less marvellous than the deflection of the avalanche, is that Clara, who has slept for the first time in a month, now rises from her bed and goes forth to meet her husband, and falls upon his neck amid the ringing of the church-bells and the hallelujahs of the assembled multitudes. But when he tries to raise her she is dead, and he himself, overwhelmed by his emotion, falls dead at her side.

This is so obviously a closet-drama that it is difficult to imagine how it would look under the illumination of the foot-lights. For all that, I see a recent announcement that the trial is soon to be made at the *Théâtre Libre* in Paris.[10] No Scandinavian theatre, as far as I know, has as yet had the courage to risk the experiment. In his next play, however, "Love and Geography" (1885), Björnson reconquered the stage and repeated his early triumphs. From the scientific seriousness of "Beyond their Strength" his pendulum swung to the opposite extreme of light comedy, almost bordering on farce. Not that "Love and Geography" is without a Björnsonian moral, but it is amusingly, jocosely enforced in scenes of great vivacity and theatrical effect. This time it is [Pg 85] himself the author has chosen to satirize. The unconscious tyranny of a man who has a mission, a life-work, is delightfully illustrated in the person of the geographer, Professor Tygesen, to whom Björn Björnson, the actor, when he played the part at the Christiania Theatre, had the boldness to give his father's mask. Professor Tygesen is engaged upon a great geographical opus, and gradually takes possession of the whole house with his maps, globes, and books, driving his wife from the parlor floor and his daughter to boarding-school. So absorbed is he in his work that he can talk and think of nothing else. He neglects the social forms from sheer abstraction and becomes almost a boor, because all the world outside of his book pales into insignificance, and all persons and events are merely interesting in so far as they can stimulate inquiry or furnish information bearing upon the immortal opus. The inevitable consequence follows. The professor alienates all who come in contact with him. He is on the point of losing the affection of his wife, and his daughter comes near going astray for want of paternal supervision. Both these calamities are, however, averted, though in an arbitrary and highly eccentric manner. The professor's eyes are opened to the error of his ways, he does penance, and the curtain falls upon a reunited family.

[10] July, 1894.

The unpretentious little story "Dust" (*Støv*, 1882) undertakes to demonstrate the unwholesomeness of the religious ideas regarding the life to come usually impressed upon [Pg 86] children by parents and teachers. By dust Björnson means all obsolete, lifeless matter in the world of thought which settles upon, and often impairs, the vitality of the living growth, or even chokes it outright. "When children are taught that the life here is nothing compared to the life to come—that to be visible is nothing compared to being invisible—that to be a man is nothing compared to being an angel—that to be alive is nothing compared to being dead—then that is not the way to give them the right view of life; not the way to teach them to love life; not the way to inspire them with courage, energy, and patriotism."

In his novel "Flags in City and Harbor" (1884), the English translation of which is entitled "The Heritage of the Kurts," Björnson has attacked a tremendous problem. He has attempted to illustrate the force of heredity, and the exact extent to which it may be modified by environment —to what extent an unfavorable heredity may be counteracted by a favorable environment. The family of Kurt, whose history is here traced through five generations, inherits a temperament which would have secured its survival and raised it to distinction in barbaric ages, but which will as surely, unless powerfully modified, necessitate its extinction in the present age. For the Kurts are incapable of assimilating civilization. An excess of physical vigor in the first Kurt who settled in Norway takes the form of lawlessness and an entire absence of moral restraint. [Pg 87]

Violence of the most atrocious kind goes unpunished because Kurt is powerful and has friends at court. In his two legitimate sons, Adler and Max (he has a host of illegitimate ones), the family temperament is modified, though in Max, who perpetuates the race, the modification is not radical. Adler is a weakling of enormous vanity, silent and moody, and addicted to the pleasures of the table. Max, on the other hand, is a man of inexhaustible vitality, violent like his father, but possessed of a gift of speech and a tremendous voice which serve to establish his authority over the simple inhabitants of the little coast town. Moreover, he is endowed with great shrewdness and practical sense, and is an expert in ship-building, agriculture, and other pursuits. But he is the terror of women, and his sensual excesses so undermine his strength that he becomes insane, and believes that he is continually pursued by the spirit of his brother, whose death he had caused. Konrad Kurt, the son of Max, runs away from home because he cannot endure to see his mother maltreated by his father. He inherits a shattered constitution and poor nerves; outwardly he is quite a respectable man, but he has a strong physical need of drink, and every night he goes to bed intoxicated. It is the author's purpose to show how the sins of his fathers, by a physiological necessity, predisposed Konrad Kurt to drink. His son, John Kurt, who is the result of [Pg 88] a criminal relation, is the complete incarnation of the genius of the family. The fresh blood which he has derived from his English mother has postponed the doom of the race and enabled him to repeat, in a modified form, the excesses of his ancestors. He first distinguishes himself as a virtuoso in swearing. The magnificent redundance and originality of his oaths make him famous in the army, which he chooses as the first field of his exploits. Later he roams aimlessly about the world, merely to satisfy a wild need of adventure. On his return to his native town he signalizes himself by his vices as a genuine Kurt. The little town, however, cannot find it in its heart to condemn a man of so distinguished a race, and society, though it is fully cognizant of his mode of life, not only tolerates but even pets him. He is entertaining, has been everywhere and seen everything. He meets a young girl, named Thomasine Rendalen, the daughter of an educated peasant, who occupies a position as a teacher. She is large, ruddy, full of health and uncorrupted vigor. John Kurt takes a violent fancy to her, and moves heaven and earth to induce her to marry him. He goes even to the length of bribing all her female friends, and they by degrees begin to sing his praises. At last she yields; a net of subtle influences surrounds her, and unconsciously she comes to reflect the view of society. Her moral prudery begins to appear ridiculous to her, and the so-called common-sense view predominates. The author here, with great earnestness, [Pg 89] emphasizes the responsibility of society in weakening the moral resistance of the individual rather than strengthening it. Thomasine Rendalen would not have married John Kurt if society had not condoned his offences; and society in condoning such offences undermines its own foundations.

After his marriage Kurt endeavors to hold his exuberant nature in check, and for a while is moderately successful. But an uneasy suspicion haunts him that his wife's friends, in a confidential moment, may expose his delinquencies, and destroy her confidence in him. He watches her like a lynx, surprises her at all hours and places, and thereby produces the suspicion which he is endeavoring to avert. The relation develops with inevitable logic toward an awful crisis. This is brought about by a mere trifle. John Kurt, failing to humble his wife, strikes her. The baleful forces that lurk in the depths of the Kurt temperament rise to the surface; the whole terrible heritage of savagery overwhelms the feeble civilization which the last scion has acquired. If Thomasine had been weak, she would have been killed; but she defends herself with fierce persistency, and though it seems as if she must succumb, her compact frame, strengthened by generations of healthful toil, possesses an endurance which in the end must prevail over the paroxysmal rage of John Kurt. When the combatants part there is not a whole piece of furniture in the room. John Kurt retires a conquered man. But with cowardly viciousness he locks the door [Pg 90] and leaves his wife for hours despairing, while he himself goes to a dinner-party. There he is stricken down by apoplexy.

The terror with which Thomasine contemplates her approaching maternity is one of the finest points in the book. Has she the right to perpetuate such a race, which will be a curse to itself and to future generations? Would she not confer a boon upon mankind if, by destroying herself, she sweetened the life-blood of humanity? For by self-destruction she would forever cut off the turbid

current of the Kurt blood which had darkened the vital stream of the race for centuries. The moral exaltation which manifests itself in this struggle is most vividly portrayed. She clings to life desperately; she is young and strong, unsentimental, and averse to ascetic enthusiasm. It finally occurs to her that her own race, too, will assert itself in this child; that the pure and vigorous strain which her own blood will infuse may redeem it from the dark destiny of the Kurts. She finally resolves upon a compromise; if the child is dark, like the Kurts, both it and its mother shall die. If it is blue-eyed and light-haired, like the Rendalens, she will devote her life to obliterating in it, or transforming into useful activities, the destructive vigor of the paternal character. Thomas, when he is born, chooses a golden mean between these two extremes, and perversely makes his appearance as a red-haired, gray-eyed infant, in which both a Kurt and a Rendalen might have made comforting observations. He is accordingly permitted to live, and to become the hero of one of the most remarkable novels which has ever been published in Scandinavia. [Pg 91]

He is by no means a good boy, but his mother, by a kind of heroic conscientiousness and rationality, slowly conquers him and secures his attachment. She has solemnly abjured her connection with her husband's family, assumed her maiden name, and has consecrated her life to what she regards as the highest utility—the work of education. She wishes to atone to the race for her guilt in having perpetuated the race of the Kurts. The scene in which she makes a bonfire of all the ancestral portraits in the Hall of Knights, and the smell of all the burning Kurts is blown far and wide over city and harbor, would, in the hands of another novelist, have been made the central scene in the book. But Björnson is so tremendously in earnest that he cannot afford to stop and note picturesque effect. Therefore he relates the burning of the Kurts quite incidentally, and proceeds at once to talk of more serious things.

By turning the great, dusky, ancestral mansion into a school, Mrs. Rendalen believes that she can best settle the account of the Kurts with humanity. All the latest, improved methods of education are introduced. The Hall of Knights is turned into a chemical laboratory, and the daylight is allowed to pour unobscured into all its murky recesses. Through the dim and lofty passage-ways resounds the laughter of children; on the scenes of so many hoary crimes the prattle of innocent girls is heard; a multitude of scientific instruments labor to demonstrate the laws of nature, and to simplify the problem of existence which the crimes of the Kurts had tended to complicate. Thomas Rendalen, profoundly impressed as he is with his responsibility as the last descendant of such a race, takes up this educational mission with a lofty humanitarian enthusiasm. He has spent many years abroad in preparing himself for this work, and possesses, like his great-grandfather, the gift of lucid exposition. But his perpetual and conscious struggle with his heritage makes him nervous and ill-balanced. He conceives the idea, fostered both by observation and by the study of his own family history, that unchastity is the chief curse of humanity, and the primal cause of the degeneracy of races. He believes that the false modesty which leaves young people in ignorance of one of the most important natural functions is largely responsible for the prevailing immorality, and he advocates, as a remedy, fearless and searching physiological study. His inaugural address as superintendent of the school deals uncompromisingly with this subject, and excites such universal indignation that it comes near wrecking the promising enterprise. A great speech in a small town, Björnson hints, is always more or less risky. But we are also given to understand that though Rendalen obviously speaks out of the author's heart, this very speech is in itself a subtle manifestation of the Kurt heritage. Rendalen is as immoderate in virtue as his ancestors have been in vice. The violent energy which formerly expended itself in lawless acts now expends itself in an excessive, ascetic enthusiasm for self-conquest and lofty humanitarian ideals. As a piece of psychology this is admirable. Prudent, well adapted or adaptable to the civilization in which he lives, the scion of the Kurts is not yet; but as a promise of the redemption of the race he represents the first upward step. It is highly characteristic of Björnson's respect for reality that he makes Rendalen neither agreeable, handsome, nor lovable; nay, he dwells again and again on the bad relations which temporarily exist between him and his mother, between him and the teachers, between him and the town. For all that we are filled with a profound respect for a man who can fight in himself so great a fight, and win so great a victory. It is the sturdy peasant blood which he derived from his mother that enables him to wrestle thus mightily with the Lord, and extort at last the tardy blessing; for we are assured in the last pages of the book that he makes a marriage, which is a further step toward health and virtue. We are not assured that he conquers happiness either for himself or for his wife; and there is not a syllable to betray that he cherishes for her any romantic attachment. But the chances are that, in transforming and ennobling the Kurt heritage, he insures vigor and usefulness to his descendants. He bequeathes to them a more wholesome mixture of blood than he himself possesses, and an energy, nay, perhaps a genius, derived from the Kurts, which, with an upward instead of a downward tendency, may be a redeeming force in society instead of a corrupting one. [Pg 92] [Pg 93] [Pg 94]

In order not to miss any phase of his problem, Björnson also takes up briefly the illegitimate line of the Kurts, which, being unsupplied with any favorable environment, sinks deeper and deeper into the mire of vice. The inevitable result is insanity and ultimate extinction. Mrs. Rendalen's visit to the slums, and her recognition of the peculiar scream of her own son in a terrible little ragamuffin, is one of the most remarkable incidents in this remarkable book.

One thing that especially strikes the reader in this novel is the author's fierce indignation against all shams, deceits, and social lies. Therefore he calls a spade a spade, and leaves you to blush if you are so inclined. The young girls whom he introduces are mostly misses in their teens, and his portrayal of them is physiological rather than pictorial. The points which he selects for comment are those which would particularly be noted by their medical advisers; and the progress of their

histories, as he follows them, is characterized by this same scientific minuteness of observation. Zola's ideal of scientific realism (which Björnson has repudiated) has nevertheless found its most [Pg 95] brilliant exponent in him. Here the sordid and cruel facts of life are not dwelt upon by preference; nor are they optimistically glossed over. I doubt if a great and vital problem has ever been more vigorously, unflinchingly, and convincingly treated in a work of fiction.

"*Paa Guds Veje*" ("In the Ways of God"), (1889), in which Thomas Rendalen again figures, though not as hero, is another indictment of conventional morality. It is a very powerful but scarcely an agreeable book. The abrupt, laconic style has no flux, no continuity, and gives the reader the sensation of being pulled up sharply with a curb bit, whenever he fancies that he has a free rein. Though every page is crowded with trenchant and often admirable observations, they have not the coherence of an organic structure, but rather that of a mosaic. The design is obvious, striking, and impressive. It is neither distorted nor overdrawn. It is unquestionably thus we treat moral non-conformists, even though it be in pure self-preservation that they broke the bond which we are agreed to enforce. The question resolves itself into this: Has society, in its effort to uphold its moral standards, the right to exact the sacrifice of life itself and every hope of happiness from the victims of its own ignorance and injustice? When the young physician, Edward Kallem, rescues the eighteen-year old Ragni Kule from the degradation of her marriage to a husband afflicted with a most loathsome disease, and afterward marries her—does he [Pg 96] deserve censure or praise? Björnson's answer is unmistakable. It is exactly the situation, depicted five years later, by Madame Sarah Grand in the relation of Edith to the young rake, Sir Moseley Menteith. Only, Björnson rescues the victim, while the author of "The Heavenly Twins" makes her perish. In both instances it is the pious ignorance of clerical parents which precipitates the tragedy. Ragni's deliverance is, however, only an apparent one. Society, which without indignation had witnessed her sale to the corrupt old libertine, is frightfully shocked by her marriage to Dr. Kallem, and manifests its disapproval with an emphasis which takes no account of ameliorating circumstances. The sanguinary ingenuity in the constant slights and stabs to which she is exposed makes her life a martyrdom and finally kills her. "Contempt will pierce the armor of a tortoise," says an oriental proverb; and poor Ragni had no chelonian armor. When her most harmless remarks are misinterpreted and her most generous acts become weapons wherewith to slay her, she loses all heart for resistance, and merely lies down to die. Very subtile and beautiful is the manner in which Björnson indicates the interaction of psychical and physical conditions. The "soul-frost" which chills the very marrow of her bones is so vividly conveyed that you shiver sympathetically. The self-righteous and brutally censorious attitude of the community lowers the temperature and makes the atmosphere deadly. And the fact that it is Ragni's [Pg 97] unsuspicious innocence, and even her love of her husband, which expose her to this condemnation is made plain with much delicate art. Her residence of five years in the United States after her divorce, and before her second marriage, had, no doubt, accustomed her to a greater freedom of intercourse between man and woman, and thereby disposed her to trip rather lightly over the stumbling-blocks of prudence.

The history of Kallem's sister, Josephine, and her husband, the Reverend Ole Tuft, which is closely interwoven with the above, furnishes us with two more characters deeply felt and strongly realized. It is they who are the chief instruments of Ragni's martyrdom. As the upholders of social purity, and, as it were, professional guardians of morals, it would seem that Tuft and his wife had scarcely any choice but to condemn marriage with a *divorcée*. When, however, after Ragni's death, they discover whom they have slain—how much purer, nobler, and of more delicate nature she was than either of them—they are dissolved in shame and remorse. A tremendous crisis in their spiritual lives is produced by the mortal peril of their only child, whom Kallem saves by a skilful operation. Out of the ancient religion of dogmas which judges and damns, Tuft is by these experiences led into a new religion of love, which values life above faith, and charity above all. The reconciliation of brother and sister in the last chapter is profoundly moving. The moral is [Pg 98] emphasized in the phrase with which the story closes: "Wherever good men walk, there are the ways of God."

The charm of this novel is, to me, that it is strong, virile, instinct with vital thought. There are blemishes in it, too, which no one will be likely to overlook. Several chapters read like the reports of a clinic in a medical journal, so extremely minute and circumstantial are the accounts of Kallem's operations and hypnotic experiments. An excursion into botany, *à propos* of Ragni's walk in the woods, is likewise overloaded with details and teems with scientific terms. But the greatest blemish is the outbreak in Kallem (who has the author's fullest sympathy) of a certain barbaric violence which to civilized people is well-nigh incomprehensible. Thus, when, after an absence of six years, he calls upon his brother-in-law, the pastor, he proceeds to turn handsprings about the latter's study. When, after his marriage, his sister meets him in the street for the purpose of informing him of the scandalous rumors concerning his wife, he gives her a box on the ear.

In Björnson's last book, "New Tales" (*Nye Fortaellinger*) (1894), this tendency to vehemence is even more marked. In the masterly story, "Absalom's Hair" (than which the author has never written anything more boldly original) old Harold Kaas literally spanks his young wife in the presence of his servants. And the matter is in nowise minced, but described with an unblushing zest which makes the impression of *naïveté*. It is obvious that in his delight in the exhibition of a [Pg 99] healthy, primitive wrath, Björnson half forgets how such barbarism must affect his readers. We hear, to be sure, that the servants were filled with indignation and horror, and that Harold Kaas, having expected laughter and applause, "went away a defeated and irremediably crushed man." But for all that the incident is crude, harsh, and needlessly revolting. In Russia it might have happened; but I am inclined to doubt if a Norwegian gentleman, even though he were descended

from the untamable Kurts, would have been capable of so outrageous a breach of decency.

Apart from this incident, "Absalom's Hair" is so interpenetrated with a sense of reality that we seem to live the story rather than read it. I verily believe it to be a type of what the fiction of the future will be, when scientific education shall have been largely substituted for the classical; and even the novelists will be expected to know something about the world in which they live and the sublime and inexorable laws which govern it. At present the majority of them spin irresponsible yarns, and play Providence *ad libitum* to their characters. Man's vital coherence with his environment is but loosely indicated. Chance reigns supreme. They have observed carefully enough the external phenomena of life—and chiefly for their picturesque or dramatic interest—but of the causes which underlie them they rarely give us a glimpse. [Pg 100]

It is in this respect that Björnson's last tales offer so grateful a contrast to conventional fiction. Here is a man who has resolutely aroused himself from the old romantic doze, cleared his eyes of the film of dreams, and with a sharp, wide-awake intensity focussed them to the actual aspect of the actual world. He has sat down with his windows wide open, and allowed the sounds and sights and smells of reality to pour in upon him. And the magic spectacles are his which enable him to gauge the significance of the phenomena and divine the causes which lurk behind them. Therefore his characterizations are often extremely unconventional, and amid all their picturesque vigor of phrase hint at the kind of knowledge which could only be possessed by a family physician. In "Absalom's Hair" we have no mere agglomeration of half-digested scientific data, but a scientific view of life. The story moves, from beginning to end, with a beautiful epic calm and a grand inevitableness which remind one of Tolstoi, and reaches far toward the high-water mark of modern realism. Take, for instance, the characterization of Kirsten Ravn (pp. 11-15), and I wonder where in contemporary fiction so large and deep a comprehension is shown both of psychic and of physical forces. Emma, the heroine of Flaubert's "Madame Bovary" is the only parallel I can recall, as regards the kind and method of portraiture, though there is no resemblance between the characters. In the development of the character of Rafael Kaas, there is [Pg 101] the same beautiful respect for human nature, the same unshrinking statement of "shocking" facts, and the same undeviating adherence to the logic of reality. The hair by which Rafael, as his prototype, the son of David, is arrested and suspended in the midst of his triumphant race is sensuality. His life is on the point of being wrecked, and his splendid powers are dissipated by his inability to restrain his passions. The tragic fate which hovers over him from the moment of his birth is admirably hinted at, but not emphasized, in the sketch of his parents. The carnal overbalance, supplied by the blood of the Kurts, wellnigh neutralizes the mechanical genius which is hereditary in the blood of the Ravns.

It is reported that "Absalom's Hair" has aroused great indignation in Christiania, because it is claimed that the characters are drawn, with scarcely an attempt at disguise, from well-known persons in the Norwegian capital.

The remaining stories of the volume, "An Ugly Reminiscence of Childhood," "Mother's Hands," and "One Day" betray the same contempt for romantic standards, the same capacity for making acquaintance with life at first hand. The first-named is an account of a murder and execution, and extremely painful. The second is a bit of pathological psychology *à propos* of intemperance. Tastes imprisoned, genius cramped and perverted, joy of life (*joie de vivre*) denied, will avenge themselves. They will break out in drunkenness. The hero of "One Day" is afflicted with the same [Pg 102] vice, and apparently for the same reason. The cruel disillusion which in consequence overtakes the poor little soul-starved heroine rises almost to the height of tragedy. It is an every-day tale, full of "deep and blood-veined humanity," and deriving its interest and significance from the very fact of its commonness.

What distinguishes the Norsemen above other nations is, generally speaking, an indestructible self-respect and force of individuality. The old Norse sagas abound in illustrations of this untamable vigor and ruthless self-assertion. It was the looseness of the social structure, resulting from this sense of independence and consequent jealousy and internecine warfare, which destroyed the Icelandic republic and made Norway for four centuries a province of Denmark. In all the great men of Norway we recognize something of the rampant individualism of their Viking forefathers. Ibsen is the modern apostle *par excellence* of philosophic anarchism; and Björnson, too, has his full share of the national aggressiveness and pugnacity. For all that there is a radical difference between the two. The sense of social obligation which Ibsen lacks, Björnson possesses in a high degree. He fights, not as a daring guerilla, but as the spokesman and leader of thousands. He is the chieftain who looms a head above all the people. He wields a heavy sword, and he deals mighty blows. The wrath that possesses him is, however, born of love. He fights man [Pg 103] in the name of humanity. It is not for himself, primarily, that he demands larger liberties, securer rights, more humanizing conditions of life; but it is for his fellow-men. The many, the small and down-trodden, the dumb millions, whom Ibsen despises, Björnson loves. As Dr. Brandes[11] has so happily said:

[11] Det Moderne Gjennembruds Maend, p. 60.

"Ibsen is a judge, stern as the old judges of Israel. Björnson is a prophet, the hopeful herald of a better day. Ibsen is, in the depth of his mind, a great revolutionist. In 'The Comedy of Love,' 'A Doll's House,' and 'Ghosts,' he scourges marriage; in 'Brand,' the State Church; in the 'Pillars of Society,' the dominant bourgeoisie. Whatever he attacks is shivered into splinters by his profound and superior criticism. Only the shattered ruins remain, and we are unable to espy the new social institutions beyond them. Björnson is a conciliatory spirit who wages war without bitterness.

April sunshine glints and gleams through all his works, while those of Ibsen, with their sombre seriousness, lie in deep shadow. Ibsen loves the idea—the logical and psychological consistency which drives Brand out of the church and Nora out of the marital relation. To Ibsen's love of the idea corresponds Björnson's love of man." [Pg 104]

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

As Björnson's works have been translated not only into English, French, and German, but also largely into Russian, Italian, Spanish, Bohemian, and even remoter tongues, a bibliography, including all translations, would demand a volume by itself. I shall therefore only enumerate the more important English translations; but would warn my readers not to judge Björnson's style by that of his translators. *Arne*: Translated by Augusta Plesner and S. R. Powers (Boston, 1872). *The Happy Boy*: Translated by H. R. G. (Boston, 1872). *The Railroad and the Churchyard*, *The Eagle's Nest*, and *The Father* are contained in the volume to which Goldschmidt's *The Flying Mail* gives the title (Sever, Francis & Co., Boston and Cambridge, 1870). The following volumes are translated by Professor R. B. Anderson, and published in a uniform edition by Houghton, Mifflin & Co. (Boston, 1881): *Synnöve Solbakken*, *Arne*, *A Happy Boy*, *The Fisher Maiden*, *The Bridal March*, *Magnhild*, *Captain Mansana and other Stories*. *Sigurd Slembe*: A Dramatic Trilogy: Translated by William Morton Payne (Boston and New York, 1888). *Arne* and *The Fisher Lassie*: Translated, with an Introduction, by W. H. Low (Bohn Library, London). *Pastor Sang (Over Aevne)*: Translated by Wm. Wilson (London, 1893). *In God's Way* (Heinemann's International Library, London, 1891). *The Heritage of the Kurts*, 1892. *A Gauntlet*. A Play. London, 1894. A new translation of all Björnson's novels and tales has just been announced by Messrs. Macmillan & Co., and the first volume, *Synnöve Solbakken* (New York and London, 1895), has appeared. The translation is rather slipshod. [Pg 105]

[Pg 107]

ALEXANDER KIELLAND

In June, 1867, about a hundred enthusiastic youths were vociferously celebrating their attainment of the baccalaureate degree at the University of Norway. The orator on this occasion was a tall, handsome, distinguished-looking young man named Alexander Kielland, from the little coast town of Stavanger. There was none of the crudity of a provincial either in his manners or his appearance. He spoke with a quiet self-possession and a pithy incisiveness which were altogether phenomenal.

"That young man will be heard from one of these days," was the unanimous verdict of those who listened to his clear-cut and finished sentences, and noted the maturity of his opinions.

But ten years passed, and outside of Stavanger no one ever heard of Alexander Kielland. His friends were aware that he had studied law, spent some winters in France, married, and settled himself as a dignitary in his native town. It was understood that he had bought a large brick and tile factory, and that as a manufacturer of these useful articles he bid fair to become a provincial magnate, as his fathers had been before him. People had almost forgotten that great things had [Pg 108] been expected of him, and some fancied perhaps that he had been spoiled by prosperity. Remembering him, as I did, as the most brilliant and notable personality among my university friends, I began to apply to him Mallock's epigrammatic damnation of the man of whom it was said at twenty that he would do great things, at thirty that he might do great things, and at forty that he might have done great things.

This was the frame of mind of those who remembered Alexander Kielland (and he was an extremely difficult man to forget), when in the year 1879 a modest volume of "Novelettes" appeared, bearing his name. It was, to all appearances, a light performance, but it revealed a sense of style which made it, nevertheless, notable. No man had ever written the Norwegian language as this man wrote it. There was a lightness of touch, a perspicacity, an epigrammatic sparkle, and occasional flashes of wit which seemed altogether un-Norwegian. It was obvious that this author was familiar with the best French writers, and had acquired through them that clear and crisp incisiveness of utterance which was supposed, hitherto, to be untransferable to any other tongue.

As regards the themes of these "Novelettes," it was remarked at the time of their first appearance that they hinted at a more serious purpose than their style seemed to imply. Who can read, for instance, "Pharaoh" (which in the original is entitled "A Ball Mood") without detecting [Pg 109] the revolutionary note that trembles quite audibly through the calm and unimpassioned language? There is, by the way, a little touch of melodrama in this tale which is very unusual with

Kielland. "Romance and Reality," too, is glaringly at variance with conventional romanticism in its satirical contrasting of the prematrimonial and the postmatrimonial view of love and marriage. The same persistent tendency to present the wrong side as well as the right side—and not, as literary good manners are supposed to prescribe, ignore the former—is obvious in the charming tale, "At the Fair," where a little spice of wholesome truth spoils the thoughtlessly festive mood; and the squalor, the want, the envy, hate, and greed which prudence and a regard for business compel the performers to disguise to the public, become the more cruelly visible to the visitors of the little alley-way at the rear of the tents. In "A Good Conscience" the satirical note has a still more serious ring; but the same admirable self-restraint which, next to the power of thought and expression, is the happiest gift an author's fairy godmother can bestow upon him, saves Kielland from saying too much—from enforcing his lesson by marginal comments, *á la* George Eliot. But he must be obtuse indeed to whom this reticence is not more eloquent and effective than a page of philosophical moralizing.

"Hope's Clad in April Green" and "The Battle of Waterloo" (the first and the last tale in the Norwegian edition) are more untinged with a moral tendency than any of the foregoing. The former is a mere *jeu d'esprit*, full of good-natured satire on the calf-love of very young people, and the amusing over-estimate of our importance to which we are all, at that age, peculiarly liable. [Pg 110]

As an organist with vaguely melodious hints foreshadows in his prelude the musical *motifs* which he means to vary and elaborate in his fugue, so Kielland lightly touched in these "Novelettes" the themes which in his later works he has struck with a fuller volume and power. What he gave in this little book was a light sketch of his mental physiognomy, from which, perhaps, his horoscope might be cast and his literary future predicted.

Though a patrician by birth and training, he revealed a strong sympathy with the toiling masses. But it was a democracy of the brain, I should fancy, rather than of the heart. As I read the book, sixteen years ago, its tendency puzzled me considerably, remembering, as I did, with the greatest vividness, the fastidious and *distingué* personality of the author. I found it difficult to believe that he was in earnest. The book seemed to me to betray the whimsical *sans-culottism* of a man of pleasure who, when the ball is at an end, sits down with his gloves on, and philosophizes on the artificiality of civilization and the wholesomeness of honest toil. An indigestion makes him a temporary communist; but a bottle of seltzer presently reconciles him to his lot, and restores the equilibrium of the universe. He loves the people at a distance, can talk prettily about the sturdy son of the soil, who is the core and marrow of the nation, etc.; but he avoids contact with him, and, if chance brings them into contact, he loves him with his handkerchief to his nose. [Pg 111]

I may be pardoned for having identified Alexander Kielland with this type, with which I am very familiar; and he convinced me presently that I had done him injustice. In his next book, the admirable novel "Garman and Worse," he showed that his democratic proclivities were something more than a mood. He showed that he took himself seriously, and he compelled the public to take him seriously. The tendency which had only flashed forth here and there in the "Novelettes" now revealed its whole countenance. The author's theme was the life of the prosperous *bourgeoisie* in the western coast towns; and he drew their types with a hand that gave evidence of intimate knowledge. He had himself sprung from one of these rich ship-owning, patrician families, had been given every opportunity to study life both at home and abroad, and had accumulated a fund of knowledge of the world, which he had allowed quietly to grow before making literary draughts upon it. The same Gallic perspicacity of style which had charmed in his first book was here in a heightened degree; and there was, besides, the same underlying sympathy with progress and what is called the ideas of the age. What mastery of description, what rich and vigorous colors, Kielland had at his disposal was demonstrated in such scenes as the funeral of Consul Garman and the burning of the ship. There was, moreover, a delightful autobiographical note in the book, particularly in the boyish experiences of Gabriel Garman. Such things no man invents, however clever; such material no imagination supplies, however fertile. Except Fritz Reuter's Stavenhagen, I know no small town in fiction which is so vividly and completely individualized, and populated with such living and credible characters. Take, for instance, the two clergymen, Archdeacon Sparre and the Rev. Mr. Martens, and it is not necessary to have lived in Norway in order to recognize and enjoy the faithfulness and the artistic subtlety of these portraits. If they have a dash of satire (which I will not undertake to deny), it is such delicate and well-bred satire that no one, except the originals, would think of taking offence. People are willing, for the sake of the entertainment which it affords, to forgive a little quiet malice at their neighbors' expense. The members of the provincial bureaucracy are drawn with the same firm but delicate touch, and everything has that beautiful air of reality which proves the world akin. [Pg 112]

It was by no means a departure from his previous style and tendency which Kielland signalized in his next novel, "Laboring People" (1881). He only emphasizes, as it were, the heavy, serious bass chords in the composite theme which expresses his complex personality, and allows the lighter treble notes to be momentarily drowned. His theme is the corrupting influence of the upper upon the lower class. He has in this book made some appalling, soul-searching studies in the pathology as well as the psychology of vice. [Pg 113]

Kielland's third novel, "Skipper Worse," marked a distinct step in his development. It was less of a social satire and more of a social study. It was not merely a series of brilliant, exquisitely finished scenes, loosely strung together on a slender thread of narrative, but was a concise and well-constructed story, full of beautiful scenes and admirable portraits. The theme is akin to that of Daudet's "L'Évangéliste;" but Kielland, as it appears to me, has in this instance outdone his

French *confrère*, as regards insight into the peculiar character and poetry of the pietistic movement. He has dealt with it as a psychological and not primarily as a pathological phenomenon. A comparison with Daudet suggests itself constantly in reading Kielland. Their methods of workmanship and their attitude toward life have many points in common. The charm of style, the delicacy of touch, and felicity of phrase, are in both cases pre-eminent. Daudet has, however, the advantage (or, as he himself asserts, the disadvantage) of working in a flexible and highly finished language, which bears the impress of the labors of a hundred masters; while [Pg 114] Kielland has to produce his effects of style in a poorer and less pliable language, which often pants and groans in its efforts to render a subtle thought. To have polished this tongue and sharpened its capacity for refined and incisive utterance, is one—and not the least—of his merits.

Though he has by nature no more sympathy with the pietistic movement than Daudet, Kielland yet manages to get psychologically closer to his problem. His pietists are more humanly interesting than those of Daudet, and the little drama which they set in motion is more genuinely pathetic. Two superb figures—the lay preacher Hans Nilsen and Skipper Worse—surpass all that the author had hitherto produced in depth of conception and brilliancy of execution. The marriage of that delightful, profane old sea-dog Jacob Worse with the pious Sara Torvestad, and the attempts of his mother-in-law to convert him, are described not with the merely superficial drollery to which the subject invites, but with a sweet and delicate humor which trembles on the verge of pathos. In the Christmas tale, "Elsie," Kielland has produced a little classic of almost flawless perfection. With what exquisite art he paints the life of a small Norwegian coast-town in all its vivid details! While Björnson, in "The Heritage of the Kurts," primarily emphasizes the responsibility of the individual to society, Kielland chooses to emphasize the responsibility of society to the individual. The former selects a hero with vicious inherited tendencies, redeemed [Pg 115] by wise education and favorable environment; the latter portrays a heroine with no corrupt predisposition, destroyed by a corrupting environment. Elsie could not be good, because the world was once so constituted that girls of her kind were not expected to be good. Temptations, perpetually thronging in her way, broke down the moral bulwarks of her nature; resistance seemed in vain. In the end, there is scarcely one who, having read the book, will have the heart to condemn her.

Incomparably clever is the satire on the benevolent societies which exist to furnish a kind of officious sense of virtue to their aristocratic members. "The Society for the Redemption of the Abandoned Women of St. Peter's Parish" is presided over by a gentleman who is responsible for the abandoned condition of a goodly number of them. However, it turns out that those miserable creatures who need to be redeemed belong to another parish, and accordingly cannot be reached by St. Peter's. St. Peter's parish is aristocratic, exclusive, and keeps its wickedness discreetly veiled. The horror of the secretary of the society, when she hears that "the abandoned woman" who calls upon her for aid, has a child without being married, is both comic and pathetic. In fact, there is not a scene in the book which is not instinct with life and admirably characteristic.

Besides being the author of some minor comedies and a full-grown drama ("The Professor"), [Pg 116] Kielland has published several novels, the more recent being "Poison" (1883), "Fortuna" (1884), "Snow" (1886), and "St. John's Eve" (1887).

The note of promise and suspense with which "Snow" ends is meant to be symbolic. From Kielland's point of view, Norway is yet wrapped in the wintry winding-sheet of a tyrannical orthodoxy, and all he dares assert is that the chains of frost and snow seem to be loosening. There is a spring feeling in the air.

This spring feeling is scarcely perceptible in his last book, "Jacob" (1890), which is written in anything but a hopeful mood. It is rather a protest against that optimism which in fiction we call poetic justice. The harsh and unsentimental logic of reality is emphasized with a ruthless disregard of rose-colored traditions.

From the pedagogic point of view, I have no doubt that "Jacob" would be classed as an immoral book. But the question of its morality is of less consequence than the question of its truth. The most modern literature, which is interpenetrated with the spirit of the age, has a way of asking dangerous questions—questions before which the reader, when he perceives their full scope, stands aghast. Our old idyllic faith in the goodness and wisdom of all mundane arrangements has undoubtedly received a shock. Our attitude toward the universe is changing with the change of its attitude toward us. What the thinking part of humanity is now largely engaged in doing is [Pg 117] readjusting itself toward the world and the world toward it. Success is but adaptation to environment, and success is the supreme aim of the modern man. The authors who, by their fearless thinking and speaking, help us toward this readjustment should, in my opinion, whether we choose to accept their conclusions or not, be hailed as benefactors. It is in the ranks of these that Alexander Kielland has taken his place, and occupies a conspicuous position. [Pg 118]

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JONAS LIE

The last Norwegian novelist who is in the Parisian sense *arrivé* is Jonas Lie.[12] The *Figaro* has occupied itself with him of late; and before long, I venture to predict, London and New York will also have discovered him. English versions of a few of his earlier novels appeared, to be sure, twenty years ago—in very bad translations—and accordingly attracted no great attention. "The Visionary," which has recently been published in London, has had better luck, having been accorded a flattering reception. Of its popular success it is yet too early to speak. But even if Jonas Lie were not about to knock at our gates, I venture to say that I shall earn the gratitude of many a reader by making him acquainted with this rare, complex, and exceedingly modern spirit. For Jonas Lie is not (like so many of his brethren of the quill) a mere inoffensive gentleman who spins yarns for a living, but he is a forceful personality of bright perceptions and keen sensations, which has chosen to express itself through the medium of the novel. He dwells in a many-windowed house, with a large outlook upon the world and its manifold concerns. In a score of [Pg 122] novels of varying degrees of excellence he has given us vividly realized bits of the views which his windows command. But what lends their chief charm to these uncompromising specimens of modern realism is a certain richness of temperament on the author's part, which suffuses even the harshest narrative with a rosy glow of hope. Though, generally speaking, there is no very close kinship between him and the French realists, I am tempted to apply to him Zola's beautiful characterization of Daudet: "Benevolent Nature placed him at that exquisite point where reality ends and poetry begins." Before he had yet written a single book, except a volume of flamboyant verse, Björnson said of him in a public speech: "His friends know that he only has to plunge his landing-net down into himself in order to bring it up full."

[12] Pronounced *Lee*.

The man who, in anticipation of his achievements, impressed Björnson so deeply with his genius, was, however, by others, who felt themselves to be no less entitled to an opinion, regarded as an "original," not to say a fool. That he was decidedly queer, his biography by Arne Garborg amply testifies.

> "Two souls, alas, abide within my breast,
> The one forever strives against the other,"

says Faust; and Jonas Lie's life and literary activity are apparently, in a very real sense, the result [Pg 123] of a similar warfare. There was, indeed, a good ancestral reason for the duality of his nature. His father, a judge of sterling ability and uprightness, was descended, but a few generations back, from sturdy, blond, Norwegian peasants; while his mother was of Finnish, or possibly Gypsy, descent. I remember well this black-eyed, eccentric little lady, with her queer ways, extraordinary costumes, and still more extraordinary conversation. It is from her Jonas Lie has inherited the fantastic strain in his blood, the strange, superstitious terrors, and the luxuriant wealth of color which he lavished upon his poems and his first novel, "The Visionary." From his paternal ancestors, who were for three generations judges and judicial functionaries, he has derived his good sense, his intense appreciation of detail, and his strong grip on reality. His career represents at its two poles a progression from the adventurous romanticism of his maternal heritage to the severe, wide-awake realism of the paternal—the emancipation of the Norseman from the Finn.

"Jonas Lie has a good memory," writes his biographer. "Thus he remembers—even though it be as through a haze—that he was once in the world as the son of a laborer, a carpenter, or something in that line, and that he went with food in a tin-pail to his father, when he was at work. During this incarnation he must have behaved rather shabbily; for in the next he found himself degraded to a fox—a silver fox—and in this capacity he was shot one moonlight night on the snow. After [Pg 124] that he emerged, according to his recollection, as Jonas Lauritz Idemil, son of the lawyer Mons Lie, at Hougsund, in Eker. This took place November 6, 1833."

When he was but a few years old his father removed, in various official capacities, to Mandal, Söndhordland, and, finally, to the city of Tromsoe, in Nordland. It was here, in the extreme north, that Jonas spent the years of his boyhood, and it was this wild, enchanted region which put the deepest impress upon his spirit.

"In Nordland," he says in "The Visionary," the hero of which is essentially the Finnish half of himself, "all natural phenomena are intense, and appear in colossal contrasts. There is an endless, stony-gray desert as in primeval times, before men dwelt there; but in the midst of this are also endless natural riches. There is sun and glory of summer, the day of which is not only twelve hours, but lasts continuously, day and night, for three months—a warm, bright, fragrance-laden summer, with an infinite wealth of color and changing beauty. Distances of seventy to eighty miles across the mirror of the sea approach, as it were, within earshot. The mountains clothe themselves up to the very top with greenish-brown grass, and in the glens and ravines the little birches join hands for play, like white, sixteen-year-old girls; while the fragrance of the strawberry and raspberry fills the air as nowhere else; and the day is so hot that you feel a need [Pg 125] to bathe yourself in the sun-steeped, plashing sea, so wondrously clear to the very bottom.... Myriads of birds are surging through the air, like white breakers about the cliffs, and like a screaming snow-storm about their brooding-places...."

But "as a contrast there is a night of darkness and terror which lasts nine months."

In this arctic gloom, during which the yellow candle-light struggled all day long through the frost-covered window-panes, the Finn grew big in Jonas Lie, and the Norseman shrank and was almost

dwarfed. The air was teeming with superstitions which he could not help imbibing. His fancy fed eagerly on stories of Draugen, the terrible sea-bogie who yells heartrendingly in the storm, and the sight of whom means death; on blood-curdling tales of Finnish sorcery and all sorts of uncanny mysteries; on folk-legends of trolds, nixies, and foul-weather sprites. He had his full share of that craving for horrors which is common to boyhood; and he had also the most exceptional facilities for satisfying it. Truth to tell, if it had not been for the Norse Jekyll in his nature the Finnish Hyde might have run away with him altogether. They were mighty queer things which often invaded his brain, taking possession of his thought, paralyzing his will, and refusing to budge, no matter how earnestly he pleaded. There were times when he grew afraid of himself; when his imagination got the upper hand, blowing him hither and thither like a weather-cock. Then the Norse Jekyll came to his rescue and routed his uncomfortable yoke-fellow. Hence that very curious phenomenon that the same man who has given us sternly and soberly realistic novels like "The Family at Gilje" and "The Commodore's Daughters," is also the author of the collection of tales called "Trold," in which his fancy runs riot in a phantasmagoria of the grotesquest imaginings. The same Jonas Lie who comports himself so properly in the parlor is quite capable, it appears, of joining nocturnally the witches' dance at the Brocken and cutting up the wildest antics under the pale glimpses of the moon.

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Throughout his boyhood he struggled rather ineffectually against his Hyde, who made him kill roosters, buy cakes on credit, go on forbidden expeditions by land and sea, and shamefully neglect his lessons. Accordingly, he made an early acquaintance with the rod, and was regarded as well-nigh incorrigible. He accepted with boyish stoicism the castigations which fell pretty regularly to his lot, bore no one any grudge for them, but rarely thought of mending his ways, in order to avoid them. They were somehow part of the established order of things which it was useless to criticise. In his reminiscences from his early years, which he published some years ago, he is so delightfully boy, that no one who has any recollection of that barbaric period in his own life can withhold his sympathy. The following, for instance, seems to me charming:

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"I can still feel how she (Kvaen Marja, the maid) pulled us, cowering and reluctant, out of our warm beds, where we lay snug like birds in their nests, between the reindeer skin and the sheepskin covering. I remember how I stood asleep and tottering on the floor, until I got a shower of cold water from the bathing-sponge over my back and became wide awake. Then to jump into our clothes! And now for the lessons! It was a problem how to get a peep at them during the scant quarter hour, while the breakfast was being devoured down in the dining-room with mother, who sat and poured out tea before the big astral lamp, while darkness and snow-drift lay black upon the window-panes. Then up and away!...

"There (in the school) I sat and perspired in the sultry heat of the stove, and with a studiously unconcerned face watched with strained anxiety every expression and gesture of the teacher. Was he in good-humor to-day? Would that I might escape reciting! He began at the top.... That was a perfect millstone lifted from my breast, though, as yet, nothing could be sure. Now for a surreptitious peep at the end of the lesson."

It was Jonas Lie's ambition at that time to become a gunsmith. He had a profound respect for the ingenuity and skill required for such a curious bit of mechanism. But his father, who could not afford to have a member of his family descend into the rank of artisans, promptly strangled that ambition. Then the sea, which has been "the Norseman's path to praise and power," no less than the Dane's, lured the adventurous lad; and his parent, who had no exalted expectations regarding him, gave his consent to his entering the Naval Academy at Fredericksvaern. But here he was rejected on account of near-sightedness. Nothing remained, then, but to resume the odious books and prepare to enter the University. But to a boy whose heroes were the two master-thieves, Ola Höiland and Gjest Baardsen, that must have been a terribly arduous necessity. However, he submitted with bad grace, and was enrolled as a pupil at the gymnasium in Bergen. Here his Finnish Hyde promptly got him into trouble. Having by sheer ill luck been cheated of his chances of a heroic career, he began to imagine in detail the potentialities of greatness for the loss of which Fate owed him reparation. And so absorbed did he become in this game of fancy, and so enamored was he of his own imaginary deeds, that he lost sight of the fact that they were of the stuff that dreams are made of. With frank and innocent trustfulness he told them to his friends, both young and old, and soon earned a reputation as a most unblushing liar. But if any one dared call him that to his face, he had to reckon with an awe-inspiring pair of fists which were wielded with equal precision and force. The youth, being at variance with the world, lived in a state of intermittent warfare, and he gave and received valiant blows, upon which he yet looks back with satisfaction.

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In spite of his distaste for books Jonas Lie managed, when he was eighteen years old, to pass the entrance examination to the University. Among his schoolmates during his last year of preparation at Heltberg's Gymnasium, in Christiania, were Björnstjerne Björnson and Henrik Ibsen. The former took a great interest in the odd, *naïve*, near-sighted Nordlander who walked his own ways, thought his own thoughts, and accepted ridicule with crushing indifference.

"I was going about there in Christiania," he says in a published letter to Björnson, "as a young student, undeveloped, dim, and unclear—a kind of poetic visionary, a Nordland twilight nature—which after a fashion espied what was abroad in the age, but indistinctly in the dusk, as through a water telescope—when I met a young, clear, full-born force, pregnant with the nation's new day, the blue steel-flash of determination in his eyes and the happily found national form—pugnacious to the very point of his pen. I gazed and stared, fascinated, and took this new thing aboard along the whole gunwale. Here, I felt, were definite forms, no mere dusk and fantastic

haze—something to fashion into poetry.... From the first hour you knew how to look straight into this strange twilight of mine, and you espied flashes of the aurora there when no one else did, like the true and faithful friend you are. You helped and guided and found grains of gold, where [Pg 130] others saw mostly nonsense, and perhaps half a screw loose. While I was straying in search of the spiritual tinsel, with which the *esprits forts* of the age were glittering, you taught me, and impressed upon me, again and again, that I had to seek in myself for whatever I might possess of sentiment and simplicity—and that it was out of this I would have to build my fiction."

This bit of confession is extremely significant. The Finnish Hyde was evidently yet uppermost. Björnson taught Lie to distrust the tinsel glitter of mere rhetoric, and the fantastic exuberance of invention in which the young Nordlander believed that he had his *forte*. But the matter had even a more serious phase than this. It was about this time that Lie disappeared for a period of three months from his friends, and even his parents, and when again he emerged into the daylight, he could give no account of himself. He had simply sauntered about, moping and dreaming. He had been Hyde. The cold shudders which lurked in his blood from the long, legend-haunted arctic night could break into open terror on unforeseen occasions. Grown man though he was, he was afraid of being alone in the dark—a peculiarity which once got him into a comical predicament.

It was his habit when travelling to place his big top-boots at night within easy reach, so that he might use them as weapons against any ghost or suspicious-looking object that might be stirring in the gloom. One evening when he had gone to bed at a country inn, he was aroused from his [Pg 131] sleep and saw indistinctly a white phenomenon fluttering to and fro along the opposite wall. Instantly he grabs a boot and hurls it with ferocious force at the goblin. A roar was heard followed by a salvo of blue profanity. It was a fellow-traveller—a lumber-dealer—who was to occupy the other bed in the room. He had undressed and was disporting himself in nocturnal attire before reposing, when Jonas Lie's well-aimed missile hit him in the stomach and doubled him up with pain.

A skeleton in the den of a medical friend caused Lie many a shiver, for he could never quite rid himself of the idea that it moved. All that lay beyond the range of the senses drew him with an irresistible, half-shuddering attraction; and he resented all attempts to explain it by ordinary mundane laws. As his first novel abundantly proves, he possesses in a marked degree the "sixth sense" that gropes eagerly and with a half-terrified fascination in the dusk that lies beyond the daylight of the other five.

The verses which Jonas Lie began about this time to produce are mostly written for patriotic and other festive occasions, and therefore arouse no creepy sensations. But they are so overladen with confusing imagery that they have to be read twice to be understood. In the poem "Solveig" (1855) he makes the heart "in its prison envy the free-born thoughts which fly to the beloved one's breast." His versification is gnarled and twisted, and a perpetual strain upon the ear. As [Pg 132] Mr. Nordahl Rolfsen has remarked, one need not be a princess in order to be troubled by the peas in his verse.[13] Browning himself could scarcely have perpetrated more unmelodious lines than Jonas Lie is capable of. Nevertheless there is often in his patriotic songs a most inspiriting bugle-note, which is found nowhere in Browning, unless it be in the "Cavalier Tunes." The curiosities of his prosody are (according to his biographer) attributable to the Nordland accent in his speech. They would sound all right, he says, to a Nordland ear.

[13] Nordahl Rolfsen: Norske Digtere, p. 527.

At the risk of violating chronology I may as well speak here of his two collections of "Poems" (1867 and 1889) (the latter being an expurgated but enlarged edition of the earlier), to which the present criticisms particularly apply. Both editions contain notable things amid occasional bits of what scarcely rises above doggerel. The sailor songs, though rough, are true in tone and have a catching nautical swing; but of far deeper ring and more intensely felt are the poems which deal with the nocturnal sides of nature. These have at times a strange, shivering resonance, like an old violin whose notes ripple down your spine. I refer especially to such untranslatable poems as "Draugen," "Finn-Shot," "The Mermaid," and "Nightmare." The mood of these is heavy and uncanny, like that of the "Ancient Mariner." But they are indubitably poetry. It is by no means [Pg 133] sure that the world has not lost a poet in Jonas Lie; but probably a lesser one than the novelist that it gained.

As Jonas had been voted by his kin the family dullard, it was decided to make a clergyman of him. But to this the young man objected, chiefly, according to his own story, because the clerical gown looks too much like a petticoat. At all events, after having equipped himself with a set of theological tomes, and peeped cursorily into them, he grew so discouraged that he went to the bookseller and exchanged them for a set of law-books. Not that the law had any peculiar attraction for him; he rather accepted it as a *pis aller*; for, of course, he had to study something. In due time he was graduated, but with such poor standing that he concluded to put in another year and try again. And this time he managed to acquit himself creditably. He then began (1859) the practice of the law in the little town of Kongsvinger, the centre of the richest lumber districts in Norway. But in the meanwhile he had had an experience of another kind which is worth recounting.

From his boyhood he had been a worshipper of the fair sex. Marriages (of other people) had been among the most tragic events in his life; and he rarely failed to shed tears at the thought that now this lovely charmer, too, was removed from the number of his possible selections. If things went on in this way he would have no choice but to be a bachelor. However, one fine day a most [Pg 134]

attractive-looking craft, bearing the name Thomasine Lie, appeared upon his horizon, sailed within speaking distance, and presently a great deal nearer. In fact, though they were cousins, it took a remarkably short time for the two young people to discover that they loved each other; and when that discovery was made, they acted upon it with laudable promptitude. They became engaged; and were subsequently married. And from that day the Finnish Hyde in Jonas was downed and reduced to permanent subjection. He never raised his head again. The more sober-minded, industrious, and sensible Norse Jekyll took command and steered with a steady hand, in fair weather and foul, and often through dangerous waters, the barque Jonas Lie, which came to carry more and more passengers the longer it proceeded on its voyage.

Truth to tell, I know among contemporary men of letters no more complete, happy, and altogether beautiful marriage than that of Jonas and Thomasine Lie. The nearest parallel to it that I can think of is that of John Stuart Mill and Mrs. Taylor, who later became Mrs. Mill.

Lie's friends accuse him of carrying his admiration of his wife to the verge of idolatry. He will leave himself but little merit, but with an air of candid conviction he attributes even his authorship to his Thomasine. "Her name ought to stand next to mine on the title-pages of my books," he has repeatedly declared. And again, "If I have written anything that is good, then my wife deserves as much credit for it as myself ... Without her nothing would have come of it except nonsense." [Pg 135]

Even though that may be an exaggeration, pure delusion it is not. For Mrs. Lie is, in a certain way, the complement to her husband. She possesses what he has not; and he possesses what she, in her modest self-extinction, would never dream of laying claim to. The spirit of order, adjustment, and lucidity is strong in her; while he, in his fanciful exuberance, is often overwhelmed by his material, and is unable to get it into shape. Then she quietly steps in and separates the dry land from the water in his seething and struggling chaos. She is one of those rare women who, while apparently only listening, can give you back your own thoughts clarified. Mr. Garborg relates most charmingly how she straightens out the tangles in her husband's plots, and unobtrusively draws him back, when, as frequently happens, he has switched himself off on a side-line and is unable to recover his bearings. And this occurs as often in his conversation as in his manuscripts, which he never despatches to the publisher without her revision. She helps him condense. She knows just what to omit. Yet she does not pretend to be in the least literary. Her proper department, in which she is also a shining success, is the care of her children and the superintendence of her household. She understands to perfection the art of economy and has a keen practical sense, which makes her admirably competent in all the more difficult situations in life. And he, feeling her competence and his own deficiency, frankly leans on her. Hence a certain motherliness on her part (most beautiful to behold) has tinged their relation; and on his an admiring and affectionate dependence. Each prizes in the other what he himself lacks; and the husband's genius loses none of its brightness to the wife, because it is herself who trims the wick and adjusts the reflectors which send its light abroad. [Pg 136]

I have again anticipated, because the subsequent career of Jonas Lie could not be properly understood without a full appreciation of the new factor which from this time enters into it. He developed signal ability as a lawyer during the years of his practice at Kongsvinger; became prosperous and influential, bought a considerable estate (called Sigridnaes) and began to dabble in politics. He still wrote occasional poems, and was the soul of all conviviality in the town. He entertained celebrities, wrote political leaders in the papers, earned a great deal of money, lived high, and unfolded a restless and widely ramified activity. Then came the great financial crisis of 1867-68, which swept away so many great fortunes in Norway. Lie became involved (chiefly by endorsement of commercial paper) to the extent of several hundred thousand dollars. He gave up everything he had, and moved to Christiania, resolved to pay the enormous debt, for which he had incurred legal responsibility, to the last farthing. Quixotic as it may seem, it was his intention to accomplish this by novel-writing. And to his honor be it said that for a long series of years he kept sending every penny he could spare, above the barest necessities, to his creditors, refusing to avail himself of the bankruptcy law and accept a compromise. But it was a bottomless pit into which he was throwing his hard-earned pennies, and in the end he had to yield to the persuasions of his family and abandon the hopeless enterprise. [Pg 137]

In Christiania he spent some hard and penurious years, trying to make a livelihood as a journalist and man of letters. Some of his friends suspected that the Lie family were subsisting on very short rations; but they were proud, and there was no way to help them. The ex-lawyer developed ultra-democratic sympathies, and time and again his Thomasine led the dance at the balls of the Laborers' Union with Mr. Eilert Sundt.[14] A position as teacher of Norwegian in Heltberg's Gymnasium he lost because he only made orations to his pupils, but taught them no rhetoric. His volume of "Poems" (1867) had attracted no particular attention; but his political articles were much read and discussed. However, it was not in politics that he was to win his laurels.

[14] A well-known Norwegian philanthropist, whose work on the Gypsies is highly regarded. [Pg 138]

A little before Christmas, 1870, there appeared from Gyldendal's publishing-house in Copenhagen a novel, entitled "The Visionary" (*Den Fremsynte*), by Jonas Lie. To analyze the impression which this strange book makes at the first reading is difficult. I thought, as I sat rejoicing in its vivid light and color, twenty-four years ago: "This Jonas Lie is a sort of century-plant, and 'The Visionary' is his one blossom. It is the one good novel which almost every life is said to contain. Only this is so strikingly good that it is a pity it will have no successors."

It was evidently himself, or rather the Finnish part of himself, the author was exploring; it was in the mine of his own experience he was delving; it was his own heart he was coining. That may, in a sense, be true of every book of any consequence; but it was most emphatically true of "The Visionary." It is not to the use of the first person that this autobiographical note is primarily due; but to a certain beautiful intimacy in the narrative, and a *naïve* confidence which charms the reader and takes him captive. With a lavish hand Lie has drawn upon the memories of his boyhood in the arctic North; and it was the newness of the nature which he revealed, no less than the picturesque force of his language, which contributed in no small degree to the success of his book. But, above all, it was the sweetness and pathos of the exquisite love story. Susanna, though as to talents not much above the commonplace, is ravishing. To have breathed the breath of such [Pg 139] warm and living life into a character of fiction is no small achievement. It is the loveliness of love, the sweetness of womanhood, the glorious ferment of the blood in the human springtide which are celebrated in "The Visionary." The thing is beautifully done. I do not know where young love has been more touchingly portrayed, unless it be in some of the Russian tales of Tourguéneff.[15] The second-sight with which the hero, David Holst, is afflicted, introduces an undertone of sadness—a pensive minor key—and seems to necessitate the tragic *dénouement*.

[15] Spring Floods, Liza, Faust.

The immediate success of "The Visionary" changed Jonas Lie's situation and prospects. He was first sent with a public stipend to Nordland for the purpose of studying the character, manners, and economic condition of the dwellers within the polar zone; and, like the conscientious man he is, he made an exhaustive report to the proper department, detailing with touching minuteness the results of his observations. The Norwegian government has always taken a strong (and usually very intelligent) interest in rising artists, musicians, and men of letters, and has endeavored by stipends and salaries to compensate them for the smallness of the public which the country affords. Jonas Lie was now a sufficiently conspicuous man to come into consideration in the distribution of the official *panem et circenses*. The state awarded him a largess of $400 for [Pg 140] one year (twice renewed), in order to enable him to go to Italy and "educate himself for a poet;" and he was also made a beneficiary of the well-known Schafer legacy for the training of artists. In the autumn of 1871 he started with his wife and four children for Rome. It was in a solemnly festal frame of mind that he now resolved to devote the rest of his life to his real vocation, which at last he had found. This was what they had all meant—his gropings, trials, and failures. They had all fitted him for the life-work which was now to be his. The world lay before him as in the shining calm after storm.

He took his artistic training, as everything else, with extreme seriousness. With the utmost conscientiousness he started out with his Thomasine, morning after morning, to study the Vatican and the Capitoline collections. "Happy is the man," says Goethe, "who learns early in life what art means." But Jonas Lie was thirty-eight years old; and, as far as I can judge from his writings, I should venture to say that the secret of classical art has never been unlocked to him. It lies probably rather remote from the sphere of his sensations. His genius is so profoundly Germanic that only an ill-wisher would covet for him that expansion of vision which would enable him to perceive with any degree of artistic realization and intimacy the glorious serenity of the Juno Ludovisi and the divine distinction of the Apollo Belvedere.

The two books which were the first-fruits of the Roman sojourn were a disappointment to his [Pg 141] friends, though in the case of the unpretentious collection called "Tales and Sketches from Nordland" (1872) there is no reason why it should have been. The public found that it was not on a level with "The Visionary," and by "The Visionary" Jonas Lie was bound to be judged, whether he liked it or not. That is the penalty of having produced a masterpiece, that one is never permitted to follow the example of *bonus Homerus*, who, as every one knows, sometimes nods. Jonas Lie was far from nodding in "The Barque Future" (1872). There was an abundance of interest in the material, and a delightful picturesque vigor in the descriptions of nature. But of romantic interest of the kind which the ordinary novel-reader craves, there was very little. *À propos* of "The Barque Future" let me quote a bit of general characterization which applies to nearly all the subsequent works of Jonas Lie.

"It is in this particular that Jonas Lie most distinctly diverges from all romanticism and romance-writing: His interest in practical affairs, his ability to see poetry in that which is contemporary. The sawdust in the rivers has never offended him, nor the Briton's black cloud of coal-smoke. The busy toil of office and shop is not prose to him. He penetrates to the bottom of its meaning—its significance to civilization."[16]

[16] Arne Garborg: Jonas Lie, p. 172.

"The Barque Future" is, as regards its problem, Gustav Freytag's *Soll und Haben* ("Debit and [Pg 142] Credit") transferred to Nordland. Instead of the noble house of Rothsattel we have the ancient and highly esteemed commercial firm of Heggelund, whose chief falls into the toils of the scoundrel, Stuwitz, very much as Baron Rothsattel was dragged to ruin by the Jew Veitel Itzig. But no more than Freytag can find it in his heart to award the victory to the Hebrew usurer, can Lie violate the proprieties of fiction by permitting Stuwitz to fatten on his spoil. He could not, like the German novelist, conjure up a noble gentleman of democratic sympathies and practical ability (like von Finck) and make him emerge in the nick of time as the heir of the ancient gentry, justifying the dignities which he enjoys in the state by the uses which he fulfils. In Norway there is no nobility; and Lie, therefore, had to make his able and industrious plebeian, Morten Jonsen (the equivalent of Anton Wohlfahrt in *Soll und Haben*) the inheritor of the future. He accordingly

awards to him the hand of Miss Edele Heggelund; but not until he has put Jacob to shame by the amount and character of the work by which he earns his Rachel.

The reception of "The Barque Future" was far from satisfactory to its author. He grew apprehensive about himself. He could not afford another failure; nay, not even a *succès d'estime*. Accordingly he waited two years, and published in 1874 "The Pilot and his Wife," which made its [Pg 143] mark. It is an every-day story in the best sense of the word, the history of a marriage among common folk. And yet so true is it, so permeated with a warm and rich humanity, that it holds the reader's attention from beginning to end. Then, to add to its interest, it has some bearing upon the woman question. Lie maintains that no true marriage can exist where the wife sacrifices her personality, and submits without a protest to neglect and ill-treatment. Happily we are not particularly in need of that admonition on our side of the ocean. The wife of the pilot, Salve Christensen, had once broken her engagement with him, having become enamored of the handsome naval lieutenant, Beck; but she recovers her senses and marries Christensen, whom she really loves. After her marriage she tries to do penance for the wrong she has done him by being, as she fancies, a model wife. But by submission and self-extinction, so alien to her character, she arouses his suspicion that she has something on her conscience; and, in his feeling of outrage, he begins to neglect and abuse her. When, at last, his maltreatment reaches a climax, she arises in all the dignity of her womanhood, and asserts her true self. Then comes reconciliation, followed by a united life of true equality and loving comradeship.

Such a mere skeleton of a plot can, of course, give no conception of the wealth of vivid details with which the book abounds. There is, however, a certain air of effort about it, of a strenuous seriousness, which is, I fancy, the temperamental note of this author. [Pg 144]

"The Pilot and his Wife" besides reviving Lie's popularity also served to define his position in Norwegian literature. He had at first been assigned a definite corner as the "poet of Nordland," but his ambition was not satisfied with so narrow a province. In all his tales, so far, he has surpassed all predecessors in his descriptions of the sea; and the critics, when favorably disposed, fell into the habit of referring to him as "the novelist of the sea," "the poet of the ocean," etc. The Norwegian sailor, whom he may be said to have revealed in "The Pilot," came to be considered more and more as his property; and no one can read such tales as "Press On" (*Gaa Paa*) and "Rutland" without agreeing that the title is well merited. I know of no English novelist since Smollett, who produces so deep a sense of reality in his descriptions of maritime life. Mr. Clark Russell, who knows his ship from masthead to keel as thoroughly as Jonas Lie, and writes fully as clever a story, seems to me to have a lower aim, in so far as the novel of adventure, *cæteris paribus*, belongs on a lower level than the novel of character.

In the year 1874 the Norwegian Storthing conferred upon Jonas Lie an annual "poet's salary" of about six hundred dollars. This is supposed to supply a warranty deed to a lot on Parnassus. It removes any possible flaw in the title to immortality. Lie was now lifted into the illustrious [Pg 145] triumvirate in which Björnson and Ibsen were his predecessors. Great expectations were entertained of his literary future. But, oddly enough, this official recognition did not have a favorable effect upon Lie. He felt himself almost oppressed by a sense of obligation to yield full returns for what he consumed of the public revenues. In 1875 he published a versified tale, "Faustina Strozzi," dealing with the struggle for Italian liberty. In spite of many excellences it fell rather flat, and was roughly handled by the critics. Even a worse fate befell its successor, "Thomas Ross" (1878), a novel of contemporary life in the Norwegian capital. It is a pale, and rather labored story, in which a young girl, of the Rosamond Vincy type, is held up to scorn, and the atrocity of flirtation is demonstrated by the most tragic consequences. There is likewise an air of triviality about "Adam Schrader" (1879); and Lie became seriously alarmed about himself when he had to register a third failure. Like its predecessor, this book is full of keen observations, and the sketches of the social futilities and the typical characters at a summer watering-place are surely good enough to pass muster. But, somehow, the material fails to combine into a sufficiently coherent and impressive picture; and the total effect remains rather feeble. In a drama, "Grabow's Cat" (1880), he suffered shipwreck once more, though he saved something from the waves. The play was performed in Christiania and Stockholm, and aroused [Pg 146] interest, but not enough to keep it afloat.

It has been said of Browning that he succeeded by a series of failures, which meant, in his case, that his books failed to command instant attention, but were gradually discovered by the thoughtful few who by their appreciation spread the poet's fame among the thoughtless many. It was not in this way that Jonas Lie's failures conduced to his final success. "Thomas Ross," "Adam Schrader," and "Grabow's Cat" have not grown perceptibly in the estimation either of the critics or of the public since their first appearance. But they supplied their author a hard but needed discipline. They warned him against over-confidence and routine work. He had passed through a soul-trying experience, in its effect not unlike the one which Keats describes *à propos* of "Endymion:"

"In 'Endymion' I leaped headlong into the sea and thereby have become better acquainted with the soundings, the quicksands, and the rocks than if I had stayed upon the green shore, took tea and comfortable advice. I was never afraid of failure—would rather fail than not be among the greatest."

Jonas Lie reconquered at one stroke all that he had lost, by the delightful sea-novel "Rutland" (1881), and reinstated himself still more securely in the hearts of an admiring public by the breezy tale, "Press On" (1882). But after so protracted a sea-voyage he began to long for the

shore, where, up to date he had suffered all his reverses. It could not be that he who had lived all [Pg 147]
his life on *terra firma*, and was so profoundly interested in the problems of modern society, should be banished forever, like "The Man Without a Country," to the briny deep, and be debarred from describing the things which he had most at heart. One more attempt he was bound to make, even at the risk of another failure. Accordingly in 1883 appeared "The Life Prisoner" (*Livsslaven*), which deserved a better fate than befell it. The critics found it depressing, compared it to Zola, and at the same time scolded the author because he lacked indignation and neglected to denounce the terrible conditions which he described. He replied to their arraignments in an angry but very effective letter. But that did not save the book. Truth to tell, "The Life Prisoner" is a dismal tale. It was, in fact, the irruption of modern naturalism into Norwegian literature. It reminds one in its tone more of Dostoyevski's "Crime and Punishment" than of "L'Assommoir." For to my mind Dostoyevski is a greater exponent of naturalism than Zola, whom Lemaitre not inaptly styles "an epic poet." The pleasing and well-bred truths or lies, to the expounding of which *belles lettres* had hitherto been confined, were here discarded or ignored. The author had taken a plunge into the great dumb deep of the nethermost social strata, which he has explored with admirable conscientiousness and artistic perception. Few men of letters would object to being the father of so creditable a failure. Lie, being convinced that his [Pg 148]
book was a good one, no matter what the wielders of critical tomahawks might say to the contrary, resolved to persevere in the line he had chosen and to pluck victory from the heels of defeat. And the victory came even the same year (1883), when he published what, to my mind, is the most charming of all his novels, "The Family at Gilje." That is a book which is taken, warm and quivering, out of the very heart of Norway. The humor which had been cropping out tentatively in Lie's earlier tales comes here to its full right, and his shy, beautiful pathos gleams like hidden tears behind his genial smile. It is close wrought cloth of gold. No loosely woven spots —no shoddy woof of cheaper material. Captain Jaeger and his wife, Inger-Johanna, Jörgen, Grip, nay, the whole company of sober, everyday mortals that come trooping through its chapters are so delightfully human that you feel the blood pulse under their skin at the first touch. It is a triumph indeed, to have written a book like "The Family at Gilje."

From this time forth Jonas Lie's career presents an unbroken series of successes. "A Maelstrom" (1884), "Eight Stories," "Married Life" (*Et Samliv*), (1887), "Maisa Jons" (1888), "The Commodore's Daughters" and "Evil Powers" (1890), which deal with interesting phases of contemporary life, are all extremely modern in feeling and show the same effort to discard all tinsel and sham and get at the very heart of reality. [Pg 149]

He had by this series of novels established his reputation as a relentless realist, when, in 1892, he surprised his admirers by the publication of two volumes of the most wildly fantastic tales, entitled "Trold." It was as if a volcano, with writhing torrents of flame and smoke, had burst forth from under a sidewalk in Broadway. It was the suppressed Finn who, for once, was going to have his fling, even though he were doomed henceforth to silence. It was the "queer thoughts" (which had accumulated in the author and which he had scrupulously imprisoned) returning to take vengeance upon him unless he released them. The most grotesque, weird, and uncanny imaginings (such as Stevenson would delight in) are crowded together in these tales, some of which are derived from folk-lore and legends, while others are free fantasies.

Before taking leave of Jonas Lie, a word about his style is in order. Style, as such, counts for very little with him. Yet he has a distinctly individual and vigorous manner of utterance, though a trifle rough, perhaps, abrupt, elliptic, and conversational. Mere decorative adjectives and clever felicities of phrase he scorns. All scientific and social phenomena—all that we include under the term modern progress—command his most intense and absorbed attention. Having since 1882 been a resident of Paris (except during his annual summer excursions to Norway or the mountains of Bavaria) he has had the advantage of seeing the society which he describes at that [Pg 150]
distance which, if it does not lend enchantment, at all events unifies the scattered impressions, and furnishes a convenient critical outpost. He does not permit himself, however, like so many foreigners in the French capital, to lapse into that supercilious cosmopolitanism which deprives a man of his own country without giving him any other in exchange. No; Jonas Lie is and remains a Norseman—a fact which he demonstrated (to the gratification of his countrymen) on a recent occasion. At the funeral of the late Professor O. J. Broch—a famous Norwegian who died in Paris —the chaplain of the Swedish legation made an oration in which he praised the departed statesman and scientist, referring to him constantly as "our countryman." When he had finished, Jonas Lie, without anybody's invitation, stepped quietly up to the coffin and in the name of Norway bade *his* countryman a last farewell. "The spirit came over Lie," says his biographer, "and he spoke with ravishing eloquence."

But why did he do such an uncalled-for thing, you will ask? Because there is a systematic effort on the part of Sweden to suppress the very name of Norway, and to give the impression, throughout the world, that there is no such nationality as the Norwegian. Therefore every Norseman (unless he chooses to be a party to this suppression) is obliged to assert his nationality in season and out of season. But Jonas Lie has, indeed, in a far more effective way borne aloft the [Pg 151]
banner of his country. His books have been translated into French, German, English, Dutch, Swedish, Finnish, Italian, Russian, and Bohemian; and throughout Europe the literary journals and magazines are beginning to discuss him as one of the foremost representatives of modern realism. [Pg 152]

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN[17]

[Pg 155]

[17] A portion of this essay appeared originally in "The Dial" of Chicago.

Hans Christian Andersen was a unique figure in Danish literature, and a solitary phenomenon in the literature of the world. Superficial critics have compared him with the Brothers Grimm; they might with equal propriety have compared him with Voltaire or with the man in the moon. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were scientific collectors of folk-lore, and rendered as faithfully as possible the simple language of the peasants from whose lips they gathered their stories. It was the ethnological and philological value of the fairy-tale which stimulated their zeal; its poetic value was of quite secondary significance. With Andersen the case was exactly the reverse. He was as innocent of scientific intention as the hen who finds a diamond on a dunghill is of mineralogy. It was the poetic phase alone of the fairy-tale which attracted him; and what is more, he saw poetic possibilities where no one before him had ever discovered them. By the alchemy of genius (which seems so perfectly simple until you try it yourself) he transformed the common neglected nonsense of the nursery into rare poetic treasure. Boots, who kills the ogre and marries the [Pg 156] princess—the typical lover in fiction from the remotest Aryan antiquity down to the present time—appears in Andersen in a hundred disguises, not with the rudimentary features of the old story, but modernized, individualized, and carrying on his shield an unobtrusive little moral. In "Jack the Dullard" he comes nearest to his primitive prototype, and no visible effort is made to refine him. In "The Most Extraordinary Thing" he is the vehicle of a piece of social satire, and narrowly escapes the lot which the Fates seem especially to have prepared for inventors, viz., to make the fortune of some unscrupulous clown while they themselves die in poverty. In "The Porter's Son" he is an aspiring artist, full of the fire of genius, and he wins his princess by conquering that many-headed ogre with which every self-made man has to battle—the world's envy, and malice, and contempt for a lowly origin. It is easy to multiply examples, but these may suffice.

In another species of fairy-tale, which Andersen may be said to have invented, incident seems to be secondary to the moral purpose, which is yet so artfully hidden that it requires a certain maturity of intellect to detect it. In this field Andersen has done his noblest work and earned his immortality. Who can read that marvellous little tale, "The Ugly Duckling," without perceiving that it is a subtle, most exquisite revenge the poet is taking upon the humdrum Philistine world, which despised and humiliated him, before he lifted his wings and flew away with the swans, who [Pg 157] knew him as their brother? And yet, as a child, I remember reading this tale with ever fresh delight, though I never for a moment suspected its moral. The hens and the ducks and the geese were all so vividly individualized, and the incidents were so familiar to my own experience, that I demanded nothing more for my entertainment. Likewise in "The Goloshes of Fortune" there is a wealth of amusing adventures, all within the reach of a child's comprehension, which more than suffices to fascinate the reader who fails to penetrate beneath the surface. The delightful satire, which is especially applicable to Danish society, is undoubtedly lost to nine out of ten of the author's foreign readers, but so prodigal is he both of humorous and pathetic meaning, that every one is charmed with what he finds, without suspecting how much he has missed. "The Little Mermaid" belongs to the same order of stories, though the pathos here predominates, and the resemblance to De la Motte Fouqué's "Undine" is rather too striking. But the gem of the whole collection, I am inclined to think, is "The Emperor's New Clothes," which in subtlety of intention and universality of application rises above age and nationality. Respect for the world's opinion and the tyranny of fashion have never been satirized with more exquisite humor than in the figure of the emperor who walks through the streets of his capital in *robe de nuit*, followed by a procession of courtiers, who all go into ecstasies over the splendor of his attire. [Pg 158]

It was not only in the choice of his theme that Andersen was original. He also created his style, though he borrowed much of it from the nursery. "It was perfectly wonderful," "You would scarcely have believed it," "One would have supposed that there was something the matter in the poultry-yard, but there was nothing at all the matter"—such beginnings are not what we expect to meet in dignified literature. They lack the conventional style and deportment. No one but Andersen has ever dared to employ them. As Dr. Brandes has said in his charming essay on Andersen, no one has ever attempted, before him, to transfer the vivid mimicry and gesticulation which accompany a nursery tale to the printed page. If you tell a child about a horse, you don't say that it neighed, but you imitate the sound; and the child's laughter or fascinated attention compensates you for your loss of dignity. The more successfully you crow, roar, grunt, and mew, the more vividly you call up the image and demeanor of the animal you wish to represent, and the more impressed is your juvenile audience. Now, Andersen does all these things in print: a truly wonderful feat. Every variation in the pitch of the voice—I am almost tempted to say every change of expression in the story-teller's features—is contained in the text. He does not write his story, he tells it; and all the children of the whole wide world sit about him and listen with, eager, [Pg 159] wide-eyed wonder to his marvellous improvisations.[18]

[18] Brandes: Kritiker og Portraiter, p. 303.

In reading Andersen's collected works one is particularly impressed with the fact that what he did outside of his chosen field is of inferior quality—inferior, I mean, judged by his own high standard, though in itself often highly valuable and interesting. "The Improvisatore," upon which, next to "The Wonder-Tales," his fame rests, is a kind of disguised autobiography which exhibits the author's morbid sensibility and what I should call the unmasculine character of his mind,[19]

To appeal to the reader's pity in your hero's behalf is a daring experiment, and it cannot, except in brief scenes, be successful. A prolonged strain of compassion soon becomes wearisome, and not the worthiest object in the world can keep one's charity interested through four hundred pages. Antonio, in "The Improvisatore," is a milksop whom the author, with a lavish expenditure of sympathy, parades as a hero. He is positively ludicrous in his pitiful softness, vanity, and humility. That the book nevertheless remains unfailingly popular, and is even yet found in the satchel of every Roman tourist, is chiefly due to the poetic intensity with which the author [Pg 160] absorbed and portrayed every Roman sight and sound. Italy throbs and glows in the pages of "The Improvisatore"—the old vagabond Italy of pre-Garibaldian days, when priests and bandits and pretty women divided the power of Church and State. Story's "Roba di Roma," Augustus Hare's "Walks in Rome," and all the other descriptions of the Eternal City, are but disguised guide-books, feeble and pale performances, when compared with Andersen's beautiful romance.

[19] R. L. Stevenson in speaking of the "Character of Dogs" makes the following cruel observation: "Hans Christian Andersen, as we behold him in his startling memoirs, thrilling from top to toe with an excruciating vanity and scouting even along the streets for the shadows of offence—here was the talking dog."—Memories and Portraits, p. 196.

The same feminine sentimentality which, in spite of its picturesqueness, makes "The Improvisatore" unpalatable to many readers, is still more glaringly exhibited in "O. T." and "The Two Baronesses." In "The Story of My Life" the same quality asserts itself on every page in the most unpleasant manner. The author makes no effort to excite the reader's admiration, but he makes constant appeals to his sympathy. Nevertheless this autobiography rivals in historic and poetic worth Rousseau's "Confessions" and Benvenuto Cellini's "Life." The absolute candor with which Andersen lays bare his soul, the complete intentional or unintentional self-revelation, gives a psychological value to the book which no mere literary graces could bestow. I confess, until I had the pleasure of making Andersen's acquaintance, "The Fairy Tale of My Life" impressed me unpleasantly. After I had by personal intercourse possessed myself of the clew to the man's character, I judged differently. Andersen remained, until the day of his death, a child. His [Pg 161] innocence was more than virginal; his unworldliness simply inconceivable. He carried his heart on his sleeve, and invited you to observe what a soft, tender, and sensitive heart it was. He had the harmless vanity of a child who has a new frock on. He was fidgety and unhappy if anybody but himself was the centre of attraction; and guilelessly happy when he could talk and be admired and sympathized with. His conversation was nearly always about himself, or about the kings and princes and lofty personages who had graciously deigned to take notice of him. He was a tuft-hunter of a rare and curious sort; not because he valued the glory reflected upon himself by royal acquaintances, but because the pomp and splendor of a court satisfied his thirst for the marvellous. A king seemed to him, as to the boy who reads his fairy-tales, something grand and remote; and in invading this charmed sphere he seemed to have invaded his own fairy-tales, and to live actually in the fabulous region of wonders in which his fancy revelled. He conceived of his life as a fairy-tale, and delighted in living up to his own ideal of living. The very title of his autobiography in Danish (*Mit Livs Eventyr*) shows this conclusively; and it ought to have been rendered in English "The Fairy-Tale of My Life." "The Story of My Life," as Mr. Scudder has translated it, would have been in the original "Mit Livs Historie," a very common title, by the way, for an autobiography, while *Mit Livs Eventyr* is entirely unique. [Pg 162]

The feeling of the marvellous pervades the book from beginning to end. The prose facts of life had but a remote and indistinct existence to the poet, and he blundered along miserably in his youth, supported and upheld by a dim but unquenchable aspiration. He commiserated himself, and yet felt that there was something great in store for him because of his exceptional endowment. Every incident in his career he treated as if it were a miracle, which required the suspension of the laws of the universe for its performance. God was a benevolent old man with a long beard (just as he was depicted in old Dr. Luther's Catechism) who sat up in the skies and spent his time chiefly in managing the affairs of Hans Christian Andersen as pleasantly as possible; and Hans Christian was duly grateful, and cried on every third or fourth page at the thought of the goodness of God and man. Sometimes, for a change, he cried at the wickedness of the latter, and marvelled, with the *naïveté* of a spoiled child, that there should be such dreadful people in the world, who should persist in misunderstanding and misrepresenting him. Those who were good to him he exalted and lauded to the skies, no matter how they conducted themselves toward the rest of humanity. Some of the most mediocre princes, who had paid him compliments, he embalmed in prose and verse. Frederick VII. of Denmark, whose immorality was [Pg 163] notorious, was, according to Andersen, "a good, amiable king," "sent by God to Danish land and folk," than whom "no truer man the Danish language spoke." And this case was by no means exceptional. The same uncritical partiality toward the great and mighty is perceptible in every chapter of "The Fairy-Tale of My Life." It was not, however, toward the great and mighty alone that he assumed this attitude; he was uncritical by nature, and had too soft a heart to find fault with anybody—except those who did not like his books. Heine's jocose description of heaven as a place where he could eat cakes and sweets, and drink punch *ad libitum*, and where the angels sat around raving about his poetry, was probably not so very remote from Andersen's actual conception. His world was the child's world, in which there is but one grand division into good and bad, and the innumerable host that occupies the middle-ground between these poles is ignored. Those who praised what he wrote were good people; those who ridiculed him were a malignant and black-hearted lot whom he was very sorry for and would include in his prayers, in the hope that God might make them better.

We may smile at this simple system; but we all remember the time when we were addicted to a

similar classification. That it is a sign of immaturity of intellect is undeniable; and in Andersen's case it is one of the many indications that intellectually he never outgrew his childhood. He never [Pg 164] possessed the power of judgment that we expect in a grown-up man. His opinions on social and political questions were *naïve* and quite worthless. And yet, in spite of all these limitations, he was a poet of rare power; nay, I may say in consequence of them. The vitality which in other authors goes toward intellectual development, produced in him strength and intensity of imagination. Everything which his fancy touched it invested with life and beauty. It divined the secret soul of bird and beast and inanimate things. His hens and ducks and donkeys speak as hens and ducks and donkeys would speak if they could speak. Their temperaments and characters are scrupulously respected. Even shirt-collars, gingerbread men, darning-needles, flowers, and sunbeams, he endowed with physiognomies and speech, fairly consistent with their ruling characteristics. This personification, especially of inanimate objects, may at first appear arbitrary; but it is part of the beautiful consistency of Andersen's genius that it never stoops to mere amusing and fantastic trickery. The character of the darning-needle is the character which a child would naturally attribute to a darning-needle, and the whole multitude of vivid personifications which fills his tales is governed by the same consistent but dimly apprehended instinct. Of course, I do not pretend that he was conscious of any such consistency; creative processes rarely are conscious. But he needed no reflection in order to discover the child's view [Pg 165] of its own world. He never ceased to regard the world from the child's point of view, and his personification of an old clothes-press or a darning-needle was therefore as natural as that of a child who beats the chair against which it bumped its head. In the works of more ambitious scope, where this code of conduct would be out of place, Andersen was never wholly at his ease. As lovers, his heroes usually cut a sorry figure; their milk-and-water passion is described, but it is never felt. They make themselves a trifle ridiculous by their innocence, and are amusing when they themselves least suspect it. Likewise, in his autobiography, he is continually exposing himself to ridicule by his *naïve* candor, and his inability to adapt himself to the etiquette which prevails among grown-up people. Take as an instance his visit to the Brothers Grimm, when he asked the servant girl which of the brothers was the more learned, and when she answered "Jacob," he said, "Then take me to Jacob." The little love affair, too, which he confides seems to have been of the kind which one is apt to experience during the pinafore period; a little more serious, perhaps, but yet of the same kind. It is in this vague and impersonal style that princes and princesses love each other in the fairy-tales; everything winds up smoothly, and there are never any marital disagreements to darken the honeymoon. It is in this happy, passionless realm that Andersen dwells, and here he reigns supreme. For many years to come the fair creatures of [Pg 166] his fancy will continue to brighten the childhood of new generations. No rival has ever entered this realm; and even critics are excluded. Nevertheless, Andersen need have no fear of the latter; for even if they had the wish, they would not have the power, to rob him of his laurels.

Hans Christian Andersen was born in the little town of Odense, on the island Fünen, April 2, 1805. His father was a poor shoemaker, with some erratic ambitions, or, if his son's word may be trusted, a man of a richly gifted and truly poetic mind. His wife was a few years older and a good deal more ignorant than himself; and when they set up housekeeping together, in a little back room, they rejoiced in being able to nail together a bridal bed out of the scaffolding which had recently supported a dead nobleman's coffin. The black mourning drapery which yet clung to the wood gave them quite a sense of magnificence. Their first child, Hans Christian, grew up amid these mean surroundings, constantly worried by the street boys, who made a butt of him, and tortured him in the thousand ingenious ways known to their species. He had no schooling to speak of; but, for all that, was haunted, like Joseph, by dreams foreshadowing his future greatness. Guided by this premonition he started, at the age of fourteen, for Copenhagen, a tall, ugly, and ungainly lad, but resolved, somehow or other, to conquer fame and honor. He tried [Pg 167] himself as a dancer, singer, actor, and failed lamentably in all his *débuts*. He could not himself estimate the extent of his own ignorance, nor could he dream what a figure he was cutting. Undismayed by all rebuffs, though suffering agony from his wounded vanity, he wrote poems, comedies, and tragedies, in which he plagiarized, more or less unconsciously, the elder Danish poets. Mr. Jonas Collins, one of the directors of the Royal Theatre, became interested in the youth, whose unusual ambition meant either madness or genius. In order to determine which it might be, Mr. Collins induced King Frederic VI. to pay for his education, and after half a dozen years at school Hans Christian passed the entrance examination to the University. Mr. Collins continued to assist him with counsel and deed; and his hospitable house in Bredgade became a second home to Andersen. There he met, for the first time, people of refinement and culture on equal terms; and his morbid self-introspection was in a measure cured by kindly association, tempered by wholesome fun and friendly criticism. He now resolved to abandon his University studies and devote his life to literature.

I have no doubt it would have alarmed the gentle poet very much, if he had been told that he belonged to the Romantic School. To be classified in literature and be bracketed with a lot of men with whom you are not even on speaking terms, and whom, more than likely, you don't admire, [Pg 168] would have seemed to him an unpleasant prospect. That he drew much of his inspiration from the German Romanticists, notably Heine and Hoffmann, he would perhaps have admitted; but he would have thought it unkind of you to comment upon his indebtedness. In his first book, "A Pedestrian Tour from Holmen Canal to the Eastern Extremity of Amager" (1829), he assumed by turns the *blasé* mask of the former and the fantastically eccentric one of the latter; both of which ill became his good-natured, plebeian, Danish countenance. For all that, the book was a success in its day; and no less an authority than the æsthetic Grand Mogul, J. L. Heiberg, hailed it as a work of no mean merit. It strikes us to-day as an exhibition of that mocking smartness of youth

which often hides a childish heart. It was because he was so excessively sentimental and feared to betray his real physiognomy that he cut these excruciating capers. His other alternative would have been mawkishness. His vaudeville, "Love on the Nicholas Tower," which satirizes the drama of chivalry, is in the same vein and made a similar hit. A volume of "Poems" was also well received. But in 1831 he met with his first literary reverse. A second collection of verses, entitled "Phantasies and Sketches," was pitilessly ridiculed by Henrik Hertz, in his "Letters from the Dead." Andersen's lack of style and violations of syntax were rather maliciously commented upon. If Gabriel's trump had sounded from the top of the Round Tower, it would not have startled [Pg 169] Andersen more. He was in despair. Like the great child he was, he went about craving sympathy, and weeping when he failed to find it.

"I could say nothing," he writes in "the Fairy-Tale of My Life," "I could only let the big, heavy waves roll over me; and it was the common opinion that I was to be totally washed away. I felt deeply the wound of the sharp knife; and was on the point of giving myself up, as I was already given up by others."

This is one of the numerous exhibitions of that over-sensitiveness to criticism which caused him such long and continued suffering. His mind was like a bared nerve, quivering with delight or contracting with violent pain. Utterly devoid, as he was, of self-criticism, he regarded his authorship as something miraculous, and held God (who apparently supervised each chapter) responsible for the fate of his books. "If the Lord," he writes in solemn earnest to a friend, "will take as good care of the remainder as he has of the first chapters, you will like it."[20] There was to him no difference between his best and his worst. It was all part of himself, and he could scarcely conceive of any motive for finding fault with it, except personal malice, envy, animosity. [21] This did not, however, always prevent him from associating with the malevolent critic, as for [Pg 170] instance in the case of Hertz, with whom he presently established pleasant relations.

[20] P. Hansen: Illustreret Dansk Litteratur Historic, vol. ii., p. 477.

[21] I derive this impression not only from the Autobiography, but from many conversations. An account of My Acquaintance with Hans Christian Andersen will be found in The Century Magazine, March, 1892.

In 1831 Andersen made his first trip abroad. "By industry and frugality," he says, "I had saved up a little sum of money, so I resolved to spend a couple of weeks in North Germany."

The result of this journey was the book "Shadow Pictures," which was followed in 1833 by "Vignettes on Danish Poets," and a chaplet of verse entitled "The Twelve Months of the Year." It is quite true, as he affirms, that in his "Vignettes," he "only spoke of that which was good in them" [the poets]; but in consequence there is a great lack of Attic salt in the book. In 1833 he went abroad once more, visited Germany, France, Switzerland, and Italy, and sent home the dramatic poem "Agnete and the Merman," the comparative failure of which was a fresh grief to him. After his return from Rome (1835) he published his "Improvisatore," which slowly won its way. It was the reputation this novel gained abroad which changed public opinion in Denmark in its favor. A second novel, "Only a Fiddler" (1837), is a fresh variation of his autobiography, and the lachrymose and a trifle chaotic story, "O. T." (being the brand of the Odense penitentiary) scarcely deserved any better reception than was accorded it.

It is a curious thing that misconception and adversity never hardened Andersen or toughened the [Pg 171] fibre of his personality. The same lamentable lack of robustness—not to say manliness—which marked his youth remained his prevailing characteristic to the end of his life. And I fancy, if he had ever reached intellectual maturity, both he himself and the world would have been losers. For it is his unique distinction to have expressed a simplicity of soul which is usually dumb—which has, at all events, nowhere else recorded itself in literature. We all have a dim recollection of how the world looked from the nursery window; but no book has preserved so vivid and accurate a negative of that marvellous panorama as Andersen's "Wonder Tales for Children," the first collection of which appeared in 1835. All the jumbled, distorted proportions of things (like the reflection of a landscape in a crystal ball) is capitally reproduced. The fantastically personifying fancy of childhood, where does it have more delightful play? The radiance of an enchanted fairy realm that bursts like an iridescent soap-bubble at the touch of the finger of reason, where does it linger in more alluring beauty than in "Ole Lukøie" ("The Sandman"), "The Little Mermaid," or "The Ice-Maiden"? There is a bloom, an indefinable, dewy freshness about the grass, the flowers, the very light, and the children's sweet faces. And so vivid—so marvellously vivid—as it all is. Listen to this from "Five in a Pea-Pod:" [Pg 172]

> "There were five peas in one pod. They were green, and the pod was green; and so they thought that the whole world was green. And that was just as it should be. The pod grew and the peas grew; they accommodated themselves to circumstances, sitting all in a row."

Or take this from "Little Tuk:"

> "Yes, that was Little Tuk. His name wasn't really Tuk, but when he couldn't speak plain, he used to call himself so. It was meant for Charley; and it does very well, when one only knows it."

Or this incomparable bit of drollery from Hjalmar's dream in "The Sandman:"

> "There came a terrible wail from the table-drawer where Hjalmar's school books

> lay. 'Whatever can that be?' said the Sandman. And he went to the table and opened the drawer. It was the slate which was in convulsions because a wrong number had got into the sum, so that it was fairly falling to pieces. The slate-pencil tugged and jumped at the end of its string, as if it had been a little dog that wanted to help the sum. But he could not. There was a great lamentation in Hjalmar's copy-book, too; it was quite terrible to hear. On each page the large letters stood in a row, one underneath the other, and each with a little one at its side. That was the copy. And next to these were a few more letters, which thought they looked just like the others. These were the ones Hjalmar had written. But they lay down as if they had tumbled pell-mell over the pencil lines upon which they were to stand.
>
> "'Look, this is the way you should hold yourselves,' said the copy, 'sloping this way with a bold swing.' 'Oh, we should be very glad to do that,' answered Hjalmar's letters, 'but we can't. We are so weakly.' 'Then you must take medicine,' said the [Pg 173] Sandman. 'Oh, no, no,' cried they, and straightway they stood up so gracefully that it was a pleasure to look at them."

This strikes me as having the very movement and all the delicious whimsicality of a school-boy's troubled dream. It has the delectable absurdity of the dream's inverted logic. You feel with what beautiful zest it was written; how childishly the author himself relished it. The illusion is therefore perfect. The big child who played with his puppet theatre until after he was grown up is quite visible in every line. He is as much absorbed in the story as any of his hearers. He is all in the game with the intense engrossment of a lad I knew, who, while playing Robinson Crusoe, ate snails with relish for oysters.

Throughout the first series of "Wonder Tales" there is a capital air of make-believe, which imposes upon you most delightfully, and makes you accept the most incredible doings, as you accept them in a dream, as the most natural thing in the world. In the later series, where the didactic tale becomes more frequent ("The Pine Tree," "The Wind's Tale," "The Buckwheat"), there is an occasional forced note. The story-teller becomes a benevolent, moralizing uncle, who takes the child upon his knee, in order to instruct while entertaining it. But he is no more in the game. A cloying sweetness of tone, such as sentimental people often adopt toward children, spoils more than one of the fables; and when occasionally he ventures upon a love-story ("The [Pg 174] Rose-Elf," "The Old Bachelor's Nightcap," "The Porter's Son"), he is apt to be as unintentionally amusing as he is in telling his own love episode in "The Fairy-Tale of My Life." However, no man can unite the advantages of adult age and childhood, and we all feel that there is something incongruous in a child's talking of love.

It is a curious fact that his world-wide fame as the poet of childhood never quite satisfied Andersen.[22] He never accepted it without a protest. It neither pleased nor sufficed him. He was especially eager to win laurels as a dramatist; and in 1839 celebrated his first dramatic success by a farcical vaudeville entitled "The Invisible at Sprogöe." Then followed the romantic drama "The Mulatto" (1840), which charmed the public and disgusted the critics; and "The Moorish Maiden," which disgusted both. These plays are slipshod in construction, but emotionally effective. The characters are loose-fibred and vague, and have no more backbone than their author himself. J. L. Heiberg thought it high time to chastise the half-cultured shoemaker's son [Pg 175] for his audacity, and in the third act of "A Soul after Death," held him up to ridicule. Andersen, stabbed again to the heart, hastened away from home, "suffering and disconcerted." But before leaving he published "A Picture-Book without Pictures", (1840), which is attached to the American edition of his "Stories and Tales," and deserves its place. The moon's pathetic and humorous observations on the world she looks down upon every evening of her thirty nights' circuit have already become classic in half-a-dozen languages. The little girl who came to kiss the hen and beg her pardon; the ragged street gamin who died upon the throne of France; the Hindoo maiden who burned her lamp upon the banks of the Ganges in order to see if her lover was alive; the little maid who was penitent because she laughed at the lame duckling with a red rag around its leg—who does not know the whole inimitable gallery from beginning to end? The tenderest, the softest, the most virginal spirit breathes through all these sketches. They are sentimental, no doubt, and a trifle too sweet. But then they belong to a period of our lives when a little excess in that direction does not trouble us.

> [22] For verification of this statement I may refer to his indignant letter *à propos* of the statue that was to be raised to him in Copenhagen, in which he was represented surrounded by listening children: "None of the sculptors," he wrote, "have known me; none of their sketches indicate that they have seen what is characteristic in me. Never could I read aloud when anybody was sitting behind me or close up to me; far less if I had children on my lap or on my back, or young Copenhageners lying all over me. It is a *façon de parler* to call me 'the children's poet.' My aim has been to be the poet of all ages; children could not represent me."

In 1842 Andersen gave to the world "A Poets' Bazaar," a chronicle of his travels through nearly all the countries of Europe. In 1844 the drama "The King is Dreaming," and in 1845 the fairy [Pg 176] comedy "The Flower of Fortune." But his highest dramatic triumph he celebrated in the anonymous comedy "The New Lying-in Room," which in a measure proved his contention that it was personal hostility and not critical scruples which made so large a portion of the Copenhagen literati persecute him. For the very men who would have been the first to hold his play up to scorn were the heartiest in their applause, as long as they did not know that Andersen was its

author. Less pronounced was the success of the lyrical drama "Little Kirsten" (1846); and the somewhat ambitious epic "Ahasverus" comes very near being a failure. The next ventures of the versatile and indefatigable poet were the novel "The Two Baronesses" (1849), and the fairy comedies "More than Pearls and Gold" (1849), adapted from a German original, "The Sandman" [23] (1850), and "The Elder Tree Mother" (1851). The comedies "He was not Born" (1864), "On Langebro" and "When the Spaniards were Here" (1869), complete the cycle of his dramatic labors. But the most amusing thing he did, showing how incapable he was of taking the measure of his faculties, was to write a novel, "To Be or Not to Be" (1857), in which he proposed once and forever to down the giant Unbelief, prove the immortality of the soul, and produce "peace and reconciliation between Nature and the Bible." It was nothing less than the evidences of Christianity in novelistic form with which he designed to favor an expectant world. "If[24] I can [Pg 177] solve this problem," he naïvely wrote to a friend, "then the monster materialism, devouring everything divine, will die." But rarely was a bigger Gulliver tackled by a tinier Liliputian. The book not only fell flat, but it was only the world-wide renown and the good intention of its author which saved it from derision.

[23] Danish, Ole Luköie.

[24] Hansen: Illustreret Dansk Litteratur Historie, ii. p. 560.

Though Andersen never attained in Copenhagen an uncontested recognition of his talent, honors both from at home and abroad were showered upon him. The fame which undeniably was his commanded respect, but scarcely approval. Heiberg made merry at his obscurity in the country of his birth and his celebrity beyond its boundaries, and represented him as reading "The Mulatto" to the Sultan's wives and the "Moorish Maiden" to those who were to be strangled, kneeling in rapture, while the Grand Eunuch, crowned his head with laurels. But in spite of obloquy and ridicule, Andersen continued his triumphant progress through all the lands of the civilized world, and even beyond it. In 1875 his tale, "The Story of a Mother," was published simultaneously in fifteen languages, in honor of his seventieth birthday. A few months later (August 4th) he died at the villa Rolighed, near Copenhagen. His life was indeed as marvellous as any of his tales. A gleam of light from the wonderland in which he dwelt seems to have fallen upon his cradle and to have illuminated his whole career. It was certainly in this illumination that [Pg 178] he himself saw it, as the opening sentence of his autobiography proves: "My life is a lovely fairy-tale, happy and full of incidents."

The softness, the sweetness, the juvenile innocence of Danish romanticism found their happiest expression in him; but also the superficiality, the lack of steel in the will, the lyrical vagueness and irresponsibility. If he did not invent a new literary form he at all events enriched and dignified an old one, and revealed in it a world of unsuspected beauty. He was great in little things, and little in great things. He had a heart of gold, a silver tongue, and the spine of a mollusk. Like a flaw in a diamond, a curious plebeian streak cut straight across his nature. With all his virtues he lacked that higher self-esteem which we call nobility. [Pg 179]

[Pg 181]

CONTEMPORARY DANISH LITERATURE

The late Romantic authors of Denmark who lived on the traditions of Oehlenschläger's time and the æsthetical doctrines of J. L. Heiberg, have gradually been passing away; and a new generation has grown up, which, though it knows Joseph, has repudiated his doctrine. A period of stagnation followed the disappearance of the Romanticists. The Sleswick-Holstein war of 1866, and the consequent hostility to Germany, cut off the intellectual intercourse between the two countries which in the first half of the century had been lively and intimate; and as, for a while, no new ties were formed, a respectable dulness settled upon the little island kingdom. People lived for the concerns of the day, earned their bread and butter, amused themselves to the best of their ability, but troubled themselves very little about the battles of thought which were being fought upon the great arena of the world. The literary activity which now and then flared up spasmodically, like flames over a smouldering ash-heap, flickered and half-expired for want of fresh sustenance. A direfully conventional romanticist, H. F. Ewald (1821-1892), wrote [Pg 182] voluminous modern and historical novels, the heroines of which were usually models of all the copy-book virtues, and the heroes as bloodless as their brave and loyal prototypes in "Ivanhoe" and "Waverley." Instead of individualizing his *dramatis personæ* this feeble successor of Ingemann and Walter Scott gave them a certificate of character, vouching for their goodness or badness, and trusting the reader to take his word for it in either case. Like many another popular novelist, he varnished them with the particular tint of excellence or depravity that might suit his purpose, stuffed their heads with bran and their bellies with sawdust, but troubled himself little about what lay beneath the epidermis. There was something *naïve* and juvenile in his view of life which appealed to the large mass of half-educated people; and the very absence of any subtle literary art tended further to increase his public. Many of his books, notably "The Youth of Valdemar Krone" (*Valdemar Krone's Ungdomshistorie*), "The Swedes at Kronborg" (*Svenskerne*

paa Kronborg), have achieved an extraordinary success. The former deals with contemporary life, while the latter expurgates and embellishes history after the manner of Walter Scott. Two subsequent novels, "The Family Nordby" and "Johannes Falk," are, like all of Ewald's writings, pervaded by a robust optimism and a warm Danish sentiment, which in a large measure account for their popularity with the public of the circulating libraries. [Pg 183]

A lesser share of the same kind of popularity has fallen to the lot of an author of a much higher order—Wilhelm Bergsöe (born 1835). His voluminous novel "Fra Piazza del Popolo" (1860) made a sensation in its day, and "From the Old Factory" (1869), which constructively is a maturer book, is likewise full of fascination. The description of the doings of the artistic guild in Rome, which occupies a considerable portion of the former work, is delightful, though intermingled with a deal of superfluous mysticism and romantic entanglements which were then held to be absolutely indispensable. "In the Sabine Mountains" (1871), the scene of which is laid in Genazzano during the struggle for Italian independence, is a trifle too prolix; and its effect is lessened by the old-fashioned epistolary form. Signor Carnevale, the revolutionary apothecary, is, however, a very amusing figure, and would be still better if he were not caricatured. The tendency to screw the characters up above the normal—to tune them up to concert pitch as it were—interferes seriously with the pleasure which the book otherwise might yield.

The conception of art as something wholly distinct from and above nature animates all Bergsöe's productions. The theory of fiction which R. L. Stevenson has so eloquently propounded has found an able practitioner in him. For all that, I am indebted to Bergsöe's two Italian romances for a great deal of enjoyment, the afterglow of which still warms my memory. But that was long ago. A young man is apt to enjoy in a book quite as much what he himself supplies as that which the author has deposited therein. Each word is a key which unlocks a store of imprisoned emotions. The very word Italy has a magic which imparts to it a charm even in the geography. And Bergsöe, though he works, without suspicion of its decrepitude, the ancient machinery of Italian romance, is unaffectedly eloquent and unsophistically entertaining. The historic whisperings which he catches from the names, the ruins, the facial types, and the very trees and grass of Genazzano invest his letters from that picturesque neighborhood with a certain beautiful glow of color and a dusky richness of decay. The autobiographical form imposes, to be sure, an increasing strain on the reader's credulity, as the plot thickens, and we find ourselves, half-unexpectedly, involved in a lurid tale of monks, priests, disguised revolutionists, cruel, mercenary fathers, etc., and the Danish author playing his favorite *rôle* of *deus ex machina*. Still more incredible is the part of benevolent Providence which he assigns to himself in "The Bride of Rörvig," where he saves the heroine's life by restoring to her a ring given to her lover, and thus assuring her that he is alive when she believes him dead. The autobiographical story (especially when the writer is a mere convenient supernumerary, designed, like the uncle from America in the old-fashioned melodrama, to straighten out the tangled skein), is apt to involve other difficulties than the mere embarrassment of having to distrust the author's assertion, or censure his indiscretions. The illusion is utterly spoiled by that haunting *arrière pensée* that this or that writer, whom you know perhaps at first or second-hand, or whose features, at all events, are familiar to you from pictures, never could or would have played the more or less heroic *rôle* with which he here delights to impose upon you. [Pg 184] [Pg 185]

Altogether the best book which Bergsöe has written is the autobiographical romance "From the Old Factory," the scene of which is laid in Denmark. This book evidently contains a great deal of genuine reminiscence, and is therefore devoid of that air of laborious contrivance and artificial intrigue which brings the foregoing novels into such unpleasant relationship with Wilkie Collins and his *genre*. The incidents of the hero's boyhood in the old porcelain factory, and his uncle's agitating experiments for the rediscovery of a lost process of glazing are saner and soberer and lie closer to the soil of common experience than the exploits of monks and pirates and revolutionists.

Among the notable men of the expiring Danish romanticism Meyer Aaron Goldschmidt (1819-1886) holds a leading position. A comic paper, *Corsaren*, which he edited (1840-1846) made a tremendous stir in its day; and its scathing wit and satire were not without influence upon current events. His two novels, *En Jöde* (1845), *Hjemlös* (1857), and a large number of clever novelettes (*Ravnen*, *Arvingen Flyveposten*, etc.), are full of psychological subtleties, and often charmingly told. *Flyveposten* ("The Flying Mail") was translated into English (Boston and Cambridge, 1870) but attracted no particular attention. For all that, Goldschmidt, in spite of occasional prolixity, stands the test of time remarkably well. His Jewish stories, notably *Maser, Aron og Esther*, and *En Jöde*, contain a higher order of work, though less dramatically effective, than that of Sacher-Masoch, and Emil Franzos, and the later Ghetto romancers. Goldschmidt's double nationality, as a Danish-born Jew, indicates his position and the source from which he drew his weakness and his strength. As a Jew he saw and judged the Danish character, and as a Dane he saw and judged the Jewish character with a liberality and insight of which no autochthon would have been capable. For all that his tales aroused anything but friendly feelings among his own people. They felt it to be a profanation thus to expose the secluded domestic and religious life of the children of Israel. It is to this sentiment that Dr. Brandes has given utterance in his protest against "perpetually serving up one's grandmother with sauce piquante." [Pg 186]

An author who is born into an age of transition, when old faiths are passing away and new ones are struggling for recognition, is placed in a serious dilemma. Where he makes his choice by mere temperamental bias, he is apt to miss that element of growth which is involved in every spiritual struggle. But if, as is so frequently the case, he finds his choice in a measure made for [Pg 187]

him, his education, kinships, and worldly advantage identifying him with the established order, it takes a tremendous amount of courage and character to break away from old moorings and steer, without other compass than a sensitive conscience, toward the rosy dawn of the unknown. There was a desperate need of such men in Denmark in the seventies, when the little kingdom was sinking deeply and more deeply into a bog of patriotic delusion and spiritual stagnation. An infusion of new blood was needed—a re-establishment of that circulation of thought which keeps the whole civilized world in vital connection and makes it akin. No country can cut itself off from this universal world-life without withering like a diseased limb. The man who undertook to bring Denmark again into *rapport* with Europe was Dr. Georg Brandes, whom I have characterized at length in another essay. It was his admirable book, "The Men of the Modern Transition" (translated into German under the title *Moderne Geister*) which impelled me, some years ago, to make the acquaintance of the three authors who represent whatever there is of promise in contemporary Danish literature, viz., Sophus Schandorph, Holger Drachmann, and J. P. Jacobsen. [Pg 188] The last named, who died (1884) in the flower of his young manhood, is, perhaps, not in the strictest sense contemporary. But he is indispensable to the characterization of the group.

Widely different as these three men are in almost everything, they have this in common, that they have deeply breathed the air of the nineteenth century; and they all show more or less the influence of Brandes. That this influence has been direct and personal seems probable from the relation which they have sustained to the revolutionary critics. Of this I am, however, by no means sure. Mr. Jacobsen, who was by profession a botanist, and translated Darwin into Danish, no doubt came by his "advanced views" at first hand. In the case of Schandorph it is more difficult to judge. He is an excellent linguist, and may have had access to the same sources from which Brandes drew his strength. Drachmann is so vacillating in his tendencies that he refuses to be permanently classified in any school of art or thought. Of the three, Schandorph seems altogether the maturest mind and furnishes the most finished and satisfactory work. In his novel "Without a Centre" (*Uden Midtpunkt*) the reader feels himself at once face to face with an interesting and considerable personality. He has that sense of surprise and delighted expectation which only the masters of fiction are apt to evoke. It is a story of a Danish national type—the conversational artist. In no country in the world is there such a conversational fury as in [Pg 189] Denmark. A people has, of course, to do something with its surplus energy; and as political opposition is sure to prove futile, there is nothing left to do but to talk—not only politics, but art, poetry, religion, in fact, everything under the sun. At the time, however, when Albrecht, the hero of "Without a Centre," plied his nimble tongue, the country had a more liberal Government, and criticism of the Ministry was not yet high treason. But centuries of repression and the practical exclusion of the bourgeoisie from public life were undoubtedly the fundamental causes of this abnormal conversational activity. There is something soft and emotional in the character of the Danes, which distinguishes them from their Norwegian and Swedish kinsmen—an easily flowing lyrical vein, which imparts a winning warmth and cordiality to their demeanor. Socially they are the most charming people in the world. Also in this respect Albrecht is typical, and the songs in which he gives vent to his lyrical moods have such a rapturous melody that they keep humming in the brain long after the reader has closed the book. It almost follows as a psychological necessity that a man so richly endowed with the gift of speech is feeble and halting in action. Like Tourguéneff's "Rudin," who suffered from the same malady, he gains by the brilliancy and novelty of his speech the love of a noble young girl, who, taking his phrases at their face value, believes [Pg 190] his heart to be as heroic as his tongue. Like him, too, he fails in the critical moment; nay, restrained by petty scruples, he even stays away from the rendezvous, and by his cowardice loses what by his eloquence he had won.

A second novel, "Common People," which deals with low life in its most varied phases, shows the same admirable truthfulness and exactness in the character drawing, the same refreshing humor and universal sympathy and comprehension. "The Story of Thomas Friis" undertakes to show, in the career of a Danish youth who is meant to be typical, the futility of the vainglorious imaginings with which the little nation has inflated itself to a size out of proportion to its actual historic *rôle*. In "The Old Pharmacy" the necessity of facing the changed reality of the modern world, instead of desperately hugging an expiring past, is enforced in a series of vivid and vigorous pictures of provincial life. "The Forester's Children," which is one of the latest of this author's novels, suffers by comparison with its predecessors, but is yet full of cleverness and smacks of the soil.

Schandorph's naturalism is not pathological; not in the nature of an autopsy or a diagnosis of disease. It is full-blooded and vigorous—not particularly squeamish—but always fresh and wholesome. His shorter tales and sketches ("From the Province," "Five Stories," "Novelettes") are of more unequal merit, but are all more or less strongly characterized by the qualities which [Pg 191] fascinate in his novels. Of his poems "*Samlede Digte*," (1882) I have not the space to speak, and can only regret that they are written in a language in which they will remain as hidden from the world as if they had been imprinted in cuneiform inscriptions upon Assyrian bricks. They are largely occasional and polemical; and more remarkable for vigor of thought than sweetness of melody.

J. P. Jacobsen, the second in the group to which I have referred, was a colorist of a very eminent type, both in prose and verse; but his talent lacked that free-flowing, spontaneous abundance—that charming air of improvisation—with which Schandorph captivates his reader, takes him into his confidence, and overwhelms him with entertainment. Jacobsen painted faces better than he did souls; or, rather, he did not seem to think the latter worth painting, unless they exhibited some abnormal mood or trait. There is something forced and morbid in his people—a lack of free movement and natural impulse. His principal work, "Mistress Marie Grubbe," is a series of

anxiously finished pictures, carefully executed in the minutest details, but failing somehow to make a complete impression. Each scene is so bewilderingly surcharged with color that, as in the case of a Gobelin tapestry, one has to be at a distance before one discovers the design. There is something almost wearisome in the far-fetched words with which he piles up picturesque effects, [Pg 192] returning every now and then to put in an extra touch—to tip a feather with light, to brighten the sheen of his satins, to polish the steely lustre of swords and armors. Yet, if one takes the time to linger over these unusual words and combinations of words, one is likely to find that they are strong and appropriate. All conventional shop-work he disdained; the traditional phrases for eyes, lips, brow, and hair were discarded, not necessarily because they were bad, but because by much use they have lost their freshness. They have come to be mere sounds, and no longer call up vivid conceptions. An author who has the skill and the courage to undertake this repolishing and resharpening of the tools of language is, indeed, a public benefactor; but it requires the finest linguistic taste and discrimination to do it with success. Most authors are satisfied if they succeed in giving currency to one happy phrase involving a novel use of the language, or to an extremely limited number; I know of no one who has undertaken the renovation of his mother-tongue on so extensive a scale as Jacobsen. To say that he has in most cases done it well is, therefore, high praise. "Mistress Marie Grubbe" is not, however, easy reading; and the author's novelettes, entitled "Mogens and Other Stories," seem to be written, primarily, for literary connoisseurs, as their interest as mere stories is scarcely worth considering. They are, rather, essays in the art of saying things unusually and yet well. They do not seem to me, even in this respect, a success. [Pg 193] There are single phrases that seem almost an inspiration; there are bits of description, particularly of flowers and moods of nature, which are masterly; but the studious avoidance of the commonplace imparts to the reader something of the strain under which the author has labored. He begins to feel the sympathetic weariness which often overcomes one while watching acrobatic feats.

In Jacobsen's third book, "Niels Lyhne," we have again the story of a Danish Rudin—a nature with a multitude of scattered aspirations, squandering itself in brilliant talk and fantastic yearnings. It is the same coquetting with the "advanced" ideas of the age, the same lack of mental stamina, the same wretched surrender and failure. It is the complexion of a period which the author is here attempting to give, and he takes pains to emphasize its typical character. One is almost tempted to believe that Shakespeare, by a gift of happy divination, made his Prince of Denmark conform to this national type, though in his day it could not have been half as pronounced as it is now. Whether the Dane of the sixteenth century was yet the eloquent mollusk which we are perpetually encountering in modern Danish fiction is a question which, at this distance, it is hard to decide. The type, of course, is universal, and is to be found in all countries. Only in the English race, on both sides of the Atlantic, it is comparatively rare. That a vigorous race like the Danish, [Pg 194] confined, as it is in modern times, within a narrow arena of action (and forbidden to do anything on that), should have developed it to a rare perfection seems, as I have already remarked, almost a psychological necessity.

Holger Drachmann, in his capacity of lyrist, has also a strain of the Hamlet nature; although, in the case of a poet, whose verses are in themselves deeds, the assertion contains no reproach. I am not even sure that the Protean quality of Drachmann's verse—its frequent voicing of naturally conflicting tendencies—need be a matter of reproach. A poet has the right to sing in any key in which he can sing well; and Drachmann sings, as a rule, exceedingly well. But, like most people with a fine voice, he is tempted to sing too much; and it thus happens that verses of slipshod and hasty workmanship are to be found in his volumes. In his first book of "Poems" he was a free oppositional lance, who carried on a melodious warfare against antiquated institutions and opinions, and gave a thrust here and a thrust there in behalf of socialists, communists, and all sorts of irregular characters. Since that time his radical, revolutionary sympathies have had time to cool, and in each succeeding volume he has appeared more sedate, conservative, *bourgeois*. [25] In a later volume of poems this transformation is half symbolically indicated in the title, [Pg 195] "Tempered Melodies." Nor is it to be denied that his melodies have gained in beauty by this process of tempering. There is a wider range of feeling, greater charm of expression, and a deeper resonance. Half a dozen volumes of verse which he has published since ("Songs of the Ocean," "Venezia," "Vines and Roses," "Youth in Verse and Song," "Peder Tordenskjold," "Deep Chords") are of very unequal worth, but establish beyond question their author's right to be named among the few genuine poets of the latter half of the nineteenth century; nay, more than that, he belongs in the foremost rank of those who are yet surviving. His prose, on the other hand, seems aimless and chaotic, and is not stamped with any eminent characteristics. A volume of short stories, entitled "Wild and Tame," partakes very much more of the latter adjective than of the former. The first of the tales, "Inclined Planes," is a discursive family chronicle, showing the decadence of a fishing village under the influence of city boarders. The second, "Love and Despatches," inculcates a double moral, the usefulness of economy and the uselessness of mothers-in-law; and the third, "The Cutter Wild Duck," is a shudderingly insipid composition about a village lion who got drunk on his birthday, fell overboard, and committed no end of follies. A later volume of "Little Tales" is, indeed, so little as scarcely to have any excuse for being. The stories have all more or less of a marine flavor; but the only one of them that has a [Pg 196] sufficient *motif*, rationally developed, is one entitled "How the Pilot Got his Music-box." The novel, "A Supernumerary," is also a rather weak performance, badly constructed, and overloaded with chaotic incidents.

[25] Since this was written Drachmann has undergone a fresh transformation, and is said to have returned to the radical camp.

Völund Smed (1895) is a cycle of spirited poems dealing with the tragic fate of Weland the Smith, who took such a savage vengeance upon the King for having maimed and crippled him. The legend is invested with an obvious symbolic significance, and seems to have been intended as a poetic declaration of independence—a revolutionary manifesto signalizing the Drachmann's re-espousal of the radical opinions of his youth, in his allegiance to which he had, perhaps, out of regard for worldly advantages been inclined to waver. [Pg 197]

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GEORG BRANDES

It is a greater achievement in a critic to gain an international fame than in a poet or a writer of fiction. The world is always more ready to be amused than to be instructed, and the literary purveyor of amusement has opportunities for fame ten times greater than those which fall to the lot of the literary instructor. The epic delight—the delight in fable and story—to which the former appeals, is a fundamental trait in human nature; it appears full grown in the child, and has small need of cultivation. But the faculty of generalization to which the critic appeals is indicative of a stage of intellectual development to which only a small minority even of our so-called cultivated public attains. It is therefore a minority of a minority which he addresses, the intellectual *élite* which does the world's thinking. To impress these is far more difficult than to impress the multitude; for they are already surfeited with good writing, and are apt to reject with a shoulder-shrug whatever does not coincide with their own tenor of thought.

What I mean by a critic in this connection is not a witty and agreeable *causeur*, like the late Jules Janin, who, taking a book for his text, discoursed entertainingly about everything under the sun; [Pg 200] but an interpreter of a civilization and a representative of a school of thought who sheds new light upon old phenomena—men like Lessing, Matthew Arnold, and Taine. The latest candidate for admission to this company, whose title, I think, no one who has read him will dispute, is the Dane, Georg Brandes.

Dr. Brandes was born in Copenhagen in 1842, and is accordingly fifty-three years of age (1895). At the age of seventeen he entered the University of his native city, devoting himself first to jurisprudence, and occupying himself later with philosophical and æsthetical studies. In 1862 he gained the gold medal of the University by an essay on "Fatalism among the Ancients," which showed a surprising brilliancy of expression and maturity of thought; and soon after he passed his examination for the doctorate of philosophy with the highest distinction. It is told that the old poet Hauch, who was then Professor of Æsthetics at the University, was so much impressed by the young doctor's ability that he hoped to make him his successor. And toward this end Dr. Brandes began to bend his energies. During the next five or six years he travelled on the Continent, spending the winter of 1865 in Stockholm, that of 1866-67 in Paris, and sojourning, moreover, for longer or shorter periods in the principal cities of Germany. He became a most accomplished linguist, speaking French and German almost as fluently as his mother-tongue; [Pg 201] and, being an acute observer as well as an earnest student, he acquired an equipment for the position to which he aspired which distanced all competitors. But in Denmark, as elsewhere, cosmopolitan culture does not constitute the strongest claim to a professorship. In his book, "The Dualism in Our Most Recent Philosophy" (1866), Brandes took up the dangerous question of the relation of science to religion, and treated it in a spirit which aroused antagonism on the part of the conservative and orthodox party.

This able treatise, though it may not be positivism pure and simple, shows a preponderating influence of Comte and his school, and its attitude toward religion is approximately that of Herbert Spencer and Stuart Mill. The constellation under which Brandes was born into the world of thought was made up of the stars Darwin, Comte, Taine, and Mill. These men put their stamp upon his spirit; and to the tendency which they represent he was for many years faithful. Mill's book on "The Subjection of Women" he has translated into Danish (1869), and he has written besides a charmingly sympathetic essay, containing personal reminiscences, of that grave and conscientious thinker, whose "Autobiography" is perhaps the saddest book in the English language.

The three next books of Brandes, which all deal with æsthetical subjects ("Æsthetic Studies," 1868, "Criticisms and Portraits," 1870, and "French Æsthetics at the Present Day"), are full of [Pg 202] pith and winged felicities of phrase. It is a delight to read them. The passage of Scripture often occurs to me when I take up these earlier works of Brandes: "He rejoiceth like a strong man to run a race." He handles language with the zest and vigor of conscious mastery. There is no shade of meaning which is so subtle as to elude his grip. Things which I should have said, *a priori*, were impossible to express in Danish he expresses with scarcely a sign of effort; and however new and surprising his phrase is, it is never awkward, never cumbrous, never apparently conscious of its brilliancy.

I do not mean to say that these linguistic excellences are characteristic only of Dr. Brandes's earlier works; but, either because he has accustomed us to expect much of him in this respect, or

because he has come to regard such brilliancy as of minor consequence, it is a fact that two of his latest hooks ("Impressions of Poland" and "Impressions of Russia") contain fewer memorable phrases, fewer winged words, fewer *mots* with a flavor of Gallic wit. Intellectually these "Impressions" are no less weighty; nay, they are more weighty than anything from the same pen that has preceded them. They show a faculty to enter sympathetically into an alien civilization, to seize upon its characteristic phases, to steal into its confidence, as it were, and coax from it its intimate secrets; and they exhibit, moreover, an acuteness of observation and an appreciation of significant trifles (or what to a superficial observer might appear trifles) which no previous work [Pg 203] on the Slavonic nations had displayed. It is obvious that Dr. Brandes here shuns the linguistic pyrotechnics in which, for instance, De Amicis indulges in his pictures of Holland and the Orient. It is the matter, rather than the manner, which he has at heart; and he apparently takes a curb bit between his teeth in the presence of the Kremlin of Moscow and the palaces of St. Petersburg, in order to restrain mere pictorial expression.

Having violated chronology in speaking of these two works out of their order, I shall have to leap back over a score of years and contemplate once more the young doctor of philosophy who returned to Copenhagen in 1872 and began a course of trial lectures at the University on modern literature. The lecturer here flies his agnostic colors from beginning to end. He treats "The Romantic School in Germany" as Voltaire treated Rousseau—with sovereign wit, superior intelligence, but scant sympathy. At the same time he penetrates to the fountains of life which infused strength into the movement. He accounts for romanticism as the chairman of a committee *de lunatico inquirendo* might account for a case of religious mania.

The second and third courses of lectures (printed, like the first, and translated into German by Strodtmann) dealt with "The Literature of the French Emigrés" and "The Reaction in France." Here the critic is less unsympathetic, not because he regards the mental attitude of the fugitives [Pg 204] from the Revolution with approbation, but because he has an intellectual bias in favor of everything French. Besides having a certain constitutional sympathy with the clearness and vigor of style and thought which distinguish the French, Dr. Brandes is so largely indebted to French science, philosophy, and art that it would be strange if he did not betray an occasional *soupçon* of partisanship. His treatment of Chateaubriand, Benjamin Constant, Madame de Staël, Oberman, Madame de Krüdener, and all the queer saints and scribbling sinners of that period is as entertaining as it is instructive. It gives one the spiritual complexion of the period in clear lines and vivid colors, which can never be forgotten. Nearly all that makes France France is to be found in these volumes—its wit, its frivolity, its bright daylight sense, contrasting so strikingly with the moonshiny mysticism of German romanticism. And yet France has its romanticism too, which finds vent in a supercredulous religiosity, in a pictorial sentimentalized Christianity, such as we encounter in Chateaubriand's "Génie du Christianisme" and "Les Martyrs." It is with literary phenomena of this order that "The Reaction in France" particularly deals.

The fourth course of lectures, entitled "Byron and his Group," though no less entertaining than the rest, appears to me less satisfactory. It is a clever presentation of Byron's case against the British public; but the case of the British against Byron is inadequately presented. It is the [Pg 205] pleading of an able advocate, not the charge of an impartial judge. Dr. Brandes has so profound an admiration for the man who dares to rebel that he fails to do justice to the motives of society in protecting itself against him. It is not to be denied that the iconoclast may be in the right and society in the wrong; but it is by no means a foregone conclusion that such is the case. If society did not, with the fierce instinct of self-preservation, guard its traditional morality against such assailants as Byron and Shelley, civilization would suffer. The conservative bias of the Philistine (though not so outwardly attractive) is no less valuable as a factor in civilization than the iconoclastic zeal of the reformer. If the centrifugal force had full sway in human society, without being counteracted by a centripetal tendency, anarchy would soon prevail. I cannot (as Dr. Brandes appears to do) discover any startling merit in outraging the moral sense of the community in which one lives; and though I may admit that a man who was capable of doing this was a great poet, I cannot concede that the fact of his being a great poet justified the outrage. Nor am I sure that Dr. Brandes means to imply so much; but in all of his writings there is manifested a deep sympathy with the law-breaker whose Titanic soul refuses to be bound by the obligations of morality which limit the freedom of ordinary mortals. Only petty and pusillanimous souls, according to him, submit to these restraints; the heroic soul breaks them, as did Byron and [Pg 206] Shelley, because he has outgrown them, or because he is too great to recognize the right of any power to limit his freedom of action or restrain him in the free assertion of his individuality. This is the undertone in everything Dr. Brandes has written; but nowhere does it ring out more boldly than in his treatment of Byron and Shelley, unless it be in the fifth course of his "Main Currents" dealing with "Young Germany."

These four courses of lectures have been published under the collective title "The Main Literary Currents in the Nineteenth Century" (*Hovedströmningerne i det Nittende Aarhundredes Litteratur*). The German translation is entitled *Hauptströmungen in der Litteratur des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*. Barring the strictures which I have made, I know no work of contemporary criticism which is more luminous in its statements, more striking in its judgments, and more replete with interesting information. It reminds one in its style of Taine's "Lectures on Art" and the "History of English Literature." The intellectual bias is kindred, if not the same; as is also the pictorial vigor of the language, the subtle deductions of psychical from physical facts, and a certain lusty realism, which lays hold of external nature with a firm grip.

In Dr. Brandes's "Impressions of Poland" I found an observation which illustrates his [Pg 207]

extraordinary power of characterization. The temperament of the Polish people, he says, is not rational but fantastically heroic. When I recall the personalities of the various Poles I have known (and I have known a great many), I cannot conceive of a phrase more exquisitely descriptive. It makes all your haphazard knowledge about Poland significant and valuable by supplying you with a key to its interpretation. It is this faculty Dr. Brandes has displayed in an eminent degree in his many biographical and critical essays which have appeared in German and Danish periodicals; as also in his more elaborate biographies of Benjamin Disraeli (1878), Esaias Tegnér (1878), Sören Kierkegaard (1877), Ferdinand Lassalle (1882), and Ludwig Holberg. The first of these was translated into English, and was also published in the United States. A second volume, entitled "Eminent Writers of the Nineteenth Century," was translated some years ago by Professor R. B. Anderson. The greater number of these highly finished essays were selected from the Danish volumes "The Men of the New Transition" (1884) and "Men and Works in Recent European Literature" (1883), and one or two from "Danish Poets" (1877). They give in every instance the keynote to the personality with which they deal; they are not so much studies of books as studies of the men who are revealed in the books. Take, for instance, the essay on Björnstjerne Björnson, which I regard as one of the finest and most vital pieces of critical writing in recent times. What can be more subtly descriptive of the very innermost soul of this poet than the picture of him as [Pg 208] the clansman, the Norse chieftain, who feels with the many and speaks for the many; and what more beautifully indicative of his external position than this phrase: "To mention his name is like running up the flag of Norway"?

It seems peculiarly appropriate to follow up this essay with one on Ibsen, who is as complete an antithesis to his great and popular rival as could well be conceived. There is no bugle-call in the name Henrik Ibsen. It is thin in sound, and can be spoken almost with closed lips. You have no broad vowels and large consonants to fill your mouth as when you say Björnstjerne Björnson. This difference in sound seems symbolic. Ibsen is the solitary man, a scathing critic of society, a delver in the depths of human nature, sceptical of all that men believe in and admire. He has not, like Björnson, any faith in majorities; nay, he believes that the indorsement of the majority is an argument against the wisdom of a course of action or the truth of a proposition. The summary of this poet's work and personality in Dr. Brandes's book is a masterpiece of analytical criticism. It enriches and expands the territory of one's thought. It is no less witty, no less epigrammatic, than Sainte-Beuve at his best; and it has flashes of deeper insight than I have ever found in Sainte-Beuve.

The last book of Dr. Brandes's that has been presented to the American public is his "Impressions [Pg 209] of Russia." The motto of this work (which in the Danish edition is printed on the back of the title-page) is "Black Earth," the significance of which is thus explained in the concluding paragraph:

"Black earth, fertile soil, new soil, wheat soil ... the wide, rich, warm nature ... the infinite expanses, which fill the soul with melancholy and with hope ... the impenetrable, duskily mysterious ... the mother-womb of new realities and new mysticism ... Russia, the future."

The prophetic vagueness of this paragraph, big with dim possibilities, conveys the very impression to which all observations and experiences in Russia finally reduce themselves. It is the enduring residue which remains when all evanescent impressions have lapsed into the background. It expresses, too, the typical mental attitude of every Russian, be he ever so Frenchified and denationalized. The word "Virgin Soil" was a favorite phrase with Tourguéneff when speaking of his country, and he used it as the title of his last novel. It seemed to him to explain everything in Russian conditions that to the rest of the world appeared enigmatical. The whole of Dr. Brandes's book is interpenetrated with this consciousness of the vast possibilities hidden in the virgin bosom of the new earth, even though they may be too deeply hidden to sprout up into the daylight for centuries to come. The Russian literature, which is at present [Pg 210] enchaining the attention of the civilized world, is a brilliant variation of this theme, an imaginative commentary on this text. The second half of Dr. Brandes's "Impressions" is devoted to the consideration of Puschkin, Gogol, Lermontoff, Dostojevski, Tourguéneff, and Tolstoï; of each of whom he gives, as it appears to me, a better account than M. de Vogüé in his book "Le Roman Russe," which gave him a seat among the Forty Immortals.

The significance of Dr. Brandes's literary activity, which has now extended over a quarter of a century, can hardly be estimated from our side of the Atlantic. The Danish horizon was, twenty years ago, hedged in on all sides by a patriotic prejudice which allowed few foreign ideas to enter. As previously stated, the people had, before the two Sleswick-Holstein wars, been in lively communication with Germany, and the intellectual currents of the Fatherland had found their way up to the Belts, and had pulsated there, though with some loss of vigor. But the disastrous defeat in the last war aroused such hostility to Germany that the intellectual intercourse almost ceased. German ideas became scarcely less obnoxious than German bayonets. Spiritual stagnation was the result. For no nation can with impunity cut itself off from the great life of the world. New connections might, perhaps, have been formed with France or England; but the obstacles in the way of such connections appeared too great to be readily overcome. Racial [Pg 211] differences and consequent alienism in habits of thought made a *rapprochement* seem hopeless. It seemed, for awhile, as if the war had cut down the intellectual territory of the Danes even more than it had curtailed their material area. They cultivated their little domestic virtues, talked enthusiastic nonsense on festive occasions, indulged in vain hopes of recovering their lost provinces, but rarely allowed their political reverses to interfere with their amusements. They let the world roar on past their gates, without troubling themselves much as to what interested or agitated it. A feeble, moonshiny late-romanticism was predominant in their literature; and in art,

philosophy, and politics that sluggish conservatism which betokens a low vitality, incident upon intellectual isolation.

What was needed at such a time was a man who could re-attach the broken connection—a mediator and interpreter of foreign thought in such a form as to appeal to the Danish temperament and be capable of assimilation by the Danish intellect. Such a man was Georg Brandes. He undertook to put his people *en rapport* with the nineteenth century, to open new avenues for the influx of modern thought, to take the place of those which had been closed. We have seen that he interpreted to his countrymen the significance of the literary and social movements both in England and in France. But a self-satisfied and virtuous little nation which [Pg 212] regards its remoteness from the great world as a matter of congratulation is not apt to receive with favor such a champion of alien ideas. The more the Danes became absorbed in their national hallucinations, the more provincial, nay parochial, they became in their interests, the less did they feel the need of any intellectual stimulus from abroad; and when Dr. Brandes introduced them to modern realism, agnosticism, and positivism they thanked God that none of these dreadful isms were indigenous with them; and were disposed to take Dr. Brandes to task for disturbing their idyllic, orthodox peace by the promulgation of such dangerous heresies. When the time came to fill the professorship for which he was a candidate, he was passed by, and a safer but inferior man was appointed. A formal crusade was opened against him, and he was made the object of savage and bitter attacks. I am not positive, but am disposed to believe, that it was this crusade, not against his opinions only, but against the man himself, which drove Dr. Brandes from Copenhagen, and induced him, in October, 1877, to settle in Berlin. Here he continued his literary activity with unabated zeal, became a valued contributor to the most authoritative German periodicals, and gained a conspicuous position among German men of letters. But while he was sojourning abroad, the seed of ideas which he had left at home began to sprout, and in 1882 his friends in Copenhagen felt themselves strong enough to brave the antagonism which his æsthetical and religious heresies had aroused. At their invitation he [Pg 213] returned to Denmark, having been guaranteed an income of four thousand crowns ($1,000) for ten years, with the single stipulation that he should deliver an annual course of public lectures in Copenhagen. Since then his reputation has spread rapidly throughout the civilized world; his books have been translated into many languages, and he would have won his way to a recognition, as the foremost of contemporary critics, if he had not in his later publications discredited himself by his open sympathy with anarchism.

In order to substantiate this it is only necessary to call attention to the fifth volume of his lectures entitled "Young Germany" (*Det unge Tydskland*, 1890), which betrays extraordinary intellectual acumen but also a singular confusion of moral values. All revolt is lauded, all conformity derided. The former is noble, daring, Titanic; the latter is pusillanimous and weak. Conjugal irregularities are treated not with tolerance but with obvious approval. Those authors who dared be a law unto themselves are, by implication at least, praised for flinging down their gauntlets to the dull, moral Philistines who have shackled themselves with their own stupid traditions. That is the tone of Brandes's comment upon such relations as that of Immermann to Eliza von Lützow.

But nowhere has he unmasked so Mephistophelian a countenance as in his essays on Luther and [Pg 214] on an obscure German iconoclast named Friedrich Nietschke (*Essays: Fremmede Personligheder*, pp. 151-244). It is difficult to understand how a man of well-balanced brain and a logical equipment second to none, can take *au sérieux* a mere philosophical savage who dances a war-dance amid what he conceives to be the ruins of civilization, swings a reckless tomahawk and knocks down everybody and everything that comes in his way. There must lie a long history of disappointment and bitterness behind that endorsement of anarchy pure and simple. And it is the sadder to contemplate because it casts a sinister light upon Dr. Brandes's earlier activity and compels many an admirer of his literary art to revise his previous opinion of him. Can a man ever have been a sound thinker who at fifty practically hoists the standard of anarchy? A ship is scarcely to be trusted that flies such compromising colors.

That all development, in order to be rational, must have its roots in the past—must be in the nature of a slow organic growth—is certainly a fundamental proposition of the Spencerian sociology. It is the more to be wondered at that an evolutionist like Dr. Brandes, in his impatience at the tardiness of social progress, should lose his philosophic temper and make common cause with a crack-brained visionary. The kind of explosive radicalism which Nietschke betrays in his cynical questions and explanations is no evidence of profundity or sagacity, but is the equivalent of the dynamiter's activity, transferred to the world of thought. His pretended re-investigation of [Pg 215] the foundations of the moral sentiments reminds one of the mud geysers of the Yellowstone, which break out periodically and envelop everything within reach in an indeterminate shower of mud. To me there is more of vanity than of philosophic acumen in his onslaught on well-nigh all human institutions. He would, like Ibsen, no doubt,

> "Place 'neath the ark the torpedo most cheerfully;"

but torpedoes of his making would scarcely do the ark much harm. They have not the explosive power of Ibsen's. There are in every age men who, unable to achieve the fame of Dinocrates, who built the temple of the Ephesian Diana, aspire to that of Herostratos, who destroyed it. To admire these men is as compromising as to be admired by them.

In the essay on "Martin Luther on Celibacy and Marriage" Dr. Brandes derides with a satyr-like leer all traditional ideas of chastity, conjugal fidelity, and marital honor.

Though he pretends to fight behind Luther's shield the deftest thrusts are not the reformer's, but the essayist's own. Fundamentally, I fancy, this is an outbreak of that artistic paganism which is so prevalent among the so-called "advanced" Hebrews. The idea that obedience to law is degrading; that conformity to traditional morals is soul-crippling and unworthy of a free spirit; that only by giving sway to passion will the individual attain that joy which is his right, and that self-development which should be his highest aim, has found one of its ablest and most dangerous advocates in Georg Brandes. [Pg 216] [Pg 217]

[Pg 219]

ESAIAS TEGNÉR

The genius of the Scandinavian north has never found a more complete and brilliant incarnation than the Swedish poet Esaias Tegnér. Strong, cheerful, thoroughly wholesome, with a boyish delight in prowess, adventure, and daring deeds, he presents a most agreeable contrast to the moonshine singers and graveyard bards of the phosphoristic school, who were his contemporaries. To Tegnér, in his prime, life was a brisk and exhilarating sail, with a fresh breeze, over sunny waters; and he had no patience with those who described it as a painful and troublous groping through the valley of the shadow of death. There was, in other words, a certain charming juvenility in his attitude toward existence, which presented to him no riddles that a man with a strong arm and an honest heart might not solve with comparative ease. All problems were to him soluble with the sword; and Alexander, when he cut the Gordian knot, must have appeared to him wiser, as he was surely more admirable, than either Plato or Socrates. This scorn of all metaphysical subtleties, and reliance upon strength and Swedish manhood, are, perhaps (from an advanced European point of view), indicative of a little intellectual immaturity; [Pg 220] but they are thoroughly characteristic of the Scandinavian nationalities. The love of brave words and brave deeds, the exaltation of the man of action above the man of thought, the pleasure in reckless gallantry and foolhardy adventure, are, however, not confined to Swedes and Norwegians, but are characteristic of the boyhood of every nation. In the Scotchman, Robert Louis Stevenson, this jaunty juvenility, this rich enjoyment of bloody buccaneers and profane sea-dogs, is carried to far greater lengths, and the great juvenile public of England and America, both young and old, rises up and calls him blessed.

There is, however, a vast difference between Tegnér's youthfulness and that of Stevenson. The latter (in spite of the charm of his style, which is irresistible) strikes me as a sort of mediæval survival—a boyish feudal sixteenth-century spirit astray in the nineteenth. I am by no means insensible to the fascination of his capricious confidences, his beautiful insight, and his exquisite humor; but for all that, he always leaves me with a vague regret at his whimsicality and a certain lack of robustness in his intellectual equipment. In Tegnér, on the other hand, it is primarily the man who is impressive; and the author is interesting as the revelation of the man. He has no literary airs and graces, but speaks with a splendid authority, *e plena pectore*, from the fulness of his manly conviction. He seems a very personification of the national genius—fair, vigorous, and [Pg 221] beautiful—with the glow of health in his cheeks and the light of courage in his eye. His vision of the world is bright and vivid, and he swims with a joyous ease in the high-tide of the moment, like a beautiful fish in the luminous summer sea.

As a specimen of magnificent manhood Tegnér had few equals in his day. Tall, robust, and finely proportioned as he was, with a profile of almost classic purity, he was equally irresistible to men and women. There was a breezy, out-of-door air about him, and a genial straightforwardness and affability in his manner which took all hearts captive. His was not only the beauty of perfect health, but a certain splendid virility in his demeanor and appearance heightened the charm of his personality.

It is a matter of wonder that a man in whom the race-type had reached such perfection was but two generations removed from the soil. Tegnér's grandfathers on both sides were peasants; and his father, Esaias Lucasson, was a peasant lad who by industry and ambition had obtained an education and become a clergyman. He owed his aristocratic name to the custom, prevalent in those days, to Latinize all vulgar appellations. Esaias Lucasson, of Tegnaby (the little Småland village where he was born), became, in the Latin school, Esaias Tegnerus. He married in the course of time a clergyman's daughter, Sara Maria Seidelius, who bore him a large family of sons [Pg 222] and daughters. The fifth son, named Esaias after his father, first saw the light of day in the parsonage of Kyrkerud, in Wermland, November 13, 1782. When he was nine years old his father died, leaving behind him poverty and sorrow. Happily a friend of the family, the Assessor Branting, took a fancy to the handsome and clever boy and offered him a home in his house. Esaias wrote a very clear, good hand, and soon got a desk and a high three-legged stool in the assessor's office. So far from rebelling against this tedious discipline, he applied himself with zeal to his task, and became, in a short time, an excellent clerk. And a clerk he might have remained if his patron had not had the wit to discover that very unusual talents slumbered in the lad. Being fond of his society, Mr. Branting got into the habit of taking him along on his official journeys; and from the back seat of his chaise Esaias made the acquaintance of the beautiful rivers,

heights, and valleys of Wermland. The unconscious impressions which a boy absorbs at this period of his life are apt to play a decisive part in fashioning his future. Nature, however picturesque, never yet made a poet of a dullard; but many a time has she aroused to poetic consciousness a soul which without this stimulating influence might never have discovered its calling, might never have felt that strange, tremulous exaltation which demands utterance in song.

Esaias Tegnér stored his mind during these journeys with that wealth of imagery, drawn from the [Pg 223]
scenery of his native land, which constitutes the most national element in his verse. He also contracted, during his residence in Branting's house, an inordinate love of books. Once during the harvest-time he was placed on guard at an open gate, so as to prevent the cattle from breaking into the adjoining field. To the great chagrin of his patron, however, the cows made their way unhindered and unnoticed into the forbidden territory, while their watchman was lying on his belly in the grass, deeply absorbed in a book. Wherever he happened to be, his idea of happiness was to hide himself away with a cherished volume. Sometimes he was found sitting on the top rung of a ladder, sometimes on the roof of a turf-thatched cottage, oblivious of the world about him, plunged up to his ears in some historic or mythological tale. He was voracious, nay, omnivorous, in his reading. A book was a book to him; no matter what was its subject, whether it were poetry, history, heraldry, or horticulture, he was always likely to find something in it to interest him. But his favorite reading was the old Norse sagas, with their tremendous recitals of war and song and fabulous prowess.

It was not, however, his delight in books which made the change in his destiny. Professor C. W. Böttiger, Tegnér's son-in-law, quotes, in his life of the poet, the following incident in the latter's own words: [Pg 224]

"One evening, as I was travelling homeward with Assessor Branting, from Carlstad to Högvalta, the stars were bright and my religious foster-father seized this opportunity to talk with me about God's omnipotence, and its visible traces throughout nature. I had just been reading Bastholm's 'Philosophy for Laymen,' and I began to give an account of what I had there learned concerning the movements of the heavenly bodies. This made an impression upon the old man, who, a few days later, informed me that he had determined to give me a scholarly education. This had long been my secret desire, though I had never dared to express it. 'You can learn nothing more with me,' he said, 'and I believe you were born for something better. If that is the case,' he added, 'do not forget to thank the Giver of all good things.'"

The boy, who was now fourteen years old, was sent to the house of a neighbor, where his elder brother, Lars Gustaf, was tutor, and was initiated by him into the classical languages. He also taught himself English by reading McPherson's "Ossian," which kept ringing in his memory for many years to come. It was during his first enthusiasm for "Ossian" that, in order to rid himself of the line "the spear of Connell is keen," he cut it into his chamber-door, where probably it is yet to be seen. At the end of fifteen months the elder brother accepted a more profitable position as tutor in the family of the great iron-manufacturer Myhrman, at Rämen, and stipulated that Esaias [Pg 225]
should be permitted to accompany him.

Very charming is the description of this hospitable, patriarchal household, in Böttiger's biography; and doubly interesting it becomes when we recognize on every page scenes and incidents which were later woven into "Frithjof's Saga." There was a large library on the estate, consisting of French, Latin, and Greek classics. With great zest Esaias attacked this storehouse of delight; and scarcely would he grant himself the needed sleep, because every hour seemed to him lost which had been robbed from his beloved authors. The instruction in Latin and Greek which his brother imparted to the young Myhrmans was to him far too slow. In his eagerness to plunge into Homer's enchanted world, he rapidly finished his grammar, and began to read ahead, book after book, so as to get the connection, even though understanding but half the words. Without knowing it, he had adopted a modern and really most excellent method of acquiring the language. For Homer became literature to him instead of a mere text for excruciating grammatical gymnastics.

It was Tegnér's good fortune that his playfellows, the seven young Myhrmans, were not so fond of Greek as he was. Often, when he was revelling in a glorious Homeric passage, these lusty barbarians would come storming into his room and carry him off bodily, compelling him to share in their sports; for Esaias was a capital hand at inventing new games, and they willingly accepted [Pg 226]
his leadership and acted upon his suggestions. Particularly his Homeric games were greatly enjoyed. They divided their troop into Greeks and Trojans and captured Troy. Esaias was always Hector, and the other boys became the raging Ajax, the swift-footed Achilles, the wily Ulysses, etc. The youngest daughter of the house, Anna Myhrman, must, I should fancy, have played somewhat more of a part in Tegnér's boyhood than his biographer allows, for the descriptions of Frithjof's and Ingeborg's childhood in Hilding's house are obviously personal reminiscences:

"No bird's nest found so high a spot
That he for her could find it not;
The eagle's nest from clouds he sundered,
And eggs and young he deftly plundered.

"However swift, there ran no brook,
But o'er it Ingeborg he took;
How sweet, when roaring torrents frighten,

To feel her soft arms round him tighten.

"The first spring flowers by sunshine fed,
The earliest strawberries turning red,
The first of autumn's golden treasure
He proffered her with eager pleasure."[26]

[26] Translation of Thomas A. E. and Martha A. L. Holcomb, Chicago, 1877. I have taken the liberty to substitute "strawberries," which is the correct translation of "Smultron," for berries.

At the age of seventeen Tegnér entered the University of Lund, accompanied by three young Myhrmans, whose father had generously promised to share with Assessor Branting the expenses of his academic education. His playmate, familiarly called Achilles, had to share his room, and thus it came to pass that Hector and his deadly foe became bedfellows. In fact the bed in question, being intended for but one, afforded the scantiest possible accommodations for two, and often threatened to collapse under their united weight. Aching in every joint from the discomfort of their cramped position, they would then get up and spend the remainder of the night in playing chess. [Pg 227]

At the University Tegnér soon made his mark, and two years later took his degree of *Magister Artium* with great distinction, being, according to the extraordinary custom of the country, laurel-crowned in the cathedral as the first of twenty-four candidates. The Swede loves pomp and ceremonious display, and rarely misses an opportunity for a fine stage effect. I do not mean to insinuate, of course, that Esaias Tegnér was unworthy of the honor which was conferred upon him; but it seems a terrible cheapening of the laurel to place it annually upon the brows of a herd of deedless striplings, standing upon the threshold of their careers. Tegnér was but nineteen years of age when the Muse, contrary to her habit, gave him the crown without the dust, generously rewarding him in advance of performance. But he came very near forfeiting the fruits of all his fair fame by participating in a hostile demonstration in front of the house of the University's rector, who was justly unpopular. His manly bearing, however, and the friendship of several of the professors saved him from the *consilium abeundi cum infamia*, with which he was threatened. Instead of that he was appointed *docent* in æsthetics, Secretary to the Faculty of Philosophy, and Assistant University Librarian. His summer vacations he spent at Rämen with the Myhrmans. His playmate, Miss Anna, was now sixteen years of age, and had undergone that miraculous transformation, which never loses its delightful mystery, from childhood into young womanhood. He went away one day and bade good-by to an awkward kangaroo-like girl in short skirts, and returned in a few months to greet a lovely, blushingly dignified young lady, who probably avowed no more her fondness for him with the same frank heedlessness as of old. But she would have been more than woman if she could have resisted the wooing of the beautiful youth upon whom nature had showered so many rare gifts. A stone has been found up in the woods above Rämen which yet shows under its coating of moss the initials of E. T. and A. M. It requires but little imagination to fill out the story of the brief and happy courtship; and two cantos in "Frithjof's Saga" ("Frithof's Wooing" and "Frithjof's Happiness") supply an abundance of hints which have a charmingly autobiographical tinge: [Pg 228] [Pg 229]

"He sat by her side and pressed her soft hand,
And he felt a fond pressure, responsive and bland,
Whilst his love-dreaming gaze
Was returned as the sun's in the moon's placid rays.

"They spoke of days bygone, so gladsome and gay,
When the dew was yet fresh on life's new-trodden way;
For on memory's page
Youth traces its roses; its briers old age.

"She brought him a greeting from dale and from wood,
From the bark-graven runes and the brook's silver flood;
From the dome-crownèd cave
Where oaks bravely stream o'er a warrior's grave."[27]

[27] Strong's translation.

But here, happily, Tegnér's life ceased to supply material for that of his hero. For Anna Myhrman, instead of pledging her troth to a high-born, elderly gentleman, like King Ring, married the young University instructor, Esaias Tegnér; and when her bridal wreath of myrtle failed to arrive from the city, she twined a wreath of wild heather instead; and very lovely she looked on her wedding-day with the modest heather blossoms peeping forth from under her dark locks.

His insecure position in life, as one dependent upon the bounty of friends, had hitherto oppressed Tegnér, and at times made him moody and despondent. He had felt impelled, in justice to himself and to satisfy the expectations of his patrons, to apply himself to his studies with a perseverance and industry which came near undermining his health. He looked during his student days overworked, and if nature had endowed him with a less magnificent physique he would, no doubt, have succumbed to the strain of this perpetual over-exertion. But after his marriage a happy change came over him. The joyous substratum of his nature (what he himself called his pagan self) broke through its sombre integuments and asserted itself. No sooner had he taken his place [Pg 230]

among the teachers of the University than his clear and weighty personality commanded admiration and respect. In social intercourse his ready wit and cheerful conviviality made him a general favorite. His talk, without being in the least forced, was full of surprises; and there was a charm, in the redundant vigor and virility that seemed to radiate from him. But it may as well be admitted that he began at this time to show what may euphemistically be styled his paganism, in the relish which he evinced for jests of doubtful propriety. He was indeed as far as possible from being a prude; many years later, when he was a bishop and a great ecclesiastical dignitary, he wrote to his friend the poet Franzén:

> "I thank God that I can yet, at times, be merry and give vent to my mirth in prose and verse. I don't scruple to make a good joke even though its subject be the bridal bed. All prudery—and frequently the clerical dignity is, in social intercourse, nothing else—I detest and despise."

His inability to restrain his wit in this particular direction has done some injury to his memory. [Pg 231] Not that his fancy had any taint of uncleanness. It was open and cheerful as the sunlight; and as the sunlight played brightly over all things without fastidious discrimination. There was a rich, and healthy humanity about him which manifested itself in an impartial, all-embracing delight in the glow and color of mere sensuous existence. There has scarcely ever been a great poet (Dante perhaps excepted) who has not had his share of this pagan joy in nudity. Goethe's "Roman Elegies" are undisguisedly Anacreontic, and the most spiritual of modern poets, Robert Browning, is as deep and varied and bountiful in the expression he gives to life in its sensuous phases as in its highest ascetic transports.

Do not imagine, then, that I am apologizing for Tegnér, I am merely trying to account for him. From his Homer, whom he loved above all other poets, he had in a measure derived that artistic paganism which perceptibly colored his personality. There was nothing of the scholarly prig or pedant about him. In his lectures he gave himself, his own view of life, and his own interpretation of his authors. And it was because of the greatness of the man, the unhackneyed vigor of his speech, and the power of his intellect that the students flocked to his lecture-hall and listened with enthusiasm to his teaching.

I am not by any means sure, however, that much of his popularity was also due to what, at this stage of his career, may without disrespect be called his immaturity. That wholesome robustness [Pg 232] in his acceptance of life which finds utterance in his early songs must have established a quick bond of sympathy between him and his youthful hearers. The instincts of the predatory man were yet strong in him. The tribal feeling which we call patriotism, the juvenile defiance which carries a chip on its shoulder as a challenge to the world, the boastful self-assertion which is always ridiculous in every nation but our own—impart a splendid martial resonance to his first notable poem, "War-Song for the Scanian Reserves" (1808). There was a charming, frank ferocity in this patriotic bugle-blast which found an echo in every Swedish heart. The rapid dactylic metres, with the captivating rhymes, alternating with the more contemplative trochees, were admirably adapted for conveying the ebullient indignation and wrath which hurls its gauntlet into the face of fate itself,[28] checked, as it were, and cooled by soberer reflection and retrospective regret. It is the sorrow for the yet recent loss of Finland which inspires the elegiac tones in Tegnér's war-song; and it is his own ardent, youthful spirit, his own deep and sincere love of country, which awakes the martial melody with the throbbing of the drum and the rousing alarum of trumpets. What can be more delightfully—shall I say juvenile—than this reference to the numerical [Pg 233] superiority of the Muscovites:

> "Many, are they? Well, then, of the many
> Sweden shall drink the red blood and be free!
> Many? We count not the warriors' numbers
> Only the fallen shall numbered be."

[28] "Vi Kaste var handske
Mot ödet sjelf."

It is with no desire to disparage Tegnér that I say that this strain, which is that of all his early war-songs, is extremely becoming to him. It is not a question of the legitimacy of the sentiment, but of the fulness and felicity of its expression. As long as we have wars we must have martial bards, and with the exception of the German, Theodor Körner, I know none who can bear comparison with Tegnér. English literature can certainly boast no war-poem which would not be drowned in the mighty music of Tegnér's "Svea," "The Scanian Reserves," and that magnificent, dithyrambic declamation, "King Charles, the Young Hero." Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade" is technically a finer poem than anything Tegnér has written, but it lacks the deep virile bass, the tremendous volume of breath and voice, and the captivating martial lilt which makes the heart beat willy nilly to the rhythm of the verse.

The popularity which Tegnér gained by "The Scanian Reserves" was the immediate cause of his appointment to a professorship at the University of Lund, and his next notable poem, "Svea," which won him the great prize of the Swedish Academy, raised him to a height of fame which [Pg 234] naturally led to further promotion. According to the curious custom of Sweden, a professor may, even though he has never studied theology, take orders and accept the charge of a parish. He is regarded as being, by dint of his learning, in the regular line of clerical promotion; and the elevation from a professorship (though it be not a theological one) into a bishopric is no infrequent occurrence. There was therefore nothing anomalous in Tegnér's appointment

(February, 1812) as pastor of Stäfvie and Lackalänge, and his subsequent promotion (February, 1824) to the bishopric of Wexiö. His pastorate he was permitted to combine with his professorship of Greek, to which he was simultaneously transferred from that of æsthetics, and the office was chiefly valuable to him on account of the addition which it procured him to his income. The nearness of his parish to Lund enabled him to preach in the country on Sundays as regularly as he lectured in the city on week-days. His other pastoral duties he could not very well discharge *in absentia*, and they probably remained in a measure undischarged. He had not sought the parish; it was the parish which had sought him; and he exerted himself to the utmost to fill the less congenial office as conscientiously as he did his academic chair. The peasants of Stäfvie and Lackalänge were always welcome at his hospitable board; he gave them freely his advice, and in order to recall and emphasize his own kinship with them, he invited a peasant [Pg 235] woman to become the godmother of his youngest son, and selected all the sponsors from the same class.

This was not the only occasion on which Tegnér demonstrated his superiority to all snobbish pretensions. He was not only not ashamed of his peasant descent, but he was proud of it. Once (1811) during a visit to Rämen, he took it into his head that he desired to know, from actual experience, the kind of lives which his ancestors must have lived; and to that end he dressed himself in wadmal, loaded a dray with pig-iron, greased its axles, harnessed his team, and drove it to the nearest city, a distance of ten to twelve miles. He induced three of his brothers-in-law, two of whom were army officers and one a government clerk, to follow his example. Up hill and down hill they trudged, and arrived late in the afternoon, footsore and with blistered hands, in the town, where they reported at the office of a commission merchant, sold their iron and obtained their receipts. That of Tegnér was made out to Esaias Esaiasson, which would have been his name, if his father had never risen from the soil. The four sham peasants now bought seed-corn with the money they had obtained for their iron, loaded again their wagons, and started for home. But they had forgotten to take into account the robustness of the rustic appetite, and before they had proceeded far their bag of provisions was empty. To add to their discomfort the rain began to pour down, but they would not seek shelter. After midnight they [Pg 236] arrived at Rämen, hungry and drenched, not having slept for two nights, but happy and proud of their feat of endurance.

It was in 1811 that Tegnér's poem "Svea" received the prize of the Swedish Academy; and the fact that it recalled (in single passages at least) Oehlenschläger's "The Golden Horns," does not seem to have weighed in the verdict. It is not in any sense an imitation; but there is an audible reminiscence which is unmistakable in the metre and cadence of the short-lined verses, descriptive of the vision. Never, I fancy, had the Swedish language been made to soar with so strong a wing-beat, never before had it been made to sing so bold a melody. To me, I admit, "Svea" is too rhetorical to make any deep impression. It has a certain stately academic form, which, as it were, impedes its respiration and freedom of movement. When, for all that, I speak of wing-beat and melody, it must be borne in mind that Sweden had produced no really great poet[29] before Tegnér; and that thus, relatively considered, the statement is true. But Tegnér seems himself to have been conscious of the strait-jacket in which the old academic rules [Pg 237] confined him, for in the middle of the poem he suddenly discards the stilted Alexandrines with which he had commenced and breaks into a rapturous old-Norse chant, the abrupt metres of which recall the *fornyrdhalag* of the Elder Edda. Soon after "Svea" followed, in 1812, "The Priestly Consecration," the occasion of which was the poet's own ordination. Here the oratorical note and a certain clerical rotundity of utterance come very near spoiling the melody. "At the Jubilee in Lund" (1817) is very much in the same strain, and begins with the statement so characteristic of Tegnér:

> "Thou who didst the brave twin stars enkindle,
> Reason and Religion, guard the twain!
> Each shines by other; else they fade and dwindle.[30]
> Fill with clearness every human brain:
> Faith and hope in every bosom reign!"

[29] Carl Michael Bellman, the Swedish Béranger (1740-1795), whose wanton music resounded through the latter half of the eighteenth century, would, no doubt, by many be called a great poet. But his Bacchanalian strain, though at times exquisite and captivating, lacks the universality of sentiment and that depth of resonance of which greatness can alone be predicated. Both his wild mirth and his sombre melancholy exhale the aroma of ardent spirits.

[30] This line reads literally: "Guard them both; they are willingly reconciled."

He was, in fact, never very orthodox; and if he had belonged to the American branch of his denomination would surely have been tried for heresy. Rarely has a deadlier foe of priestly obscurantism and mediæval mysteries worn the episcopal robes. With doctrinal subtleties and ingenious hair-splitting he had no patience; conduct was with him the main, if not the only, thing to be considered. The Christian Church, as he conceived it, was primarily a civilizer, and the [Pg 238] expression of the highest ethical sentiment of the age.

"The Church," he writes, "can surely not be re-established in its former religious significance, for the system upon which it rests has slept away three centuries of history; and it is of no use that this man or that man yet pretends to believe in the somnambulist. But the church has also a civic significance as an integral part of the social order of humanity. If you abandon that to the spirit of

laxity and drowsiness, I can see no reason why the clergy and the whole religious apparatus should not be, and ought not to be, abolished and their costs covered into the treasury."

These are not highly episcopal sentiments; but they are in keeping with Tegnér's whole personality and his conception of his duty. His first concern was to purge his diocese of drunken clergymen, a task in which he encountered many unforeseen difficulties.

"It is nowadays less difficult," he says, "to get rid of a king than a drunken clergyman."

He was, indeed, very moderate in his demands, stipulating only that no shepherd of souls should show himself drunk in public. But the bibulous parsons frequently had influential relatives, who exerted themselves with the government to thwart the bishop's reformatory schemes. If Tegnér had not been the masterful, tireless, energetic prelate that he was, his ardor would have cooled; and he would have contented himself with drawing the revenues of his office, and left with the [Pg 239] lukewarm government the responsibility for frustrating his purposes. But this was contrary to his nature. He could not calmly contemplate abuses which it was his duty to remedy; and no discouragement ever sufficed to dampen his noble zeal. The marked and fanatical pietism which then was much diffused among the Småland peasantry he fought with his cheerful gospel of reason and sanity. Just as poetry to him meant the highest bloom of life, and his radiant lyre resounded with noble music like the statue of Memnon, when touched by the rays of the dawn; so religion was, in its essence, perfect sanity of soul, a beautiful equilibrium of mind, and complete self-mastery. His Christ was not primarily the bleeding, the scourged, the crucified, but rather a benigner and lovelier Phœbus Apollo, the bringer of clearness and light, the dispeller of the unwholesome mists and barbaric gloom that yet brood over the human soul. Like Goethe, he cherished a veritable abhorrence of the mystic symbolism of the mediæval church; and was rather inclined to minimize the significance of Christ's death and passion. He had undeniably imparted into his Christianity a great deal of sunny Hellenic paganism—a fact which in his familiar correspondence with Franzén he scarcely cares to disguise.

Having this conception of the episcopal office, he could not escape emphasizing his function as the supervisor of the schools of his diocese. If he was to be a civilizer on any great scale, the [Pg 240] chance which was here afforded him to impress his ideals upon the rising generation was not one to be neglected. And, as a matter of fact, Tegnér was indefatigable in his labors as an educator. His many speeches at school celebrations preached, as ever, a gospel derived from Greece rather than Judæa; and half-improvised though some of them appear to be, they contain passages of lofty eloquence.

It was inevitable that a bishop of such commanding personality, who wielded his authority at times somewhat ruthlessly, should make enemies. But, on the other hand, the beautiful beneficence and sincere humanity of the man often obliterated the ill-feeling which his official severity had aroused. To the widows of deceased clergymen in his diocese he was a veritable guardian, to their children a father, to his peasantry a friend, adviser, and monitor. He was an expert at detecting errors in ecclesiastical balance-sheets; and woe to the cleric who dared present to him inaccurate accounts of income and expenditures. By sheer dint of his personal superiority and that quality of soul which George Eliot calls dynamic, he impressed himself strongly upon all with whom he came in contact; and though he was feared, he was also beloved as few. A very delightful instance of the reverence with which he was regarded is recorded by Böttiger.

One summer evening he arrived at a remote parsonage which had never, in the memory of man, [Pg 241] been visited by a bishop. Some time after his arrival Tegnér observed two young ladies, the daughters of the house, coming across the yard carrying between them a big tub, full of water. When he asked them, in a friendly way, why they subjected themselves to such hard labor, one of them replied: "Should we not regard it as an honor to be allowed to water the bishop's horses?"

In order to give a clear and coherent idea of Tegnér in his prime, I have been obliged to anticipate events. Many literary achievements which I have left unrecorded belong to the period previous to his assumption of the bishopric of Wexiö. Unhappily Professor Böttiger's edition is very chary of dates, and as Dr. Brandes has truly observed, is arranged with the obvious purpose of falsifying the sequence of Tegnér's poems and confusing the reader. The three periods—previous to 1812, 1812-40, and 1840-46—are entirely arbitrary, and plainly devised with a view to concealing, in so far as they are capable of concealment, the unhappy events which undermined the strength of the Titan and wrecked his splendid powers. But such a purpose is utterly futile, as long as the poems themselves had once escaped into publicity.

It was during the period while his sky was yet unclouded that Tegnér enriched Swedish literature with a series of lyrics which in point of lucidity of thought and brilliancy of diction have rarely been surpassed. It may be admitted, without materially detracting from his merit, that in some of [Pg 242] them the foreign models from which they were in a measure fashioned shimmer through. Just as the Germans, Gottsched and Bodmer, held foreign models to be indispensable, and only disagreed as to which were the best, so the Swedish Academy, which in its predilections was French, had no scruple in recommending this or that literary form for imitation. That degree of literary independence which Germany reached with Goethe and Schiller, who discarded all models, the Scandinavian countries did not reach until a much later period; and Tegnér was one of those who stimulated that national self-respect without which independence is impossible.

A strong spiritual kinship drew him to Schiller, whose splendor of imagery and impassioned rhetoric were the very gifts which he himself in a superlative degree possessed. The breath of

political and religious liberalism which pervades the writings of the German poet was also highly congenial to Tegnér, and last, but not least, they were both light-loving, beauty-worshipping Hellenists, and, though externally conformists, hid joyous pagan souls under imperfect Christian draperies. Small blame it is therefore to Tegnér that Schiller's poems furnished him with frequent suggestions and sometimes also with metres. Schiller had, in "The Gods of Greece," sung a glorious elegy on the Olympian age which stimulated his Swedish rival to write "The Asa Age," in which he regretted, though in a rather half-hearted way, the disappearance of Odin, [Pg 243] Thor, and Freya. The poem, it must be admitted, falls much below Tegnér at his best. Schiller's "Three Words of Faith," in which liberty, virtue, and God are declared to be the only essentials of religion, finds a parallel (which even retains the metre) in Tegnér's "The Eternal," in which truth, justice, and beauty are substituted. A kindred poetic creed is far more consciously proclaimed in the famous poem *Sangen* (Poetry), which was primarily a protest against the gloomy and morbid view of poetry entertained by the Swedish Romanticists (the so-called Phosphorists). Tegnér here declares that the poet "with heavenly joy embraces life," that "he knows no weak lament" (at its misery), "no dissonance which is not dissolved" (in harmony). His temple stands in light and flame; and at its base a fountain gurgles, a draught from which is an elixir of strength and a panacea for all ills.

"Well, then," he continues, "from this fountain will I drink, if I am worthy of such a draught. With healthy eyes will I look about me in the sick world. My golden lyre shall not resound with sorrows which I myself have invented. For the poet's sorrows are none; and the sky of song is forever bright."

Peter Amadeus Atterbom, the leader of the Phosphorists, replied with much moderation and good sense to the obvious reflections upon his school which this poem contained. He intimates plainly [Pg 244] enough that Tegnér's philosophy of life, in so far as it ignores sin and sorrow, which are too real to be banished by song, is a hopelessly shallow one.

"The undissolved dissonances," he says, "in the sense in which Mr. Tegnér uses the expression, certainly betray a disease of the soul, but this disease is not peculiar to a temperament which is fostered by a personal emotional affinity for lugubrious topics and ideas given by birth and developed by circumstances; but it is inherent in the weakness (which at times doubtless surprises even the strongest ...) of desiring to set up its sorrowful view of the world as a theory, and treat it as absolutely true and fundamentally valid for all. Sorrow, as such, is no more a diseased state than is joy; both are alike primordial, necessary, indispensable elements and halves of human life. Who would venture to assert that the day might dispense with the night? And does not the latter's glorious starry sky rival in majesty (though different in kind) the former's bright and dazzling blitheness?"

The fact was that Tegnér's cheery sun-worship was as much temperamental as was Atterbom's sentimental reveries and nocturnal melancholy. The Phosphorist is unquestionably right, however, in asserting that as a theory of life the one is as limited and imperfect as the other. It was because of the abhorrence of all the darker phases of existence that Tegnér's bright Hellenic [Pg 245] muse never struck those notes which thrill with deepest resonance through the human heart. Tegnér's acquaintance with suffering during the early part of his career was chiefly a literary one, and like Goethe he went far out of his way to avoid the sight of it. As there can be no victory without combat—no laurel without dust—the Mount of Transfiguration is not reached except through the valley of the Shadow of Death.

There are, however, many fair flowers to be plucked in Tempe and the blooming vales of Arcady. Goethe had in 1798 published "Hermann and Dorothea," the form of which was Greek, though the theme was Teutonic; and Tegnér's "Children of the Lord's Supper" (1820), which Longfellow has translated so admirably into English, derived its inspiration primarily from the German idyl:

> "Pentecost, day of rejoicing, had come, the church of the village
> Stood, gleaming white in the morning sheen. On the spire of the belfry,
> Decked with a brazen cock, the friendly flames of the spring sun
> Glanced like the tongues of fire beheld by Apostles aforetime."

Thus run the beautiful, stately hexameters, which, whatever cavilling critics may say, are delightfully adapted for epic narrative in any fairly polysyllabic language. And Swedish, which is the most sonorous of all Germanic tongues, and full of Gothic strength, produces the most [Pg 246] delectable effects in the long, rolling line of slow-marching dactyls and spondees. The tempered realism of Tegnér, which shuns all that is harsh and trite, accords well with the noble classical verse. He employs it, as it were, to dignify his homely tale, as Raphael draped the fishermen of Galilee in the flowing robes of Greek philosophers. The description of the church, the rustic youth, and the patriarchal clergyman has, however, the note of experience and the touch of earth which we miss in the more declamatory passages. If, however, declamation is anywhere in place it is in the three orations of the rural parson, which occupy the larger portion of the poem. It is all very lovely and edifying; full of sacred eloquence and a grand amplitude of phrase which is distinctly clerical.

The romantic tale of "Axel" (1822), modelled after Byron's narrative poems, rejoiced in a greater popularity, in spite of the carping criticism with which it was received by the *Svensk Litteratur-Tidning,* the organ of the Phosphorists. Though, to be sure, the merits of the poem are largely ignored in this review, it is undeniable that the faults which are emphasized do exist. First, the frequent violations of probability (which, by the way, ought not to have been so offensive to a

romanticist) draw tremendous draughts upon the reader's credulity; and secondly, the lavish magnificence of imagery rarely adds to the vividness of the situations, but rather obscures and confuses them. It reminds one of a certain style of barocque architecture in which the rage for [Pg 247] ornamentation twists every line into a scroll or spiral or arabesque, until whatever design there originally was is lost in a riot of decoration. The metaphors exist for their own sake, and are in nowise subordinate to the themes which they profess to illustrate. Take, for instance, the oft-quoted passage:

"The night drew near, and in the west
Upon its couch lay Evening dreaming,
And silent, like the priests of Egypt,
The stars pursued their radiant paths,
And earth stood in the starry eve,
As blissful as a bride who stands,
The garland in her dusky hair,
Beneath the baldaquin and blushes.
Tired of the games of day, and warm,
The Naïad rested, still and smiling,
The glow of evening shone resplendent,
A gorgeous rose upon her breast;
And merry Cupid, who had slept
When sun was high, awoke and rode
Upon the moonbeams up and down,
With bow and arrow, through the forest."

This is all very magnificent; but the images tread so close upon each other's heels, that they come near treading each other down, and tumbling together in a confused jumble. I claim no originality in calling attention to the fact that it must have been a colossal Naïad who could wear the evening glow like "a gorgeous rose upon her breast." Likewise former critics have questioned [Pg 248] whether the stars gain in the least in vividness by being compared to the priests of Egypt,[31] who were certainly far less familiar to the reader's vision.

[31] L. Dietrichson: Indledning i Studiet af Sveriges Litteratur. Kjöbenhavn, 1862. See also Svensk Litteratur-Tidning as quoted in B. E. Malmström: Grunddragen af Svenska Vitterhetens Historia, vol. v., p. 423. Oerebro.

The story of the Swedish officer Axel and his beloved, the Cossack Amazon, Maria, has from beginning to end a flavor of Byron, and recalls alternately "the Corsair" and "Lara." The extravagant sentimentality of the tale appealed, however, powerfully to the contemporary taste, and the dissenting voice of criticism was drowned like the shrill note of a single fife in the noisy orchestra of praise. The Swedish matrons and maidens wept over Axel's and Maria's heroic, but tragic love, as those of England, nay, of all Europe, wept over that of Conrad and Medora. Maria, when she hears that Axel has a betrothed at home, enlists as a man in the Russian army (a very odd proceeding by the way, and scarcely conducive to her purpose) and resolves to kill her rival. She is, however, mortally wounded, and Axel finds her dying upon the battlefield.

"Yea, it was she; with smothered pain
She whispers with a voice full faint:
'Good-evening, Axel, nay, good-night,
For death is nestling at my heart.
Oh! ask not what hath brought me hither; [Pg 249]
'Twas love alone led me astray.
Alas! the last long night is dusking;
I stand before the grave's dread door.
How different life, with all its small distresses,
Seems now from what it seemed of yore!
And only love—love fair as ours,
Can I take with me to the skies.'"[32]

[32] The original is in the rhymed Byronic metre, mostly in couplets. In order not to sacrifice anything of the meaning I have chosen to put it into blank verse.

This is exactly the Byronic note, which would be still more audible, if I had preserved the rhymed couplets. Even Medora's male attire is borrowed by Maria, and much more of this Byronic melodramatic heroism is there, only a little more conventionally draped and with larger concessions to the Philistine sense of propriety. But even if Tegnér in "Axel" had coquetted with the Romantic muse, it would be rash to conclude that he contemplated any durable relation. The note which he had struck in his renowned oration at the festival commemorating the Reformation (1817), came from the depth of his heart, and continued to resound through his speech and song for many years to come. I do not moan to imply, of course, that the Byronic Romanticism was very closely akin to that of Tieck, the Schlegels, and Novalis; or that Tegnér in the least compromised his frank and manly liberalism by composing a variation, as it were, on a Byronic theme. How deeply he hated the mediæval obscurantism which then, under the auspices of [Pg 250] Metternich and his unholy "Holy Alliance" was spreading over Europe, he showed in numerous private and public utterances concerning the political condition of Europe after the fall of Napoleon. His greeting to the "New Year, 1816" (which his son-in-law has foolishly excluded from

his edition of the collected works), is overbrimming with bitterness at the triumph of the enemies of the light.

"Hurrah! Religion is a Jesuit,
The rights of man are Jacobins;
The world is free; the raven is white;
Long live the Pope—and that other;
I am going to Germany, and there I'll learn
Sonnets to sing and incense to burn.

"Welcome, thou New Year, with murder and gloom,
Stupidity, lies, and fraud!
I hope thou'lt make an end of our earth,
A bullet at least she's worth;
She's restless, poor thing, like many another,
A shot through the head—she'll cause no more bother!"

It was the fashion in those days to revile the Revolution, because it had produced the man on horseback who had turned the old order of things topsy-turvy in a very unceremonious fashion. Coleridge, Southey, and Wordsworth in England, and Klopstock, Schiller, and a horde of lesser lights in Germany, had hailed the French uprising as the bloody dawn of a new and more glorious day; but the excesses of the Reign of Terror frightened them back into the old fastnesses of [Pg 251] Conservatism. Tegnér (and to his honor be it said) was one of the few who did not despair of liberty because a people born and bred in despotism failed to exercise the wisdom and self-restraint which only liberty can foster. For the only road to the attainment of liberty is its practice and its abuse, and the slow education which can be acquired by no theoretical teaching, but only in the hard and expensive school of experience. For the terrible birth-pangs of liberty no despotically governed people can escape, unless it chooses to remain in thraldom.

This is the spirit that breathes through Tegnér's speeches and poems, during his most vigorous manhood; and even, when the rift in his lute made its music harsh and uncertain, the strain was yet essentially the same, though transposed into an alien key. It is very tempting to quote the many noble sayings of this master of the commanding phrase, but one or two must suffice. It is a delight to read his published correspondence, because of this power of strong and luminous utterance, which he wields with such Titanic ease. Then, again, there is no affectation or cant, but an engaging candor and straightforwardness which bespeak a true man, considering the time when they were written. What clarity of political vision there is in such passages as these:

(1813.) "He who fancies that Europe will be delivered by Russia and her confederates, or that the progress of the Cossacks is for the advantage of Sweden, may perhaps be in the right; but his [Pg 252] views are very different from mine. In the hatred of the Barbarians I am born and bred, and I hope to die in it, unbewildered by modern sophisms."

(1814.) "Who can believe in the re-establishment of the European balance of power or rejoice in the victory of wretched mediocrity over power and genius. The upheavals of the age will soon affect us all—at least us Swedes."

(1817) "That we are living on an earth yet quaking from the French Revolution is undeniable; and extremely foolish seems to me the speech of those who insist that the Revolution is finished, or even approaching its end."

"Napoleon fell, not on account of his wretched opponents, but because despotism is the livery of all strong souls, because his spirit was opposed to the spirit of the age, with which he wrestled, and which was stronger than he."[33]

[33] Quoted from G. Brandes: Esaias Tegnér: En Litteraturpsychologisk Studie. Kjöbenhavn, 1878, pp. 87 and 88.

Living as he did in an age of general disillusion, Tegnér performed an important service in endeavoring to stem with the full force of his personality the rising tide of reaction. How much he accomplished in this direction is difficult to estimate, for we can never know what turn Swedish affairs might have taken, if his clarion voice had not been heard. But it could scarcely fail that such a speech as the one at the Festival of the Reformation (1817), delivered in the presence of a large assembly of scholars and public men, must have made a great impression, and in a hundred [Pg 253] direct and indirect ways affected public opinion. Luther is to Tegnér a hero of liberty, a breaker of human shackles, a deliverer from spiritual bondage and gloom.

"Luther was one of those rare historical characters who always, in whatever they undertake, by their very manner, surprise, and indelibly impress themselves upon the memory. There was something chivalrous, I could almost say adventurous, in his whole personality, in his whole way of beginning and prosecuting an enterprise. He put upon whatever he did the stamp of an almost inconceivable greatness—of an almost overwhelming force. His mere word was half a battle, his deed was a whole one. He was one of those mighty souls which, like certain trees, can only bloom in a storm. His whole great, rich, marvellous life has always seemed to me like an epic with its battles and its final victory. Such a spirit must of necessity make room for itself, and decisively assert itself in history, in whatever direction its activity may be turned, under whatever circumstances and at whatever time it enters upon its career. The time when Luther came was one of those great historical epochs when the world-serpent sheds its skin and reappears in

rejuvenated shape.... A great man, even the very greatest, is always the son of his age—only he is the eldest son; he is the deputy and executor of the age. The age is his, and he administers its substance according to his judgment. He finds the scattered elements to his hand, but usually [Pg 254] tangled up and struggling in chaotic disorder. To gather and arrange them into a creation, to direct them toward a definite goal, ... this is his greatness; this is his creative powers.... In this ... sense Luther created his age."[34]

[34] Esaias Tegnér's Samlade Skrifter, vol. v., pp. 6, 7, 9, and 10.

Dr. Brandes has anticipated me in calling attention to the fact that the orator's characterization of Luther, though highly interesting, is one-sided. But as his admirable monograph on Tegnér is not accessible to English readers, I feel justified in repeating his argument in abbreviated form. There is a great uniformity, he says, in substance, in all Tegnér's heroes. They are all men of action—bold, strong, adventurous heroes, such as boys delight in. They have a striking family resemblance. With the change of a few attributes Tegnér applies his characterization of Luther to such a widely differing personality as King Gustavus III. of Sweden, a frivolous, theatrical, Frenchified, infidel monarch. And Gustavus Adolphus and Charles XII. are forced into the same livery, in spite of their diversity of structure, because Tegnér admired them all, and had practically but one type which appeared to his frank, open, and somewhat boyish fancy wholly worthy of admiration.[35]

[35] Georg Brandes: Esaias Tegnér, pp. 17-19.

In reading consecutively the whole series of Tegnér's collected works I am much struck with the [Pg 255] force of this criticism. The brave man who defies the world single-handed, and plunges up to his ears into dangers, without counting the odds against him, is the typical juvenile hero; and it is strange, though by no means incomprehensible, that a man like Tegnér, who could betray such political insight as is shown in his letters to Franzén and Leopold had not really gotten beyond this primitive type of excellence. In a certain sense, perhaps, it was not desirable that he should. For the tremendous popularity which greeted "Frithjof's Saga" was due in no small measure to this half-juvenile robustness of its author's genius. As I cannot help regretting in myself the loss of my boyish appetite for swashbuckling marauders, and mysterious treasure-diggers, I am, indeed, far from deploring Tegnér's delight in the insane prowess of Charles XII., or the gay and chivalrous gallantry of Gustavus III. There is a sort of fine salubriousness in it which makes one, on the whole, like him the more.

It might well be said of Tegnér, as he said of Luther, that his word was half a battle. At all events he accomplished by his speeches a complete overthrow of his opponents the Phosphorists, without engaging in the barren polemics to which they invited him. He waited until some appropriate public occasion occurred, and then spoke out of the fulness of his conviction. And his words spread like undulating waves of light from one end of the land to the other, finding lodgement in thousands of hearts. Thus his beautiful epilogue at the "magister promotion"[36] in [Pg 256] Lund (1820) was a direct manifesto (and a most incisive one) against that mystic obscurity which, according to the Phosphorists, was inseparable from the highest and deepest poetic utterance:

"In vain they call upon the lofty Truth
With sombre conjurations; for the dark
She ne'er endures; for her abode is light.
In Phoebus' world, in knowledge as in song,
All things are bright. Bright beams the radiant sun;
Clear runs and pure his bright Castalian fountain.
Whate'er thou canst not clearly say thou know'st not.
Twin-born with thought is word on lips of man;
That which is darkly said is darkly thought;
For wisdom true is like the diamond,
A drop that's petrified of heavenly light;
The purer that it is, the more its value,
The more the daylight shines and glitters through it.
The ancients builded unto Truth a temple,
A fair rotunda, light as heaven's vault.
And freely poured the sunshine from all sides
Into its open round; the winds of heaven
Amid its ranks of pillars gayly gambolled.
But now instead we build a Tower of Babel,
A heavy, barbarous structure. Darkness peeps
From out its deep and narrow grated casements.
Unto the sky the tower was meant to reach,
But hitherto we've only had confusion.
As in the realm of thought, in that of song
It is; and poesy is e'er transparent ..."

[36] A magister promotion corresponds approximately to our university commencements. It is the ceremony of bestowing the degree of master of arts. [Pg 257]

This was certainly an attractive doctrine, and it did not fail to command public approval. But it suffers from exactly the same limitation as Tegnér's gospel of joy. It is only relatively (I might almost say temperamentally) true; and the opposite might be maintained with equal force, and in

fact was so maintained by Atterbom, who declared (in the "Poetical Calendar for 1821") that there can be no such a conception as light without darkness. Darkness, he says, is the condition of all color and form. You distinguish the light and all things in it only by the contrasting effect of shadow—all of which, I fancy, Tegnér would not have denied. More to the point would have been the query whether in poetry darkness and indistinctness are synonymous terms. It is only the most commonplace truths which can be made intelligible to all. Much of the best and highest thinking of humanity lies above the plane of the ordinary untrained intellect. What is light to me may be twilight or darkness to you. What to you is clear as the daylight, may to me be as densely impenetrable as the Cimmerian night. Christ himself recognized this fact when he said to his disciples: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."

For all that, Tegnér's doctrine was in its effect wholesome. It discouraged the writers of the Romantic School, who under the guise of profundity gave publicity to much immature and confused thinking. He was no doubt right in saying that "a poetry which commences with [Pg 258] whooping-cough is likely to end in consumption." His frequently repeated maxim, that poetry is nothing but the health of life, "occasioned by an abounding intellectual vigor, a joyous leap over the barriers of everyday life," applied, however, to his own poetry only so long as his vigor was unimpaired. His terrible poem "Hypochondria" (*Mjeltsjukan*) is to me no less poetical because it is not "a petrified drop of heavenly light," and mocks all the cheerful theories of its author's prime.

Tegnér had yet a few years in which to rejoice in this "health of life" in which he found the inspiration for his song; and these last years were the most fruitful in his entire career. He was about forty years of age when, in 1820, he began to compose the first cantos of "Frithjof's Saga." He was living in modest comfort, happy in his marital relation, and surrounded by a family of children to whom he was a most affectionate father. He could romp and play with his curly-headed boys and girls without any loss of dignity; and they loved nothing better than to invade his study. Next to them in his regard was a black-nosed pug, named Atis, who invariably accompanied him to his lectures and remained sitting at his feet listening with intelligent gravity to his explanations of the Greek poets. If by chance his master, in his zeal for his own poetry, forgot the lecture-hour, Atis would respectfully pull him by the tails of his coat. No man at the University of Lund was more generally beloved than Tegnér, and all honors which the University [Pg 259] could bestow had been offered to him. The office of Rector Magnificus he had, however, persisted in declining.

There was at that time a general revival of interest in the so-called saga-age. The Danish poet, Oehlenschläger, had published his old-Norse cycle of poems, "Helge," which aroused a sympathetic reverberation in Tegnér's mind. The idea took possession of him that here was a theme which lay well within the range of his own voice, and full of alluring possibilities. Accordingly he chose the ancient "Saga of Frithjof the Bold," and resolved to embody in it all the characteristic features of the old heroic life. And what Oehlenschläger had attempted to do, and partly succeeded in doing, he accomplished with a completeness of success which was a surprise to himself. No sooner had "Iduna," the organ of the Gothic League, published the first nine cantos (1821), than all Sweden resounded with enthusiastic applause; and even from beyond the boundaries of the fatherland came voices of praise. When the completed poem appeared in book-form, it was translated into all civilized languages, and everywhere, in spite of the translators' shortcomings, it was hailed with delight. Not only England, France, and Germany hastened to appropriate it, but even in Spain, Greece, and Russia tears were shed over "Ingeborg's Lament," and tender bosoms palpitated with sympathy for Frithjof's sorrows. I know a dozen English [Pg 260] translations of "Frithjof's Saga" (a friend of mine, who is a bibliophile, assures me that the exact number is at present twenty-one), and of German versions the number is not very much less. A Norwegian (or rather Danish) rendering was presented to me on my twelfth birthday; and the sentiment which then most forcibly appealed to me was, as I vividly remember, embodied in the following verse, in which Björn chides his friend's grief for the loss of his beloved:

> "Frithjof, 'tis time for your folly's abating;
> Sigh and lament for a woman's loss:
> Earth is, alas, too full of such dross;
> One may be lost, still a thousand are waiting.
> Say but the word, of such goods I will bring
> Quickly a cargo—the Southland can spare them,
> Bed as the rose, mild as lambs in the spring;
> Then we'll cast lots, or as brothers we'll share them."[37]

[37] Holcomb's translation.

It was not the unconscious humor of this proposition which struck me the most in those days; but it was the bluff frankness of the gruff old viking which then seemed truly admirable. In fact, I am not sure but that Björn appeared to me a more sympathetic figure than Frithjof. But a little later it dawned upon me that his utter lack of chivalry was rather revolting; and I began to marvel at my former admiration. At fourteen the following verse (which at twelve was charmingly heroic) [Pg 261] caused me to revise my opinion of Björn:

> "Good! to King Ring it shall be my glad duty
> Something to teach of a wronged viking's power;
> Fire we his palace at midnight's still hour,

Scorch the old graybeard and bear off the beauty."

For all that, Björn with his rough speech and hearty delight in fighting and drinking, is far truer to the spirit of the old heroic age than is Frithjof with his sentimentality and lovesick reveries. This verse, for instance, is replete with the briny breath of the northern main. The north wind blows through it:

"Good is the sea, your complaining you squander,
Freedom and joy on the sea flourish best.
He never knoweth effeminate rest
Who on the billows delighteth to wander.
When I am old, to the green-growing land
I, too, will cling, with the grass for my pillow.
Now I will drink and will fight with free hand,
Now I'll enjoy my own sorrow-free billow."

I might continue in the autobiographical vein; but must forbear. For there is a period in the life of every young Norseman when, untroubled by its anachronism, he glories in Frithjof's melancholy mooning, his praise of Ingeborg, his misanthropy, and all the manifold moods of love so enchantingly expressed in Tegnér's melodious verse.

When a book acquires this significance as an expression of the typical experience in the lives of thousands, the critical muse can but join in the general chorus, and find profound reasons for the universal praise. In the case of "Frithjof's Saga" this is not a difficult matter. From beginning to end the poem has a lyrical intensity which sets the mind vibrating with a responsive emotion. It is not a coldly impersonal epic, recounting remote heroic events; but there is a deeply personal note in it, which has that nameless moving quality—*la note émue*, as the French call it—which brings the tear to your eye, and sends a delicious breeze through your nerves. All that, to be sure, or nearly all of it, evaporates in translation; for no more than you can transfer the exquisite dewy intactness of the lily to canvas can you transfer the rapturous melody of noble verse into an alien tongue. The subtlest harmonies—those upon which the thrill depends—are invariably lost. If Longfellow, instead of giving us two cantos, had translated the whole poem, we should, at least, have possessed an English version which would have afforded us some conception of the charm of the renowned original. [Pg 262]

The objections to "Frithjof's Saga" which have been urged by numerous critics may all be admitted as more or less valid; yet something remains which will account for its astounding popularity. Tegnér at the time when he was singing of Frithjof's and Ingeborg's love was himself suffering from a consuming but unrequited passion. The strong, warm pulse of life which throbs in Frithjof's wrath, defiance, and scorn, and in his deep and manly tenderness is the poet's own. It marks but the rhythm of his own tumultuous heart-beat. It is altogether an unhappy chapter, which his biographer has vainly striven to suppress. There was among his acquaintance in Lund a certain Mrs. Palm, toward whom he felt drawn with an irresistible half-demonic force. Beyond this fact we know nothing of the lady, except that she was handsome, cultivated, and well-connected. Whatever approaches Tegnér may have made toward her (and it is not known of what nature they were) she appears to have repelled; and the poet, though fighting desperately against his growing infatuation, wore out his splendid vitality in the conflict of emotions which the unhappy relation occasioned. He became a prey to the most terrible melancholy, and a misanthropy of the deepest hue spread its sombre veil over the world which hitherto had given to him its brightest smile. The dread of insanity became an *idée fixe* with him; and the pathetic cry, "God preserve my reason," rings again and again through his private correspondence. One of his brothers was insane; and he fancied that there must be a taint in his blood which menaced him with the same tragic doom. [Pg 263]

Happily, he could as yet conjure the storm. It hung threateningly on the horizon of his mind, with mutterings of thunder and stray flashes of lightning. But his poetic bark still sped along with full sails, bravely breasting the waves. [Pg 264]

"Und wenn der Mensch in seiner Qual verstummt
Gab mir ein Gott zu sagen was ich leide,"

says Goethe. And this divine gift of saying, or, better still, of singing, what he suffered made Tegnér, during this period, master of his sufferings. They did not overwhelm him and ruin his usefulness. On the contrary, these were the most active and fruitful years of his life. But it was the deep agitation which possessed him—it was the suppressed tumult of his strong soul which vibrated through "Frithjof" and which imparted to it that vital quality, that moving ring which arouses the deeper feelings in the human heart.

Archæologically the poem was not correct, and was not meant to be. Tegnér distinctly disclaimed the intention of producing a historically accurate picture of the saga age; and all criticism censuring the modernness of Frithjofs and Ingeborg's sentiments is, therefore, according to his idea, wide of the mark. I do not quite agree with his point of view, but will state his argument. For the historical Frithjof, as he is represented in the ancient Norse saga bearing his name, Tegnér cared but little. What he wished to do was to give a poetic presentation of the old heroic life, and he chose Frithjof as his representative of this age because he united in himself so many of its characteristics: [Pg 265]

"In the saga much occurs which is very grand and heroic, and hence valid for all times, which both might and ought to be retained; but, on the other hand, a great deal occurs which is rough, savage, barbarous; and this had either to be entirely eliminated, or at least materially softened. Up to a certain degree it therefore became necessary to modernize; but the difficulty was to find the golden mean. On the one hand, the poem ought not to offend too much our more refined manners and gentler modes of thought; but, on the other hand, the natural quality, the freshness, the truth to nature ought not to be sacrificed."

Tegnér fancies he has solved this problem by retaining in Frithjof the fundamental traits of all heroism, viz., nobility, magnanimity, courage; but at the same time nationalizing them by giving them a distinctly Scandinavian tinge. And this he has done by making his hero almost wantonly defiant, stubborn, pugnacious. As Ingeborg, lamenting his fierce pugnacity, and yet glorying in it, says:

"How glad, how stubborn, and how full of hope!
The point he setteth of his trusty sword
Against the breast of Fate and crieth, Thou must yield."

"Another peculiarity of the Norseman's character is a certain tendency to sadness and melancholy which is habitual with all deeper natures. An elegiac tone pervades all our old national melodies, and, generally speaking, all that is of significance in our history; for it rises from the very bottom of the nation's heart. There is a certain joyousness (commonly attributed to the French) which in the last instance is only levity. But the joyousness of the North is fundamentally serious; for which reason I have in Frithjof endeavored to give a hint of this [Pg 266] brooding melancholy in his repentance of the unintentional burning of the temple, his brooding fear of Balder,

"Who sits in the sky, and the thoughts he sends down,
Which forever are clouding my mind."

It will be seen from this that Tegnér was fully conscious of what he was doing. He civilized Frithjof, because he was addressing a civilized audience which would have taken little interest in the rude viking of the eighth century, if he had been presented to them in all his savage unrestraint. He did exactly what Tennyson did, when he made King Arthur the model of a modern English gentleman and (by implication) a Protestant a thousand years before Protestantism existed. Ingeborg, too, had to be a trifle modified and disembarrassed of a few somewhat too naturalistic traits with which the saga endows her, before she became the lovely type that she is of the faithful, loving, long-suffering, womanhood of the North, with trustful blue eyes, golden hair, and a heart full of sweet and beautiful sentiment. It was because Oehlenschläger had neglected to make sufficient concessions to modern demands that his "Helge" (though in some respects a greater poem than "Frithjof's Saga") never crossed the boundary of Scandinavia, and even there made no deep impression upon the general public.

Though the story of "Frithjof" is familiar to most readers, I may be pardoned for presenting a [Pg 267] brief *résumé*. The general plot, in Tegnér's version, coincides in its main outlines with that of the saga. Frithjof, the son of the free yeoman Thorstein Vikingson, is fostered in the house of the peasant Hilding, with Ingeborg, the daughter of King Belë of Sogn. The King and the yeoman have been life-long friends, and each has a most cordial regard for the other.

"By sword upheld, King Belë in King's-hall stood,
Beside him Thorstein Vikingson, that yeoman good,
His battle-friend with almost a century hoary,
And deep-marked like a rune-stone with scars of glory."

The yeoman's son and the king's daughter, thrown into daily companionship in their foster-father's hall, love each other; and Frithjof, after the death of their fathers, goes to Ingeborg's brothers, Helge and Halfdan, and asks her hand in marriage. His suit is scornfully rejected, and he departs in wrath vowing vengeance. The ancient King Ring, of Ringerike, having heard of Ingeborg's beauty, sends also ambassadors to woo her. Her brothers make sacrifices in order to ascertain the will of the gods. The omens are inauspicious, and they accordingly feel compelled to decline the King's offer.

Ingeborg is shut up in Balder's Grove, where the sanctity of the temple would make it sacrilege for any one to approach her. Frithjof, however, braves the wrath of the god, and sails every night across the fjord to a stolen rendezvous with his beloved. The canto called "Frithjof's Happiness," [Pg 268] which is brimming over with a swelling redundance of sentiment, is so cloyingly sweet that the reader must himself be in love in order to enjoy it. It is written in the key of the watch-songs of the German minnesingers and the aubades of Provençal troubadours. The Norse note is not only wanting, but would never fit into that key:

"'Hush! 'tis the lark.' Nay, those soft numbers
  Of doves' faith tell that knows no rest.
The lark yet on the hillside slumbers
  Beside his mate in grassy nest.
To them no king seals his dominions

When morning breaks in eastern air;
Their life is free as are their pinions
Which bear aloft the gladsome pair.

"'See day is breaking!' Nay, some tower
Far eastward sendeth forth that light;
We yet may spend another hour,
Not yet shall end the precious night.
May sleep, thou sun, thee long encumber,
And waking may'st thou linger still,
For Frithjof's sake may'st freely slumber
Till Ragnarök, be such thy will.

"Vain hope! The day its gray discloses,
Already morning breezes blow,
Already bend the eastern roses,
As fresh as Ingeborg's can glow;
The winged songsters mount and twitter
(The thoughtless throng!) along the sky,
And life starts forth, and billows glitter,
And far the shades and lover fly.

[Pg 269]

"Farewell, beloved: till some longer
And fairer eve we meet again.
By one kiss on thy brow the stronger
Let me depart—thy lips, once, then!
Sleep now and dream of me, and waken
When mid-day comes, and faithful tell
The hours as I yearn forsaken,
And sigh as I! Farewell, farewell!"[38]

[38] Translation of L. A. Sherman, Ph.D. Boston, 1878.

The two following cantos, entitled "The Parting" and "Ingeborg's Lament," though liable to the same criticism as their predecessor, are, with all their sentimental effusiveness, beautiful. No lover, I fancy, ever found them redundant, overstrained, spoiled by the lavish splendor of their imagery. Tegnér has accomplished the remarkable feat of interveining, as it were, his academic rhetoric with a blood-red humanity, and making the warm pulse of experience throb through the stately phrases.

King Ring, incensed at the rejection of his suit, declares war against Helge and Halfdan, who in their dire need ask Frithjof's aid, which is promptly refused. In order to be rid of him they then send him on an expedition to the Orkneys, to collect a tribute which is due to them from Earl Angantyr. He entreats Ingeborg to flee with him; but she refuses. She sees from Balder's Grove his good ship Ellida breasting the waves and weeps bitter tears at his loss:

"Swell not so high,
Billows of blue with your deafening cry!
Stars, lend assistance, a shining
Pathway defining!

[Pg 270]

"With the spring doves
Frithjof will come, but the maiden he loves
Cannot in hall or dell meet him,
Lovingly greet him.
Buried she sleeps
Dead for love's sake, or bleeding she weeps
Heart-broken, given by her brother
Unto another."

It is perfectly in keeping with the character of Norse womanhood in the saga age that Ingeborg should refuse to defy her brother's authority by fleeing with Frithjof and yet deeply mourn his departure without her. The family feeling, the bond of blood, was exceptionally strong; and submission to the social code which made the male head of the house the arbiter of his sister's fate was bred in the bone. It is, therefore, perfectly natural that, when King Ring has beaten her brothers in battle, and exacted Ingeborg as the prize of victory, she yields unmurmuringly to their decree.

Frithjof, in the meanwhile, distinguishes himself greatly in the Orkneys by his strength and prowess, gains Earl Angantyr's friendship, and returns with the tribute. As he sails into the fjord, a sight greets him which makes his heart quail. Framnaes, his paternal estate, is burnt to the ground, and the charred beams lie in a ruined heap under the smiling sky. The kings, though they had pledged their honor that they would not harm his property, had broken faith with him; and Ingeborg, in the hope of gaining whom he had undertaken the perilous voyage, was wedded to

[Pg 271]

King Ring. In a white-heat of wrath and sorrow Frithjof starts out to call her perjured brothers to account. He finds them in the temple in Balder's Grove, preparing for the sacrifice. There he flings the bag containing the tribute into King Helge's face, knocking out his front teeth, and observing on his wife's arm the ring with which he had once pledged Ingeborg, he rushes at her to recover it. The woman, who had been warming the wooden image of Balder before the fire, drops, in her fright, the idol into the flame. Frithjof seizes her by the arm and snatches the ring from her. In the general confusion that follows the temple takes fire, and all attempts to quench the flames are futile. In consequence of this sacrilege Frithjof is outlawed at the *Thing* as a *vargr-i-véum*, *i.e.*, wolf in the sanctuary, and is forced to go into exile. His farewell to his native land strikes one as being altogether out of tune. The old Norse viking is made to anticipate sentiments which are of far later growth; but for all that the verses are quite stirring:

"Brow of creation,
  Thou North sublime!
I have no station
  Within thy clime.
Proud, hence descended
  My race I tell; [Pg 272]
Of heroes splendid,
  Fond nurse, farewell!

My love false-hearted,
  My manor burned,
My name departed,
  An outlaw, spurned,
I now appealing
  From earth, will dwell
With waves, for healing.
  Farewell, farewell!"[39]

[39] Sherman's translation.

Frithjof now roams for many years over the sea as a viking, and gains much booty and honor. His viking code, with its swift anapestic rhythm, has a breezy melody which sings in the ear. It is an attempt to embody the ethics of Norse warfare at its best, and to present in the most poetic light the rampant, untamable individualism of the ancient Germanic paganism. In defiance of his friend Björn's advice, Frithjof, weary of this bootless chase for glory and pelf, resolves to see Ingeborg once more before he dies, and, disguised as a salt-boiler, he enters King Ring's hall. There he sees his beloved sitting in the high-seat beside her aged lord; and the sorrow which the years had dulled revives with an exquisite agony. He punishes with fierce promptitude one of the King's men who insults him; and his answer to the King's rebuke betrays him as a man of rank and station. He then throws away his disguise, without, however, revealing his name, but Ingeborg instantly recognizes him. [Pg 273]

"Then even to her temples the queen's deep blushes sped,
As when the northlight tinges the snow-clad fields with red,
And like two full-blown lilies on racking waves which rest,
With ill-concealed emotion so heaved her throbbing breast."

The king now invites the stranger, who calls himself Thjof, to remain his guest during the winter, and Frithjof accepts. He makes, however, no approach to Ingeborg, with whom he scarcely exchanges a single word. During a sleigh-ride on the ice he saves, by a tremendous feat of strength, the life of the king and queen. With the coming of the spring preparations are made for a grand chase, in which Frithjof participates.

"Spring is coming, birds are twittering, forests leaf, and smiles the sun;
And the loosened torrents downward singing to the ocean run;
Glowing like the cheek of Freya, peeping rosebuds 'gin to ope,
And in human hearts awaken love of life and joy and hope."

The canto called "The Temptation" contains the most dramatic and altogether the most beautiful situation in the poem. The old king, feigning weariness, begs Frithjof to tarry with him alone, while he takes a rest. Frithjof tries to dissuade him, but in vain.

"Then threw Frithjof down his mantle, and upon the green sward spread;
And the ancient king, so trustful, laid on Frithjof's knee his head; [Pg 274]
Slept as calmly as the hero sleepeth after war's alarms
On his shield, calm as an infant slumbers in its mother's arms."

Then the temptation comes to Frithjof to slay the old man who had stolen his bride; but after a brief struggle he hurls his sword far away into the forest.

"Straight the ancient king awakens. 'Sweet has been my sleep,' he said.
'Pleasant 'tis to sleep in shadow, guarded by a brave man's blade.

But where is thy sword, O stranger, lightning's brother, where is he?
Who has parted one from other that should never parted be?'"

"'Not a whit care I,' said Frithjof, 'I shall find a sword some day;
Sharp, O King, are tongues of falchions, words of peace they seldom say;
In the steel dwell swarthy demons, demons strayed from Nifelhem,
No man's sleep to them is sacred, silver locks embitter them.'

"'Youth, no moment have I slumbered, but to prove thee feigned to rest,
Unproved men and weapons never trusts King Ring without a test.
Thou art Frithjof. I have known thee since thou first cam'st to my hall;
Much that thou hast hidden from me; from the first I guessed it all.'"

Soon after this interview the aged king feels death approaching; and in order not to go to the dark abode of Hela, he cuts death-runes upon his breast and ascends to Odin's bright hall. But before dying he gives Ingeborg to Frithjof, and makes him the guardian of his son. The people, in *Thing* assembled, glorying in Frithjof's great renown, desire, however, to make him King's successor; but he lifts the small boy above his head upon his shield and proclaims him king. He returns home and rebuilds Balder's temple, whereupon the sentence of outlawry is removed, and he is reconciled to Ingeborg's brothers and marries the beloved of his youth. [Pg 275]

The last canto, called "The Atonement," is perhaps the most flagrant violation of historical verisimilitude in the whole epic. A hoary priest of Balder actually performs the wedding ceremony in the restored temple, and pronounces a somewhat unctuous wedding oration, which differs from those which Tegnér himself had frequently delivered chiefly in the substitution of pagan for the Christian deities. As a matter of fact, marriage was a purely civil contract among the ancient Norsemen, and had no association with the temple or the priesthood, which, by the way, was no separate office but a patriarchal function belonging to the secular chieftainship. But Tegnér's public were in nowise shocked by anachronisms of this sort; they probably rejoiced the more heartily in the happiness of the reunited lovers, because their marriage was, according to modern notions, so "regular." [Pg 276]

It was soon after his publication of "Frithjof's Saga" that Tegnér became Bishop of Wexiö. He then removed from Lund and took up his residence upon the estate Oestrabo, near the principal town in his diocese. The great fame of his poem came to him as a surprise; and he even undertook to protest against it, declaring with perfect sincerity that he held it to be undeserved. In letters to his friends he never wearied of pointing out the faults of "Frithjof" and his own shortcomings as a poet. In a letter to the poet Leopold (August 17, 1825), who had praised the poem to the skies, he argues seriously to prove that his admiration is misplaced:

> "My great fault in 'Frithjof' was not that I chose my theme from the old cycle of sagas, but that I treated it in a tone and with a manner which was neither ancient nor modern, neither antiquarian nor poetical, but hovered, as it were, on the boundary of both. For what does it mean to treat a subject poetically if not this, to eliminate everything which belongs to an alien and past age and now no longer appeals to any heart? The hearts to which it once did appeal are now all dust. Other modes of thought and feeling are current. It is impossible to properly translate one age into another. But to poetry nothing is really past. Poetry is the beautifying life of the moment; she wears the colors of the day; she cannot conceive of anything as dead.... But I am convinced that all poetic treatment of a theme belonging to a past age demands its modernization; and that everything antiquarian is here a mistake. This holds good not only in regard to the northern tone but also in regard to the Greek. Look, for instance, at Goethe's 'Iphigenie.' Who does not admire the beautiful, simple, noble, Hellenic form? And yet who has [Pg 277] ever felt his soul warmed by this image of stone?... No living spirit has been breathed into these nostrils; the staring eyes gaze upon me without life and animation; no heart beats under the Hellenically rounded marble bosom. The whole is a mistake, infinitely more beautiful than 'Frithjof,' but fashioned according to the game principles of art. The Greeks said that the Muse was the daughter of Memory; but this refers only to the material, the theme itself, which is everywhere of minor consequence. The question, then, is as to the proper treatment. Where it tends toward the antiquarian it misses the mark; it represents, like 'Frithjof,' only a restored ruin."

This passage is by no means the only one in which Tegnér, with an utter absence of vanity or illusion, judged his work and found it wanting. There is no mock modesty in his manly deprecation of the honors that were showered upon him; but as a father knows best the faults of his child whom he loves, so he knew the defects of his work, as measured by his own high standard, and refused to accept any more praise than was his due. Not even the fact that Goethe expressed his admiration of "Frithjof's Saga" could persuade him that he was entitled to the extravagant homage which his enthusiastic countrymen accorded him. There were even times when he disclaimed the title of poet. Whether he was forgotten a little sooner or a little later, he said, was a matter of small moment.

"Speaking seriously," he writes in 1824 (accordingly before the publication of "Frithjof"), "I have never regarded myself as a poet in the higher significance of the word.... I am at best a John the Baptist, who is preparing the way for him who is to come." [Pg 278]

He is always just and inclined to be generous in his judgment of every one except himself. It is necessary, however, after the year 1824, to make due allowance for the terrible strain upon his mind which disposed him to give violent and hyperbolical expression to the mood of the moment. The unhappy passion which he could at times smother, but never subdue, went boring away into his heart like a subterranean fire, consuming his vitals, and occasionally breaking forth into a wild blaze. The following reference to it, in his letter to Franzén (November 13, 1825), is very pathetic:

> "It is to-day my forty-third birthday. I have thus long since passed the highest altitude of life where the waters divide. With every year one now becomes smaller and smaller; one star is extinguished after another. And yet the sun does not rise. One dies by degrees and by halves. Therefore only children and youth ought to celebrate their birthdays with joy; we who have passed into the valley of age, which with every step is growing darker and chillier, are right in celebrating them with—whims.... However, this is not my only or my greatest affliction, I have had and have others. But the night is silent and the grave is dumb, and their sister, Sorrow, should be as they. Therefore—let this suffice."
>
> December 29th. "Alas, this old year! What I have suffered in it no one knows, if not, perhaps, the Recorder beyond the clouds. But I am indebted to this year. It has been darker, but also more serious than all the others put together. I have learned at my own expense what a human heart can endure without breaking, and what power God has deposited in a man under his left nipple. As I say, I am under obligation to this year, for it has enriched me with what is the real sinking fund of human wisdom and human independence—a mighty, deeply rooted contempt for man.... My inner nature emerges from the crisis like the hibernating bear from his den, emaciated and exhausted, but happily with my ursine sinews well preserved; and by and by some flesh will be growing on them again. It seems to me that my old barbaric, Titanic self, with its hairy arms, is constantly more and more rubbing the sleep out of its eyes. I hope that some vine may still grow upon the scorched and petrified volcano of my heart." [Pg 279]
>
> January, 1826. "But when one is compelled to despise the *character* of a human being, especially of one who has been or is dear to one, then that is the bitterest experience which life can afford; then it is not strange if a frank and ardent soul turns with loathing from this false, hypocritical generation and shuts himself up, as well as may be, in the hermitage of his own heart.
>
> "My mind is unchristian, for it has no day of rest. Generally I think that my disease has its seat in the abdomen or in the waist. Mineral waters I can no more drink this summer. But is there not a mineral water which is called Lethe?
>
> "Whether my little personality returns thither whence it came, with or without consciousness, a few months later or earlier, in order to be drowned in its great fountain-head, or to float for some time yet like a bubble, reflecting the clouds and an alien light—this appears to me constantly a matter of less and less consequence."

There is to me a heartrending pathos in these confessions. It is easy to stand aloof, of course, like a schoolmaster with his chastising rod, and lash the frailties of poor human nature. It is easy to [Pg 280] declare with virtuous indignation that the man who covets his neighbor's wife is a transgressor who has no claim upon our sympathy. And yet who can help pitying this great, noble poet, who fought so bravely against his "barbaric, Titanic self with its hairy arms"? His passionate intensity of soul was, indeed, part of his poetic equipment; and he would not have been the poet he was if he had been cool, callous, and self-restrained. The slag in him was so intimately moulded with the precious metal that their separation would have been the extinction of the individuality itself. The fiery furnace of affliction through which he passed warped and scorched and cracked this mighty compound, but without destroying it. A glimpse of this experience which transformed the powerful, joyous, bright-visaged singer into a bitter, darkly brooding pessimist, fleeing from the sinister shadow which threatened to overtake him, is afforded us in the poem "Hypochondria[40]":

> "I stood upon the altitude of life,
> Where mingled waters part and downward go
> With rush and foam in opposite directions.
> Lo, it was bright up there, and fair to stand.
> I saw the sun, I saw his satellite,
> Which, since he quenched his light, shone in the blue;
> I saw that earth was fair and green and glorious,
> I saw that God was good, that man was honest. [Pg 281]
>
> "Then rose a dread black imp, and suddenly
> The black one bit himself into my heart;
> And lo, at once the earth lay void and barren,
> And sun and stars were straightway drenched in gloom.
> The landscape, glad erewhile, lay dark, autumnal;
> Each grove was sere, each flower stem was broken;
> Within the frozen sense my strength lay dead,

All joy, all courage withered within me.

"What is to me reality—its dumb,
Dead bulk, inert, oppressive, grim, and crude?
How hope has paled, alas, with roseate hue!
And memory, the heavenly blue, grown hoary!
And even poesy! Its acrobatic
Exertions, leaps—they pall upon my sense;
Its bright mirage can satisfy no soul—
Light skimmings from the surface fair of things.

"Still I will praise thee, oh, thou human race.
God's likeness art thou, oh, how true, how striking!
Two lies thou hast natheless, in sooth, to show;
The name of one is man, the other's woman!
Of faith and honor there's an ancient ditty,
'Tis sung the best, when men each other cheat.
Thou child of heaven, the one thing true thou hast
Is Cain's foul mark upon thy forehead branded.

"A mark quite legible, writ by God's finger;
Why did I fail ere now to heed that sign?
A smell of death pervades all human life,
And poisons spring's sweet breath and summer's splendor.
Out of the grave that odor is exhaling.
The grave is sealed and marble guards its freight,
But still corruption is the breath of life,
Eludes its guard and scatters everywhere.

"Oh, watchman, tell me now the night's dark hour!
Will it then never wane unto its end? [Pg 282]
The half-devoured moon is gliding, gliding,
The tearful stars forever onward go,
My pulse beats fast as in the time of youth,
But ne'er beats out the hours of torment sore.
How long, how endless is each pulse-beat's pain!
Oh, my consuméd, oh, my bleeding heart.

"My heart! Nay in my bosom is no heart,
There's but an urn that holds life's burnt-out ashes;
Have pity on me, thou green mother Earth,
And hide that urn full soon in thy cool breast.
In air it crumbles, moulders; earth's deep woe
Has in the earth, I ween, at last an end;
And Time's poor foundling, here in school constrained,
Finds then, perchance, beyond the sun—a father."

[40] The poem is written in the *ottava rime*, but in order to preserve the sense intact I have rendered it in blank verse.

A physical disease which seems to have baffled the skill of physicians may have been the primary cause of the sufferings here described, and was no doubt aggravated by the psychical condition to which I have alluded. Now it was supposed to be the liver which was affected; then again Tegnér was treated for gall-stones. In the summer of 1833 he made a journey through Germany and spent some months at Carlsbad; but he returned without sensible relief. His foreign sojourn was, however, of some benefit in widening his mental horizon. Tegnér's intellectual affinities had always been French; and toward Germany he had assumed a more or less unsympathetic attitude. A slight acquaintance with the philosopher Schleiermacher and the Germanized Norwegian author Henrik Steffens (who was then a professor at the University of Berlin) did not, indeed, reverse his predilections, but it opened his eyes to excellences in the German people to [Pg 283] which he had formerly been blind, and removed prejudices which had obscured his vision. He had everywhere the most distinguished reception, and was honored with an invitation to Sans Souci, where he was the guest of the witty Crown Prince of Prussia, later Frederick William IV. But these agreeable incidents of his journey were a poor compensation for his failure to obtain that which he had gone in search of. Fame, honor, and distinguished friends, without health, are but a Tantalus feast, the sweets of which are seen but never tasted.

"I fear," said Tegnér, in his hopelessness, "that my right side, like that of the Chamber of Deputies, is incurable."

"When this Saul's spirit comes over me I often feel an indescribable bitterness, which endures nothing, spares nothing, in heaven or on earth. It usually finds vent in misanthropic reflections, sarcasms, and ideas which I have no sooner written down than I repent of them."

The activity which he unfolded, even in the midst of intolerable sufferings, was phenomenal. He possessed an energy of will and vigor of temperament which enabled him to rise superior to his physical condition, and lure strong music (though sometimes jarred into discords) from the

broken lyre. It was in 1829, after his illness had fastened its hold upon him, that he pronounced the beautiful epilogue in hexameters at the graduating festivities at the University of Lund, and crowned the Dane, Adam Oehlenschläger, as the king of poets: [Pg 284]

"Now, before thou beginnest the distribution of laurels
Grant me one for him in whom I shall honor them all.
Lo, the Adam of poets is here, the Northern king among singers;
Heir to the throne in poesy's world; for the throne yet is Goethe's.
Oscar, the king, if he knew it, would give his grace to my action.
Now I speak not for him, still less for myself, but the laurel
Place on thy brow in poesy's name, the bright, the eternal.

Past is disunion's age (in the infinite realm of the spirit
Never it ought to have reigned), and kindred tones o'er the water
Ring, which enrapture us all, and they are especially thine.
Therefore, Svea—I speak in her name—adorns thee with laurel:
Take it from brotherly hand, of the day in festal remembrance."

Restless official activity, parliamentary labors, educational addresses, and metrical discourses on memorable occasions filled the years from 1829 to 1840. He felt the demon of insanity lurking behind him, now close at his heels, now farther away; and it was a desperate race, in which life and death, nay, worse than death, was at stake. His indefatigable exertions afforded him a respite [Pg 285] from the thought of his terrible pursuer. We can only regard with respectful compassion the outbreaks of misanthropic spleen which often disfigure his correspondence from this period of deepening twilight, relieved by a brief interval of brightness. It is especially woman who is the object of his bitterest objurgation. The venerable *mutabile et varium* of Virgil is the theme upon which he perpetually rings the changes. No occasion is too inappropriate for a joke at the fickle and faithless sex; and even the school-boys in the Wexiö gymnasium are treated to some ironical advice, *à propos* of the beautiful jade, which must have sounded surprising in an episcopal oration. Life with its bright pageant was oppressive, like a nightmare to the afflicted poet. All charm, all rationality had departed from existence, which was but a meaningless dance of hideous marionettes. The world was battered and befouled; inexpressibly loathsome. And finally, in 1840, while Tegnér was attending the Riksdag (of which in his official capacity he was a member), the long-dreaded catastrophe occurred. His insanity manifested itself in tremendous projects of reform, world-conquests, and outbreaks of wild sensuality. He was sent to a celebrated asylum in Sleswick; and on the way thither wrote a series of "Fantasies of Travel" which have all the rich harmony of his earlier verse, and are full of delightful imagery. He fancied that there was a huge wheel of fire revolving with furious haste in his head, and his sufferings [Pg 286] were terrific. The following fragment from the notes of his attendant, who kept a record of his ravings, has a cosmic magnificence:

> "The whole trouble comes from that accursed nonsense about the diadem which they wanted to put on me. You may believe, though, that it was a splendid piece. Pictures in miniature, not painted, but living, really existing miniatures of fourteen of the noblest poets were made into a wreath. It was Homer and Pindar, Tasso and Virgil, Schiller, Petrarch, Ariosto, Goethe, Sophocles, Leopold, Milton, and several more. Between each one of them burned a radiant star, not of tinsel, but of real cosmic material. In the middle of my forehead there was the figure of a lyre on the diadem, which had borrowed something of the sun's own living light; it poured with such bright refulgence upon the wreath of stars that I seemed to be gazing straight through the world. As long as the lyre stood still, everything was well with me—but all of a sudden it began to move in a circle. Faster and ever faster it moved, until every nerve in my body was shaken. At last it began to rotate in rings with such speed that it was transformed into a sun. Then my whole being was broken, and it moved and trembled; for you must know that the diadem was no longer put on the outside of my head, but inside, on my very brain. And now it began to whirl around with an inconceivable violence, until it suddenly broke and burst into pieces. Darkness—darkness—darkness and night spread over the whole world wherever I turned. I was bewildered and faint, and I who had always hated weakness in men—I wept; I shed hot, burning tears. All was over."[41]

[41] Brandes: Esaias Tegnér, pp. 231-223.

Contrary to the expectation of his friends he recovered rapidly, and was able to return home in May, 1841. He promptly resumed his episcopal functions, and even wrote a beautiful rural idyl in [Pg 287] hexameters called "The Crowned Bride" (*Kronbruden*), which he dedicated to Franzén. He was well aware, however, that his powers were on the wane, and in 1845 he was persuaded to apply for a year's relief from his official duties. The last months of his life he spent mostly lying upon a sofa in his library, surrounded by great piles of books containing a most miscellaneous assortment of classics, from Homer to Goethe, intersprinkled with controversial pamphlets and recent novels. He was gentle and affectionate in his demeanor; and his beautiful face lighted up with a smile whenever any of his children or grandchildren approached him. Once or twice a day he drove out in his carriage, and he was even able to visit his eldest son, who was a clergyman in

Scania, and to receive the sacrament for the last time from his hand. Shortly after his return he was stricken with paralysis, and died November 2, 1846, in the sixty-fourth year of his age. His mind was unclouded and his voice was clear. When the autumnal sun suddenly burst through the windows and shone upon the dying poet, he murmured: "I will lift up mine hands unto the house and the mountain of God."

These were his last words. He was carried to the grave at night by the light of lanterns, followed by a long procession of the clergy, citizens, and the school-boys of his diocese. Peasants, from whose ranks he had sprung and to whom he was always a good friend, bore his coffin. [Pg 288]

The academic tendency which "idealizes" life and shuns earth-scented facts, had, through the decisive influence of Tegnér, been victorious in Swedish literature. I am aware that some will regard this as a questionable statement; for the academicism of Tegnér is not the stately, bloodless, Gallic classicism of the Gustavian age, of which Leopold was the last representative. It is much closer to the classicism of Goethe in "Iphigenia" and "Hermann and Dorothea," and of Schiller in "Wallenstein" and "Wilhelm Tell." Tegnér's poetic creed was exactly that of Schiller, who saw no impropriety in making the peasant lad, Arnold Melchthal, when he hears that his father has been blinded, deliver an enraptured apostrophe to the light:

> "O eine edle Himmelsgabe ist
> Das Licht des Auges," etc.

The rhetorical note is predominant in both. Their thoughts have to be arrayed in the flowing toga before they are held to be presentable. This is the academic tendency in Sweden as in France, even though the degree of euphemistic magniloquence may differ with the age and latitude. The Swedes have been called the Frenchmen of the North, and there is no doubt that delight in this toga-clad rhetoric is inherent in both. It was because Tegnér, in appealing to this delight, was so deeply representative that he extinguished the old school and became the national poet of Sweden. [Pg 289]

Transcriber's Notes:

Dostoyevski is also spelled Dostojevski and Dostoyefski

Tolstoi is also spelled Tostoï.

It appears that Fortällinger is also spelled Fortaellinger.

Page 11: valuble changed to valuable. Typo.

Page 45: Gjeunembrud's is a typo for Gjennembrud's. Changed in text.

Page 191: Open parenthesis added to 1882.

Page 262: ["The objections to "Frithjof's Saga" which] was changed to [The objections to "Frithjof's Saga" which]. The first double quote appears to be unnecessary.

Page 270: The stanzas are spaced as they appear in the original text, although they appear to be in error.

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