

A PROPHET AND HIS PEOPLE

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APPROACHING the capital of Denmark through the Oere Sound, foreigners are greeted by a scene so inviting and beautiful as few other countries are able to offer their guests. From the low coast rises in the distance the lofty castle of Kronborg, gigantic in structure, but festive and distinguished for its bays, turrets and towers, with its jadegreen roof.

The Oere Sound coast is called Denmark's Riviera. Among shadowy beeches—the beech is Denmark's national tree, as the birch is Sweden's and the pine Norway's—lie the stately villas of the wealthy summer visitors and the thatched cottages of the fishermen, all along the coast from Copenhagen to Elsinore and as far beyond. Sailing on the Sound, one sees only a few farmhouses; but if one goes ashore, one just has to cross the wood-clad slopes to see the typical Danish farms with their square built barns and stables. These are scattered through the undulating country, or clustered together in small cozy villages with red-roofed churches and smiling ponds which a Dane, born in the country, can never forget. While the native of the island of Fuenen beautifies his house and hides himself in the garden, and the Jutland farmer finds his world in the large solid stables and barns and the surrounding meadows, the Zealander's imagination builds up a picture of the whole village in which he was born, and where he walked freely about with neighbors as if in his own home.

Kronborg is no longer a fortress. The Oere Sound Tolls were abolished in 1855, and the castle is now used as a museum. But the place where it stands is still a strategic point. That is, perhaps, the reason why Denmark has been allowed to remain an independent state. None of the Great Powers has wanted to allow the important entrance to the Sound to fall into the hands of competitors.

At Elsinore were to be found seamen, traders and tourists from every country in the world, and it was said that no English sailor was fully fledged until he had been there. Here it was that Shakespeare's troupe of actors stayed and played before the court of King Frederik the 2nd who, at that time, occupied the castle. Shakespeare himself did not visit Elsinore, but the troupe told him all about the beer the courtiers drank until they lay helpless under

the benches, and they gave him a realistic description of the castle. They also told him of the people with whom they had become acquainted; otherwise Shakespeare might not have been able to create Hamlet as he did. Hamlet is a Renaissance figure, but he is also Danish.

Denmark's greatest thinker, Soren Kierkegaard, was a typical Hamlet in his power of enclosing himself in his own world and seeing from within this world figures and persons like pictures gliding past, without his being active himself. He saw

that it was the meaning of life to get a living, its aim to become a respected citizen, elevated in rank, that the greatest urge of love was to get a rich girl, that it was the blessedness of friendship to help one another in pecuniary difficulties, that wisdom was what most people considered it to be, that it was enthusiasm to make a speech; that it was courage to run the risk of being fined 10 Kroner, that it was cordiality to say *Velbekomme* after a meal, that it was fear of God to go to the Lord's Supper once a year.

He saw it, and he laughed, not longer with the laughter of childhood, but with the cynical laughter of the mature man who has had his experiences, and whose experiences have made him sad.

In this derisive laughter at great ideals that cannot be realised lies something of a little nation's feeling of impotence. If it cannot possibly achieve great things, at any rate it does not try to deceive itself into believing that it can.

Herman Bang, our unhappy poet, describes, like Soren Kierkegaard, things as he sees them, and comes to the conclusion that all we can say is that we suffer and cause other sufferings, and that, after all, there is nothing to be done. Henrik Pontoppidan, one of our greatest prose writers, in his gloomy realism, allows contemporary figures and ideas to pass, review-like, before him, but finds that it is the same with them as with the tame eagle in one of his novels which has become fat and heavy in Denmark's poultry yard and cannot swing itself up into the air. Also Hans Christian Andersen, the Danish author, whose 125th anniversary was celebrated a few years ago all over the world, created his fairy tales through a conflict between his sense of the idyllic and the actual. His open naiveté is wrestling against the disillusionment caused by his knowledge of man, and produces the mixture of irony, satire, humor and childlike confidence which brings to the foreign countries a message of Danish realism in the form of a fairy tale.

But Soren Kierkegaard did not remain in this kind of doubt. The heroic passion of faith raised him above the anxieties of doubt,

and he understood—even though he could not live up to it himself—that faith does not consist in thinking, but in living, in action. Nor did Denmark remain in scepticism. Every time it had sunk low and even feared utter extinction, through faith it has risen again; and the oldest kingdom in Europe seems time after time to have returned to its youth.

After the defeat of 1864, when the Germans had taken Slesvig, it seemed that nothing could save Denmark from oblivion. Georg Brandes and the best gifted intellectuals thought that there was nothing left in Denmark itself to build upon, and that revival and renewal would come from other countries, particularly from the great intellectual culture of France. But meanwhile there grew up in the Danish rural districts a strong and vigorous movement which was destined to create a new and greater Denmark, greater by virtue of its regained primitive force and belief in itself. "*What is lost outwardly must be won inwardly*" thought Captain Enrico Dalgas, gathering together for united effort the peasants of the Jutland heath. "*What is lost outwardly must be won inwardly*" thought Bishop Grundtvig and his folk-school men, starting the work which has resulted in making the Danish peasant one of the most enlightened in the world.

Dean Sonne of Thisted, and Severin Jorgensen of Kolding, in their respective spheres, had the same dominating thought when they threw themselves into co-operative activity, rendering it possible to unite the advantages of intensive small-scale farming with the advantages of large-scale undertakings. So vigorous were these movements and so magnificent their results, that what characterise Denmark to-day in the eyes of the world are its folk high-schools, its co-operative movement and its measures to solve the land problem.

N. F. S. Grundtvig, the prophet of the North, as the Germans have called him, was the great creative genius who, intensely devoted to the Danish people, became a source of inspiration for very much of the new life in Denmark which grew up after 1864. He too, as a young man, was filled with doubt and anxiety; but after a deep religious and emotional experience, the will to achieve awoke within him, and on returning from England in the thirties, where in the enormous industrial enterprises of the time he had heard "the thunder of Thor's mighty hammer", he became the champion of a free folk high-school which should be for the Danish people what Oxford and Cambridge had been for the English upper class. Its purpose was to train Denmark's adult youth so that they would become conscious of their responsibilities as citizens

and capable of assuming leadership in political and social life. "In Denmark", he said, "the heavy hand of absolute monarchy stifles our initiative and power of action, whereas in England there is freedom. That is why life over there is blossoming". The liberty won by the Danes in 1833 and more fully in 1849 he wished to use in creating an enlightened democracy, where all young people from the country, without preparing for examinations or vocations, could seek enlightenment. This would make them better able to live their lives with their eyes, as he said, turned towards heaven, and their hearts open to receive all that was great and beautiful on earth. He did not wish to address himself to children, his view being that a child is like a young shoot which should be kept fresh and green in the early spring. A child should rest, and grow in its rest. Nor did he think of the adolescent who, he contended, should not at that age be shut up with pen and ink and book, but should be occupied on the land of industrious farmers or in the workshops of skilful artisans, so that he might acquire a desire for the practical things in life. He wished to appeal to the more mature young persons from 18 to 25 years of age, whose spiritual life was awakened, and who were full of questions, including the great question concerning the meaning of life itself. His view was that this question should be answered by reference to history, which is not a mere mass of details, but a living continuity, the career of mankind whose failure and conquest speak with the language of experience and carry a message to all. Grundtvig thought that young people should be guided into the stream of history—not as passive spectators, but as active participants, themselves making history.

There are now about 50 high-schools in Denmark with an attendance of approximately 7000 young men and women, although the instruction is neither technical nor vocational. Their attendance is voluntary. The winter term lasts five months, the summer term three months. The students are either wholly or partly paying their own expenses. Unemployed workers are now maintained by the State, but until recently they formed only a small percentage.

About a fourth of the country population of Denmark attends the high-schools, and this means that they devote a part of their valuable youth, not to becoming more skilful farmers, but to becoming better men and women. This achievement has led to an economic victory as well, in that the young farmers have learned the meaning of fellowship and felt the call to use every opportunity and power available. They have gone back to their villages and farms

and established co-operative dairies, bacon factories and other undertakings which have gradually taken over about 86% of Denmark's butter and 80% of the bacon industry, and are now one of the most important agencies through which these food stuffs are sent to England. In these co-operative enterprises small holders owning only two or three cows have the same voting rights as the large owner with a hundred; and through this and similar local control in his activities the farmer has been trained up to a feeling of political independence. This means that he is able to represent his views and ideals in parliament, thereby ensuring that the high-school, which has meant so much for his own freedom, in receiving state support is also allowed full intellectual and spiritual freedom. "It is no use feeding hens when at the same time you tie a cord around their necks", said the farmer's representatives. The Danish high-school accordingly receives support from the state without being controlled by it. The school is permitted to arrange its own curriculum and serve the cause it desires.

It is true that there have been other factors besides the high-schools contributing to make Denmark a country of cooperation where the peasant in buying his farm, his seeds, his artificial manure, and in employing electricity and expert advice as to the physical condition of his stock, always resorts to the cooperative organizations. But is it the Danish high-school which is more than anything else responsible for the fact that the Danish peasant (and not just a few pioneer farmers) is able to employ the most modern inventions and reap the benefit of scientific research in agriculture. It is the social training in the folk high-school that has given the farmer a wider view of things.

The book, *Folk High-schools of Denmark and Development of a Farming Community* (published by the Oxford University Press) traces the influence of the Grundtvigian folk high-schools on rural conditions. But Grundtvig was not interested only in schools. His intuitive, prophetic spirit made itself felt in every sphere of Danish life. He gave expression to the idea that the small holders should have the free use, but not the ownership, of their land. Although many in Denmark are inclined to suspect that the income of the small holder may be out of comparison with the work he has to do, and therefore speak in favour of middle-sized or large farms, the process of parcelling out land has gone on since the time of the Peasant Liberation, and according to a law of 1919 some 6000 small holders with between 10 and 20 acres of land have become tenants of the State paying a yearly rental which varies with the quality of the soil and the currency of the money and is determined

by periodical valuations. Another law, of 1899, has given cheap loans to some 16,000 small holders, who have complete control of their holdings and the right to sell them or hand them down to their heirs.

It was particularly the lively and alert inhabitants of Fuenen and the more steady Jutlanders who led the way after 1864. The Jutlander is tough and persevering. He is slow in starting, but once on the go he will not give up. He is Denmark's Scot, dialectical, of few words when not in the mood for discussion, with full or restrained passions, thrifty, eager to do business and make money. This, no doubt, may be associated with the poverty of the Jutland soil, which exacts from its sons tenacity and thoughtfulness before it will yield. It may also be associated with the fact that the dwellings lie scattered, often far apart, a circumstance resulting in a loneliness which develops imagination and thoughtfulness. In the poets, Jeppe Aakjar and Johs. V. Jensen, Jutland and the Jutlanders have found two vigorous spokesmen of their independent characteristics and rights.

The Zealander is more talkative than the Jutlander, and makes pleasanter company. He has not the Jutlander's self-assurance and self-assertion. He is afraid of giving strong expression to his feelings, is critical and sceptical of persons and of big ideas, but possesses much humour and personal irony. In contrast to the Jutlanders, the Zealanders are able to sit for hours teasing each other and yet part in a good spirit. They often lack that necessary partiality and that dynamic element which set big undertakings on foot. But Zealanders and Jutlanders alike are influenced by the fact that Denmark is a small country that cannot afford to leave thousands or millions behind in the march of progress. Those in the front must help those in the rear. And when a great leader like Grundtvig eventually conquered his own doubts and fears and won in his personal struggle and in the struggle with the world around him, he was also able at last to get his people with him and carry it onwards.