BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSON,
An Exponent of the New Norway
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Approved by:

[Signatures]

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PREFACE

The writer began this study in 1916 under the direction and assistance of Professor Whitcomb, but laid it aside in 1918 (mostly owing to the World War), when he went into business, in which he remained for many years. Now that he is again in educational work, has completed the study, and is submitting it to the Department of English of the University of Kansas, he desires to express his gratitude to Professor S. L. Whitcomb for his generous cooperation and assistance in 1916-17, and to Professor W. S. Johnson for his helpful suggestions during the summer term of 1927.

E. W. H.

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PART I.

Björnson's Early Career.
CHAPTER I.

A True Son of Norway.

Introduction.

The purpose of this study is not to give a detailed chronological account of Björnson's life, or to discuss all of his political and social activities and his literary works, but to take such facts from his career as will show that he is an exponent of the new age not only in Norway but also in Europe. Part I deals chiefly with the early part of his life, showing the influences that were of vital importance to his later life. In these formative years he made some of his greatest efforts to nationalize Norway, while at the same time he made decidedly worth while contributions to literature. As a student at Molde and Christiania he manifested his natural tendency toward leadership, his ever increasing interest in the welfare of the common man whether Norwegian or not, his unselfish devotion to the interests of fine arts, Norse drama, and Norse political independence. He soon attracted public attention by his zealous political activities—whether by speeches or newspaper articles. In recognition of his leadership and his ability to understand, interpret, and to express in forceful language all the matters of public interest, he was given the editorship of different newspapers. However, he was too young and forward, too hasty in his conclusions, and too frank in expressing his opinions to be a successful editor.

In Part II, Chapter I, we shall discuss the great mental crisis that Björnson passed through during the years 1864 to 1874, especially in the year 1874. This crisis makes a definite division in all his works, as his view of life was radically
changed. These years were not very prolific in the writing of plays and novels, as he was too busily engaged in managing theaters, editing papers, etc., while devoting as much time as possible to studies. Chapter II treats the works of the first period, and Chapter III the works of the second period. Although after 1874 Bjöörnson became agnostic and radical in spirit, he did not become the pessimist like Ibsen, but retained the optimism characteristic of Browning or Tennyson; in reality he practiced the Christian principles although he denied them as a creed. In Chapter IV we shall see what supreme trust he had in his calling to serve his generation, and how confident he was that a Divine Power had given him the commission to be the poet of his people.

To understand Björnson in his literary productions as the exponent of the new age in Norway, it is necessary to understand the home and environment of his childhood, what education he received by studies and travels, and what successes he made in community and political life whether as a popular orator or as a gifted editor. It is also necessary to understand the very nature of Norway itself—its barren fjelds, its precipitous fjords, its long, cold, terrible winters with short but beautiful summers. Indeed his countrymen have a tendency to see in his head and face the features of the landscape of his own Norge.

Bjørnstjerne Björnson was born December 8, 1832, in the Bjørgan parsonage, far up in the mountains between the fjelds in the parish of Kvickne, which lies at the head of the valley of Østerdalen, on the very ridge of the watershed between the
north and south river systems of Norway. It was a much dreaded, inaccessible parish. Björnson's father was the pastor of the people who lived in this region. They were not much better than savages, who would come to church with their pistols. When Peder Björnson came to them they had been without a pastor for a long time, because the last one had fled in terror from them. In the meantime they had developed "church bosses," but in Peder Björnson they found a great fighter, who intended to manage his church affairs as he deemed best. He did not, therefore, hesitate to kick from his room one day a "church boss," who came to protest; on another occasion he kicked a drunken fellow from his church services.*

Björnstjerne Björnson descended from a famous family—a family of strong and mighty warriors, who occupy important places in the history of Norway. Some foreign blood flowed in his veins. He inherited some of the great traits of his family; from his grandfather, Björn, he received apparently his ability to sing and speak, his disposition of cheerfulness and fun, and even his looks. He also inherited that strong family characteristic—the love for home and fatherland; it was a love so beautiful and mighty that it was the lode star of his whole life. He inherited, too, a tremendous physical activity and power of endurance. In his own neighborhood he was known as a boisterous and wild fellow, yet he made friends early because of his happy


Gosse, Edmund; "An Essay on the Writings of Björnson,"
Section I, in "The Novels of Björnstjerne Björnson."
disposition. His first friends were the dog, the cat, and the pig, whom he followed wherever they went. In the winter time, when too cold for him to be out of doors, he would stand on the table and gaze longingly out of the window over the snows toward the mountains, follow with his eyes the skiers in their long jumps down the mountain sides, and look for the Finnish traders and Lapps as they would come over the mountains with their reindeer and sleighs. In his short story "Blacken" Björnson has given us a picture of his early home amid the fjelds in the long, dreary, and bleak Norwegian winter darkness, when snow would cover the houses, while intense cold and almost incessant storms reigned on the outside. *(1)*

In 1837 the parents moved to Masset in Romsdal, which was as enchanting and genial as Kvickne was just the opposite. The home was at the top of the narrows of a long fjord on the mountain side, which commanded a beautiful landscape. Close by was the church and the village of Tjelde. Björnson says

*(2) Chapters in Norwegian Literature. Chapter X. 155 f.*
*(4) Gosse: An Essay on the writings of Björnson. Section I.*
*(6) Phelps: Essays on the Modern Dramatists. Chapter IV.*

These writers cover much of the same material in a somewhat concise manner, hence frequent references will be made to this page in part I.
of Naesset that it is one of the loveliest spots in Norway, situated at the meeting place of two fjords, with beautiful shores, romantic farmhouses, billowy meadows, charming mountains, and glorious sunsets. At the close of day as he watched the sunlight fade away over the fjords and mountains a feeling sad, and yet inexplicably ecstatic, would master his soul until he would weep bitterly. Later when writing "Arne" he expressed this strange longing in the song "over de høie fjelde". The loveliness of Naesset never ceased to bewitch him.

At Naesset he learned to know and love the peasants, and here made many new friends, whom he characterized in his peasant tales. It was from them that he first learned skiing, sleighing, and skating. As a preacher's son he was permitted in many homes, which otherwise would have been closed to him.*

So from day to day young Björnson grew to be more and more a part of Norway, to become finally a true type of Norseman. Into his nature there grew assuredly the two sides of Norwegian nature, the harsh and the mild, and grew as intimately as great musical themes are integral parts of a sonata or symphony. Although he was a true son of mother nature, and had a deep-rooted love for her, he could often question her why she was so cruel, when under a beautiful, clear starlit sky she could so very coldly look down upon a helpless woman and let her and her child freeze to death in a snowdrift. He could question whether she was altogether pure, innocent and

*Reference page 4.
kind; whether she was the enlightener and helper of man. Many things must be sought for within; nature may help a man, but the same nature could also push him down, just as the high fjelds would sometimes give power and inspiration to man, while at other times they would lay almost insurmountable hindrances in his way.*

Mother nature equipped Björnson adequately both mentally and physically for the great role he was destined to play. His striking appearance, his height, his hair, his eyes, in fact his whole being, reminded one of the sternness of Norway's nature, impressed one with indomitable power: one would think he was "intended to be carved in granite" by Michael Angelo, whom he greatly admired. He became as strong as the beast whose name is twice written into his, but unlike the bear, he used his strength for the welfare of human beings and not for their destruction. He was created to withstand all attacks that hostile criticism might inflict, to endure all hardships for the sake of Norge in whatever field he labored, whether as editor, theater-manager, politician, novelist, dramatist, or poet. He would not break under the strain of multitudinous public responsibilities as so many others have done, nor would he retire from activity for mental or bodily rest.**

Björnson became the great interpreter of nature, and


**References p. 4.
of that liberty loving spirit with which the mountains and valleys of his beloved homeland had inspired him, but which he recognized had not yet taken possession of the hearts of men. Nature never did cease to fascinate him, teach him valuable lessons, and inspire him with new ideas. So when returning from Copenhagen in the summer of 1857 he received new and permanent nature impressions. These were of three kinds—the impressions of the ocean, the Norwegian coast, and the Norwegian inland. To him the ocean seemed a "sick and dull-minded champion" who was in eternal unrest, was always wandering without getting anywhere. Years later his melancholy feeling of the ocean grew into a magnificent poem, "Arnljot Colline" in which he describes the ocean—"it rolls in its calm and grandeur, its burden of mountainous fog-banks bearing, forever wandering and returning." As he approached the coast of his beloved fatherland, on that memorable trip, he was inspired to write his famous and perhaps most beloved patriotic song, "Ja, vi elsker dette landet." His strong impression of the Norwegian inland he received on the road from Kristiansand to Sogne parsonage later in the summer when journeying home to see his parents. He beheld the trees and heather growing on the hill-sides where they had struggled for hundreds of years against storm and flood and slides to reach the top. Patience was the watchword in spite of discouragements and difficulties. "Take courage," said the heather continually to the juniper, the birch, and the fir. To fall and to rise again was the order of the day,
but after centuries of struggle the product was an "epic of patience and the wiry and faithful power of endurance" (tealmodets og den seige, trofaste udholdenheds epos). This then, the saga of the covered hillsides, was the story of the Norwegian peasant himself; this was the life and family saga of Arne Kampen.*

Bjørnson has been criticized to the effect that he has too much Norwegian nature in his works; yet this criticism only illustrates the fact that he was faithful to his own true self. It would be as impossible for him to eliminate references to and descriptions of external nature out of his works as it would be for him to do without some bodily limbs. The mental battle of the years 1864-1874, similar to the battle of the trees to conquer the mountain sides, gave him a keen insight into human nature, which he used skilfully to look deeper into the souls of men. His experiences had now put "the bass string" into his life. Although he reacted violently at times to nature, and it produced in him certain "phantoms of dread with icy fingers," it held him spellbound,--a state he could not resist and from which he could not escape. In this respect he was like Wordsworth. But for this especial reason he could understand and depict nature; could become the exponent of that "fierce spirit of freedom" of the north, which made itself so strongly felt in 1843 and the following year; could become the great champion of New Norway, the champion of all liberal ideas in politics, art, religion, or literature.*

*References p. 4
CHAPTER II

At Molde and Christiania.

Before going to Molde Björnson received some school training at home. His first teacher was "klokker" Jacobsen, of whom he has given a characterization in "Björnejægeren." Björnson had an unusual imagination, which he allowed free play during the tedious school hours. Often, to the annoyance of his teacher, he would frighten the other school children with his thrilling stories of fairies, goblins, and ghosts. He acquired this trait honestly as his father with his wonderful voice could play the ghost most fearfully in the personage hallways and rooms."

Björnson had another teacher, Reed, who spoke much to him of the last day and eternal punishment,—talks that produced in his young imaginative soul so much terror of hell pains and judgment that he reacted unfavorably when older to the teachings of a personal devil, evil spirits, hell, etc. to such an extent that he would oppose vigorously revival preachers and others who sought to convince men of sin and judgment by describing terrifying scenes of eternal judgment. In Edward Kallem, a character in the novel "In God's Ways," we see portrayed another of Björnson's terrifying childhood experiences. When he was only nine years old his father took him to see an execution. The cruelty of the persons in power

*Collin: Bj. B. Vol. I "Molde" p.50-79
" " " " " "Christiania" p. 80 f.
Other references p. 4
left an impression on him so strong that a few years later he became the staunch friend of the unfortunate, and would use all of his strength in behalf of the peasants against oppressors.*

At the age of twelve he was sent to the Latin school at Molde. As he had never been in town before, the houses, churches, and the people themselves seemed marvelous to him. Since he was but a peasant boy, he was not invited to many of the homes. As might be expected he was imposed on at first by the other boys, who would make him believe almost anything. They called him the "Longfjord bear," or simply "Bear" (Björn). But since he was born the leader he could not be kept long in subjection. Nature assisted him greatly in assuming leadership as she had equipped him with a very attractive personality, and fine appearance, had made him very erect and tall, had given him fine color although his skin was somewhat freckled, and an immense head of hair, not red but very fair, and hands that were the envy of others. But his unmistakably independent spirit manifested itself as early as this, when, after having been accused of being impolite to the ladies of the city of Molde, he organized a club of country boys whose purpose was opposition to the custom of lifting their hats to the unmarried ladies.*

Björnson's school work was not encouraging. He disliked most books, especially studies, and longed for the fjords and fjelds, perhaps mainly because he did not get enough physical exercise to work off his exuberant energy. If he could be said

*References p. 9.
to have been the poorest student in school in some ways, he nevertheless did well in languages and history. He read Oehlenschläger, Ingemann, Snorre, and Walter Scott. But his favorite book was Sturleson's book on sagas. In reading this he compared the likeness between the world of sagas and the life of the peasant of his day, and consciously or unconsciously he was gathering material and ideas for his future historical plays about saga people. He began to live for the peasants, took their part, and fought the other school boys who tormented the neighboring peasants that came to Molde to sell their fish, meat, eggs, etc.*

In addition to his love for the saga times, he became extremely interested in the world conditions of the day. Europe was being shaken by liberal ideas, especially in 1848, the year of many revolutions. During this year and the following he and Ibsen debated often on these new ideas, particularly those coming from France. Bjørnson fought for Lamartine as president while Ibsen and many others fought for Louis Napoleon. True again to his nature he took the side of the poor and downtrodden, defending them by his debates, speeches, and newspaper articles. He did not, however, promote and advocate violent revolutions and mob rule to secure the freedom of the peasants, but worked for a calm and sensible legislation. These were dramatic, volcanic, stirring years but valuable to him.*

Two incidents embittered his later school life at Molde. The first was a family affair. His father took up the side

*References p. 9.
of a peasant against a captain in moral matters,—an affair that stirred up so much bitterness in the community that it was necessary for his father and mother to move away from the parish. This unfortunate affair drew Björnson much closer to his father, and he loved him more than ever. The second incident was a personal insult he received at school from one of his teachers, who thought that Björnson had broken a rule of order. He left at once, when only seventeen years old, never to return to finish his work. Collin says that his childhood’s (barndoms) saga came to an end with his leaving Molde; yet in many respects this had been a happy period of his life.*

In 1850 Björnson went to Christiania as a student. In this city, which was a striking contrast to quiet Molde, he found a freer life, newer ideas, and more liberal sentiments; he saw the world in a new light in its military, social, and political life. The theater proved especially interesting to him; and the very first time he attended a performance he was not in the least backward about arising to discuss the proceedings.

As he was a good "mixer," he made many friends, among even the young and old. He never became tired of them, and always had on hand a fund of good stories for their entertainment. One day he took an orphan boy to his room. In spite of the strenuous protests of the priest, he kept the boy, who was a Catholic and always remained a Catholic. The most influential of his friends at this time were his musically gifted cousin, Richard Nordraak, the poets, Vinje, Ibsen, and Batten-Hansen. He also gained the friendship of so promi-

*References page 9.
ment a man and poet as Jonas Lie, who said that Björnson
never betrayed a friend, was an humble soul but a Goethe
soul, was indeed a "high mastertree" to be tested in the
storms of life.*

He would never idle away any time by smoking at ease on
the sofa. He took a greater interest in his studies here than
he did at Molde, chiefly in Latin, because his teacher made
Latin itself a living tongue by leading his "young barbarians
through the Alps to Rome." He read heavier books in liter-
ature as Kierkegaard and Lessing, wrote on and discussed the
problems of the hour, took an active part with Vinje and Ibsen
in demonstrations for republican sentiments. His newspaper
articles aroused much comment, as he did not hesitate to criti-
cize anything and everybody. His firm religious tendencies
and beliefs prevented him from wandering too far astray, and
kept his love for all men strong and undefiled. On one
occasion when Richard Nordraak was playing the composition
"Napoleon's March over the Alps," Björnson composed a poem,
which expresses his heart and convictions, at the beginning
of which he says--

"Paa var korte jordestige
Up mod kærlighetens rige
er det icke tid till hat.
Kom, forente med hverandre,
ville hand i hand vi vendre,
og el mere skilles ad."*

*References p. 9
The summer of 1653 he spent at his home, Naesset in Romsdal. It was a sad visit as his parents were soon to move away; he regretted exceedingly leaving the natural surroundings found here, and the kind peasants whom he had taught to sing his songs. For this service to them they always loved him. In the late fall, when yet not quite twenty-one years old, he returned to Christiania, wearing a "good old homespun" suit which his mother had made for him. This was no doubt in good style in Longfjorden, but not quite in the best of style in aristocratic Christiania. Nevertheless he wore it proudly and well. And the proud Christianians failed to see it while looking at the man! *

His indomitable spirit was evident on every hand and in every situation. In Christiania as at Molde he was the leader of the students, who were very sociable, and soon he was "like a king surrounded by his men." He was always a great organizer, and at one time he organized a "Saturday Night Club" to play and sing. This club, however, was broken up by some hasty remarks of his. He suffered many deprivations; many a day the food was scarce, and the fuel supply low. On some of the coldest days he was obliged to go to bed to keep warm. At one time he was dangerously ill with typhoid fever. When living in comfort at Aulestad, in recalling the hardships of these days, he says that he did not have enough to eat, had

*References p. 9
to patch his own clothes, and he could not go out on the streets because he had no soles on his shoes. Notwithstanding he was happy, had an unshaken confidence in the future, never doubted the calling he was to enter, but was never in a hurry to find his place in life.*

*References p. 9.
CHAPTER III

Foreign Studies and Foreign Travels.

During Björnson's school days he entertained dreams of foreign travels, but before opportunity favored him in this respect, he made an extensive study, of some at least, of the foreign authors. As has been stated in the previous chapter, Norway was deeply stirred by the liberal literary and political movements, which were shaking the very foundations of the Old European governments. The new realism in French poetry appealed most powerfully to him, as French was a favorite study of his in school. He would read many French papers in addition to his reading of Lamartine; Alfred de Musset, Balzac, Scribe, Augier, and Dumas Fils who were chiefly instrumental in developing his psychological and ethical abilities. His interest perhaps centered on the French Comedy in its attempt to portray human nature, and this newer, more true to nature tendency he calls "naturalism." He firmly believed, in common with Scribe, in searching deeper and deeper into nature, and Scribe he calls "the man with the new machine."

*Brandes: in "Moderne Geister."

" " "Ibsen and Björnson."

Boyesen: Essays On Scandinavian Literature.


Gro-Tid: Letters from foreign countries, Vol. I and II.
The reading of the Danish writer Grundtvig, had a strong and permanent influence upon him. His doctrine of a "cheerful Christianity," as opposed to the gloomy Pietism of Norway, appealed to and captivated him. He did not, however, become a thorough "Grundtvigianer" in the special meaning of the word, as he did not have any particular interest in Grundtvig's doctrine of faith; notwithstanding the influence of Grundtvig was far-reaching in determining Björnson's future practices of Christian principles.*

Heine and "young Germany"—an influence partly a continuation of romanticism and partly a breaking with it—dominated Christiania in the fifties. He came in touch with this movement chiefly through the influence of Vinje and Batten-Hansen, and his work with Ditmar Meidell's paper "Krydseren" and "Aftenbladet." Goethe he finds more and more interesting as he reads him, yet he did not fully understand him until he had spent some time in Germany and Italy. Some of Schiller's work he considered very good. Then he read Aeschylus, Euripides, Shakespeare, Shelley, etc., and acquired habits of reading much like Shelley's, that is, he would not read one author exclusively, but would study several authors at a time, devoting part of the day to each.**

His travels in foreign lands were long delayed for


**References #3 p. 12.
financial reasons. Friends were endeavoring to secure for him a "poet's stipendium" for travel and study. In the summer and fall of 1660 he was encouraged to believe that he would receive it, but while waiting for it he worked on his poem "Arnljot Gelline." Inasmuch as he had applied for 1000 speciedaler (4000 crowns), he was disappointed when he received only 500, as this meant he would be unable to take his wife and child with him as planned. After he, his wife and child had visited his parents at Sogne, and after he had made arrangements for them (the wife and child) to remain with burgomeister Fensen in Copenhagen for the winter, he started for Germany in November in company with Ole Bull and his brother Peter. He studied all that was of interest to him, specially the theater productions, in the cities he visited. Going by way of Vienna he came to Trieste, where he received his first impression of Italy. As he traveled through Italy he was deeply moved, almost beyond control, by the greatness of its arts and cathedrals. Rome he reached on Christmas eve.*

In Rome he "dug himself down into ancient studies," as Collin expresses it, expending tremendous energy in the study of art, painting, sculpture, language, in reading and writing books. As he was extremely sensitive

*Gro-Tid Vol. I XXXIX f.

See also letter from foreign countries in Vol. I and Vol. II.
to all things he came in contact with, his time spent in Italy was full of intense feelings and emotions. His visit to the Cathedral of Milano, for instance, meant "an entrance to new mighty visions." In St. Peter's, however, he did not receive "the stunning blow" he was expecting. At the time it did not seem so magnificent to him, yet it gradually grew greater and greater. With this growth there settled upon him and his restless spirit a peacefulness that led him away from "his selfish thoughts," as he claims. With it, too, there came to him a new power of comprehension and understanding; and as he renewed the study of Goethe, whom he had assiduously studied years before, he understood him and learned from him the art of patience and sacrifice, and that self-control, which became the fundamental thought in "Kong Sverre."*

For three years he traveled widely through Europe, a part of the time with his wife, but most of it by himself. In both Germany and France he made a special study of the theaters. His letters to friends indicated how keenly he observed everything he beheld. New sights gave him new thoughts; and as long as he could keep himself from homesickness he was fast accumulating stores of knowledge. However, his longing for his wife and child and Norway grew so intense that it gave him pains in his chest (he writes in letters home), and hence he

*References same as p. 18.
could not make the best possible use of his travels the last few months. When at length he turned homeward, it could be said that his travels had widened his mental horizon greatly, and that they would prove invaluable to him in the new duties that awaited him.*

*References p. 16.
Before Björnson became actively interested in the
Norwegian theaters they had been under the perniciously
dominant Danish influence for many years. Danish plays,
players, and scenic art were in use altogether. In fact
the Danes considered the Norwegians lacking in dramatic
talents, and led some of them to think likewise of them-
selves, but most of the Norwegians considered themselves
too good for a life on the stage,—and a stage life as
displayed by some of the Danish players was anything but
desirable. The Danish invasion of the Norse stage did
not escape notice or attack when the national feeling ran
high in the middle of the century; new voices were heard
demanding that the Norwegian theater should become truly
and nationally Norse. The two leaders in this movement
were Ibsen and Björnson.*

Both Ibsen and Björnson continued the work of Ole
Bull, the great violinist, who believed explicitly in and
had labored strenuously for a purely Norse dramatic and
scenic art. They began as romanticists, then became
realists. This union of romanticism and realism pro-
duced a new Norwegian drama somewhat akin to the dramas

*Chapters in Norwegian Literature. Chapter VI on
"National Awakening."
of Shakespeare's time. The influence of Shakespeare is seen and felt in Björnson's "Mellen Slagene" and "Hulde-Hulda." Both dramatists had unshaken faith in the new art; however, their success was impeded by stubborn resistance and opposition from various sources. They were unfortunate in money matters because of the financial crisis of the times. A spirit of gloom settled over the country. Depression had set in because of the Crimean War, the disturbances in the rest of Europe, and the strained situation in the United States. Norway turned so listless and inactive that Ibsen says it became "so still that you could hear the stillness." Both attempted to wake Norway by shaking it by the collar, but the attempt proved so exasperating that it finally drove Ibsen in disgust to Italy and left Björnson to wrestle alone.*

As soon as Björnson's interests and abilities became known, he was called into the service of the theaters, and served as theater-manager twice: 1857-59 in Bergen and 1865-67 in Christiania. Björnson held a very high opinion of the educational and cultural effects of theatrical productions, believed that they exerted a beneficial

*Artikler og Taler Vol I p. 58 f.
" " " p. 148-153
" " " p. 153 f.
Collin. Vol II Björnson in Bergen p. 69-155
" " I p. 161 f. p. 259 f.
power of suggestion, since they could disseminate ideas through two doors, the eyes and the ears. He maintained that the theater should be "skjønhedens prædikestol for mildhetens og barmhertighetens dyder" (beauty's pulpit for the virtues of mildness and mercy); affirmed it so stoutly that he considered his poetry in vain if the standards of the stage could not be raised. He has given an extended view of, or a defense of the mission and possibilities of, the theater in his novel "Fiskerjaenten."

When Bjørnson received the invitation from Ole Bull to assume the directorship of Bergen theater he became so elated that he felt himself "taken up to heaven." But he came to Bergen at an inopportune time. The country was in sore financial straits. In his youthful enthusiasm he acted sometimes unwisely, as, for instance, when he arranged a masked ball in the theater, in February, 1858, into which he brought Norse peasant costumes and many other things in order to make the ball as nearly like a peasant wedding in Hardanger as possible. The ball was a great success but expensive, and that at a time when the necessaries of life were hard to get, when even many of the "best families had sorrow and anxiety." *

Bjørnson did not achieve in Bergen the success he desired because he had too many difficulties to overcome. Bergen in the first place was not large or wealthy enough

*References page 22.
to support a theater of the kind and quality Björnson
would demand. He found in the next place in himself an
impulsive and powerful nature to combat. He had to face
not only the conditions of the country in general but also
the contentions within and without the theater. On the
outside he had the public to strive with and educate.
Within he met obdurate directors and players. Among the
actors discipline was bad, and moral laxity was deplorable.
He insisted on high standards in morality and in play pro-
ductions. His strained relations with the actors became
so acute that the management found it necessary to dismiss
some actors before the season was over, and at the end of
the season to dismiss the whole personnel.*

Björnson insisted also on a very high standard of
plays to produce. There was little strictly new Norse
dramatic literature to be obtained. He used successfully
his "Mellen Slagene," Ibsen's "Haermaendene," Munch's
"Lord William Russell," Wessel's "Kjaerlighed uden Strom-
por." Oehlenschläger's plays he admired very much, since
his plays made the people of the saga ages living person-
alities. He produced three of Scribe's plays, Barriere's
"Faux Bonshommes," and Sheridan's "School for Scandal."
All told he produced not less than twenty-five good plays
during the season. He was disappointed in not being able
to give some of Goethe's and Shakespeare's plays, but that

*References p. 22.
was out of the question, since he had no players great enough to produce them.*

Björnson's experiences at the Christiania theater in 1865-67 was similar to his experiences in Bergen. When he came there he insisted on exclusive control of the repertory, but oftentimes he could not have his will, and his free-born spirit chafed under the restrictions made upon him. Nevertheless by his tireless efforts he created a theater which laid the foundations for a true Norse scenic art. By his outstanding success in coaching actors he raised the standards of histrionics greatly, as he instructed thoroughly the actors not only in acting their parts correctly but also in understanding the depths of the characters they were playing. By his sheer will power and boundless enthusiasm Björnson made the Norse theater far more than a mere amusement place; he made it an instrument conducive to good morals, made it a true institution of art of national importance.**

*References page 22.
**References page 22. Also:

"Artikler og Taler Vol. I. "Kristiania Teater" p. 89
" " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " &
CHAPTER V.
Politician and Editor.

Norway had been a province of Denmark for 400 years preceding the year 1314, when it was united with Sweden; but it was never satisfied with the union, and it was looked upon as another "seditious Ireland." Although it received the most democratic form of social and political constitutional government to be found anywhere in Europe, it, nevertheless, was monarchical in form, with a foreign king who was seldom seen in the land. The constitutional conflict took a bitter turn when Oscar II came to the throne in 1872. The dissension continued for a long time, and was not settled until 1907, when the union was dissolved. The wise leadership of Oscar II, who was a peace-loving and broad-minded king, averted the armed hostilities that threatened occasionally.*

Björnson naturally entered into the contention wholeheartedly, and as usual became one of the chief leaders of the group of the New Left, a sort of socialistic party. His adversaries called the party the "literary" or "European Left," because it introduced so many foreign ideas into Norway. Strictly speaking Björnson was never against the

*Artikler og Taler Vol. I. Introduction
Vol.II page 124 f, 156 f., 235f.
Gro-Tid Vol. I Introduction.
union as an institution; but what he fought for was the right of individuality. Accepting the teachings of Spencer and Hegel, he believed that no one had the right to dwarf either a person's or a nation's individuality. He thought that there should be a union of the three Scandinavian countries, yet that each should be a fully developed "state individual," but that Norway would first have to be "completed as a nation, a self-development," before it could be of service to the others in the union.*

The struggles of humanity, in whatsoever place or form, struck a sympathetic and responsive chord in Björnson's magnanimous soul. He followed with tense interest the outcome of events in Italy in May and June 1859,—a campaign for the common interests of man, a fight against the crushing economic conditions of the day. In Norway "the bread and money question" was choking the very life out of all. Ibsen and Björnson resisted vehemently the spirit of the day, Ibsen becoming the more bitter and the fiercer of the two in condemning the existing conditions. Carlyle and Ruskin in England fought likewise this same situation. But Björnson did not become bitter, did not hesitate or refuse to give his talents and energy to alleviate misery and suffering. In February, 1856, he helped a poor publisher edit his paper

*Artikler og Taler Vol I. "Førhold til Sverige"
page 525 and page 539.

Artikler og Taler Vol II. "Mot 'had' til Sverige" p.196
by writing in fast tempo one sheet after another, and as each sheet was filled throwing it to him until he (the publisher) had enough to fill his paper.*

Björnson was an ideal lecturer. His very presence inspired confidence; his ardor and zeal in delivery demanded attention; his full and resonant well-trained voice gave pleasure. Since the passing of John Sverdrup Norway had no greater political leader or popular orator than he; no other man in all of Norway was so powerful. Whenever and wherever he was announced to speak thousands would turn out to see and hear him. He would lecture and talk all day long, in the market places, in the theaters, anywhere, and his speeches were always full of fire, leaving their indelible impression on old and young, poor or rich.*

He was always fair with his political opponents, never suggesting that they were traitors, or that they did not love the fatherland. After the most heated word battles he was always ready to speak to them kindly and considerately. There was no trace of aloofness in his bearing; he would visit the lowly, poor, and blind in their homes as he was passing through the country lecturing. In blind Holmhoe's home in Bergen he met the hired girl who became the model for Nora in "Det Flager."

In spite of his popularity Björnson has been much misunderstood and much criticized. He has been reproached for retaliating harshly personal insults, but only when greatly irritated. He has been accused of being inconsistent with himself, and perhaps with some justification since in defending some point too eagerly he may have become blinded to facts. He has been charged with being not the most congenial worker with his political colleagues, because he would not stoop to questionable or corrupt methods; he insisted absolutely that the cards be played upon the table. And since his power in the political game could not be quelled he was censured for misusing his talents by getting into politics. "Poet-politician" was the word of scorn "thrown after him without end," as though this word would imply an impossible and unreasonable combination. Even his friends joined in the complaint that he allowed himself to be enticed away from his calling; he should have served his country, they said, chiefly by developing his poetical genius instead of misusing it "in the service of foreign Gods."

Nevertheless, if Björnson sinned against his poetical genius, he was prophetic enough to see that he fought a greater ideal than most, perhaps all, of the Norwegians realized, and like Milton he was ready to sacrifice life for it. But the fact remains that the politician and the poet in Björnson have not been rivals or antagonists; rather they have been co-workers (forbundsfaeller); in consequence he was the better politician because he was a poet, and the
better poet because he was a politician. *

As a political writer Björnson could write articles that people would read,—an art he mastered very early in life. In recognition of this ability he was given the editorship of several papers, such as "Bergensposten," "Aftenbladet," and "Norsk Folkeblad," within the space of a few years. But being an editor was not his forte, as he was too "indiscreet, precipitate, credulous and inconsiderate." He says of himself that he was like an old trumpet horse that had stood chafing in the barn all winter but rushed out into the newspaper world at the first sound of the trumpet. If he had not been so young he would certainly have avoided most of the difficulties; yet his writings boosted his group, the Party of the New Left, on their way to victory. *

He made his debut into the newspaper world by his critique on Welhaven and the Danish-German romanticism. His announcing of a new art of poetry, "dígerslekt," as he calls it, was the war cry. A second article against the Danish vaudeville, and a criticism of the Danish dramatic prima donna, Madame Schrumpf, aroused much bitterness. His criticisms, though often too harsh, were "eye openers"; and he became "a young Scipio that gave the young folks courage." He satirized to reform. Novels, poems, dramas, paintings passed in review before him but for one

purpose: to raise the standards higher. He did not spare even sedate Christiania and her students, but made war on her manners, her pride, her narrowness, her sarcastic politeness, etc. He precipitated a storm to be sure, as Christiania, the capital of Norway, resented the idea that a young, bold country boy should assume authority to reform her old customs and conventionalities. He became the "sensation" of the hour.*

Never did Bjornson occupy his time with trivialities; he always sought to penetrate and understand the deeper meanings of life itself. He wanted a philosophy of life that would make life worth while. He believed that he had found it in true art, and that this true art would assuredly bring happiness to his countrymen.**

*References p. 26. Also
   " " " " " " "Kristiania og Studenterne."

**Artikler og Taler Vol. I Introduction "Bjornson's Plads i Norges politiske Historie" by J. E. Sars.
Artikler og Taler Vol. I "Tale for Faedrelandet" p.242
   " " " " " " " " p. 270
   " " " Vol. II "Nordens Fremtid" p. 510 f.
PART II

For the Welfare of the Fatherland.
CHAPTER I

The Battle Between the Old and the New.

Björnson was very religious in the usual meaning of the term before he went through the mental struggle in 1873 and 1874. He believed the Bible and accepted the teachings of the church regarding heaven, hell, a personal devil, etc. He had a great admiration for piety (fromhed), and was himself very pious. This profound faith he obtained from his own devout and pious parents and teachers, and from the faithfully religious peasants he knew in childhood, and from his own naturally religious disposition. In Christiania he came under the spiritual influence of Grundtvig. During the winter of 1856-57 Björnson heard Grundtvig preach very often at Copenhagen, and then formed a life long friendship with him. Grundtvig's mighty personality and old Germanic and saga-like character, whose strong faith was founded on the epic times of old, captivated Björnson. Grundtvig's form of Christianity, a belief that God pledged faith with the world rulers and associated Himself with them in the struggle for the improvement of the world, fascinated Björnson, and like Grundtvig he gloried in the sagas of the old Norse kings, stories like Olav den heliges saga, whose faith Arnjot Gelline receives. Björnson was not, however, a strict "Grundtvigianer"; but he did receive a mighty inspiration from the simple trust in and communion with the
Almighty as exemplified in Grundtvigianism. The effect of this influence is clearly evident in his beautiful drama "Over Aevne" Part I. There is no greater cultural element in his youthful verse making than the religious element; it was the very life and soul of his first poetry. His mind and heart were purified; so he could say, "I fight wholly without any hate," for the brotherhood of man. He had now a philosophy of life that made it easy for him to accept adversity and pain as the Father's chastisement, under which he would bow but to rise again."

It is said that all men pass through a mental crisis, as expressed by the great prophet of old: "all we like sheep have gone astray, every one to his own way." Björnson was thirty-eight when he passed through his mental crisis, Goethe was thirty-seven, and Ibsen was thirty-four. It was a belated struggle, a "Sturm und Drang" period for his soul, a tremendous intellectual and spiritual battle, out of which he came totally changed mentally and spiritually, with a new outlook on life. He threw overboard the ballast of faith in the doctrines of the church, left the "state of idyllic

naivete," and had gained "eyes that saw and ears that heard," as a modernist might interpret it. He studied modern science and philosophy, and became a follower of Darwin, Mill, Spencer, Huxley, Taine. Tolstoi, on the other hand, who was waging at the same time a battle like Bjornson's, studied the New Testament, and climbed out of the Slough of Despond on the side which looks toward the Celestial City.*

Bjornson now "took the field" with the preachers, and declared war on some of the teachings of the Christian Church and its exposition of the Bible. The preachers made the Evil One responsible for all modern improvements, inventions, ways of thinking, art, the theaters, etc., and at a preachers' meeting in Christiania they discovered that even the railroad was the work of the devil! Bjornson said they made God a weakling, who was without home, without people; who could hear men's prayers but could not assist them in their daily obligations and duties. Although Bjornson had a new conception of God, he still believed that God was interested in

human beings personally, that He was the cause of the new ideas in the world, as the love for fatherland, the fight for the brotherhood of man, for a new art, science, etc. He could not believe that God would send to perdition for eternal pains such human benefactors, as J. S. Mill and his like-minded wife, whose life and actions were true and pure, although we may not agree with their doctrine of faith or doctrine of society. Is it not God who introduced the "doctrine of humanity;" who gives courage to one man to sacrifice himself for his brother? Is He not found in truth, in beauty, in valor; is He not found in everyday life, amidst hardships and toil and sweat, in sorrows and in joys? These were questions Björnson would discuss with them. He found God in life's tumult, but many of the preachers of his day did not.*

A greater fight than ever ensued between theological writers and him, when he attacked theology as a humbug. He wrote and published articles expressing his opinions of Christ, His place in the Trinity, His relation to the Father, and many other theological dogmas. He believed that many of our ideas regarding Christ were mixed into the Christian faith in the second century from pagan religions. He asserted that the idea of the devil was a


Chapter in Norwegian Literature. Chapter XI p. 176 f.
Persian idea which drifted into Christianity, and that many of our creeds and beliefs came from poor translations. In his article on "Hell and a Personal Devil," he advances an opinion that there is a middle state, a sort of purgatory (?), which would allow some sort of character development, and do away with everlasting hell punishments.*

Björnson's enemies branded him as a dangerous person, a freethinker, an atheist, an agnostic. His friends were grieved, but his foes rejoiced. They asserted that with him there began a falling away from Christianity. The fight was conducted wholly in the Norwegian and Danish newspapers and magazines, and these took as much interest and concern in this struggle as they did in the news regarding the Turk-Russian war then in progress. All articles, and there were many of them, that were signed "A Christian" were immediately and correctly charged to Björnson. Enough material was written to fill a volume.**

It is a remarkable fact that Björnson did not lose all faith in mankind and God, and become bitter and pessimistic as did Ibsen; that he did not get the "courage of despair," and become a destructive force. But try as he might he could not escape the power of the parsonage home,


Grundtvig's teaching, and his own buoyant and optimistic nature. Although he renounced the existing form of Christianity for agnosticism, romance for realism, he nevertheless practised the principles of the Man of Galilee. He was sincere in his belief that the church and the ministers did more harm than good when frightening youngsters, and older persons too, by teaching them to fear a personal devil, judgment day, and hell. His fight to liberate men's minds was as honest as ever and as true to his Norse nature. With unbounded enthusiasm and optimism he plunged himself in a new direction into the work as champion for a new democracy, for freedom in politics and religion; and became a zealous and tireless apostle of reform, who adopted the saying of Spencer: "To the true reformer no institution is sacred, no belief above criticism." *

This change in Björnson's life makes a striking division in the nature of his work, a distinctly, first and second literary period. Youth is clearly separated from matured age. There is an about-face, a chasm in time and style. The first literary production of the second period was "En Fallit," a drama dealing with business matters. "Det Flager" and "Paa Guds Vege," novels,

" " " " II. "Vor Uaerlige Religions-undervisning," p. 193 f.

Phelps: Essays on Modern Novelists. Chapter IV.
indicate a new development in his thinking in his older
days, but they are "confused and turbulent," because he
had not assimilated and digested all the new modern thought
he possessed.*

It was a new Björnson that appeared, the old had
passed away, and many were the readers who now were dis-
appointed and opposed him because he had left the "old,
lucid, harmonic style." He embarked upon the sea of
modern problems with a new tone, a new spirit, a new
view, which affected the thoughts, the theme, the style,
and the language in everything he wrote. The beauty and
charm of his former work was gone. And as he grew into
old age he turned more and more from the outside powers,
the divine, to the powers within to regenerate the evils
of society, but the history of society has proven that it
is incapable of regenerating itself. He has dealt with
the themes in his problem plays in an up-to-date manner
but not more efficient for solution. A few of the critics
welcomed the new Björnson with delight, among them George
Brandes, whose attitude towards Christianity is evident by
his writing on Christ as a myth not so long ago. They pro-
phesied that he would now get away from the world of dreams
and idealism down to the hard facts of life; that he would
throw off the yokes of religious opinions and become a

*Phelps: Essays on Modern Novelists Chapter IV
page 90 f.
practical man of the world, and they would hail him now as the true reformer.*

  " " " II. "Religion." p. 231 f.
  " " " " "Religion og Biblen" p. 266 f.
  " " " " Skepticism p. 454 f.


Gosse: Essay on the writings of Björnson, Section V and VII.

Payne: Björnstjerne Björnson (McClurg 1910) p. 47 f.
CHAPTER II.

His Trust in Divine Providence Unshaken.

Björnson found early in life his ability to write. When but a young boy he frankly told his parents that he wanted to become a poet. They discouraged him in this as a poet's life was not a profitable one, and besides they were planning a career as minister for him. But his natural bent could not be checked, and when only twenty-five years old he had made a place for himself in the literary world by having written and published the great peasant tale "Synnøve Solbakken" and the fine saga drama "Mellen Slagene"—works that indicated that a new poet had arrived in Norway.

He was not the originator of the peasant tales. The peasant romance was a creation in Europe in the middle of the 19th century. In Germany Immermann, Weill, Ingermann, and Auerbach wrote peasant stories; in France George Sand, and in Switzerland Fritz Reuter. Björnson has a kinship to these writers, especially to Auerbach, who wrote "Blackforest Village Tales" in 1841, but he says that he had read very little of Auerbach and nothing of George Sand when he was writing "Synnøve Solbakken."

Auerbach has written some fascinating stories of the peasants of Germany, but he looked upon them more as a critic who observes them from an impersonal point of view, while Björnson portrayed his peasant in the light of the sagas.
and the light of himself, as he loved them and was in fact an integral part of them. He understood them well, loved them greatly, yet he resorted to no peasant apotheosis but described their short-comings and faults as well.*

Scandinavia had a great inheritance in the heroic sagas, the prose epics written in Iceland from the 9th century down to the historical person of Sturla on the Sægeröld, or saga age. It is a great treasury, and Oehlenschläger in his "Helge," Tegner in his "Frithiof," and Ibsen in his "Hærmaëndene" have made use of it. Both Ibsen and Björnson desired to create a national drama from the material of this period. Björnson saw a strong affinity of the present age to the saga times, and as he had an absolute confidence in the fact that he had a message worth while to give to his fellowmen; he felt,

Gosse: An Essay on the Writings of Björnson, Section II.
Payne: Björnstjerne Björnson (McClurg 1910) p. 26 f.

When speaking of any play, novel, or short story in this chapter and chapter III (or any other chapter in this study), references to the original plays, novels, or stories are taken for granted.
he said, an irresistible force driving him to put the plow deep into the society in which he lived, to "bite fast" into the present language and thought, to take up the sins of the age, in order to "kurere tiden" (cure the time), though the process might be painful. After all, whatever attainments may be reached in arts and ideals, the great thing is not the aesthetical but the ethical, not the fine logical and psychological powers but the "simpel, redelige ting, at vaere mennesks" (the simple, reasonable thing; to be a human being), as he found in the saga times. He had the courage of his convictions, feared no criticism; hence he wrote many times in direct contrast to the popular modes of thought of the day, not caring whether society believed it or sanctioned it. He rebelled against the standards society had set in moral matters; and, therefore treated with the greatest sympathy (ömhed) unmarried women and their children (as in the treatment of Arne and his mother, and Sigurd Slembe and his mother,) against whom he believed society had no right to discriminate.*

The peasant tales, particularly "Synnøve Solbakken," received at first much harsh treatment. In Copenhagen they were not so well received on their first appearance because they were something new and foreign to their fastidious tastes; however, the prejudice soon departed. Brandes

Gro-Tid Vol. I XXVII, XXIX.
says they had "something of the primeval Northern, vigorously national, ancient Scandinavian characteristics, and at the same time--curiously and at variance--Christian ethics combined with an innocent idyllic tone, a poetry which banished titanic defiance and modern passions with equal severity from its sphere." He says also that they seemed rough, harsh, unripe, even repulsive in comparison with Oehlenschläger's tragedies. But other critics have considered them masterpieces of the highest quality. Gosse says that they brought an "ineffable freshness of remote Norwegian landscape, vast ravines, fledged with pine trees, long sonorous cascades, melancholy lakes holding their dim mirrors up among the mountains, the salt fjords winding their oceanic waters strongly in the very heart of the woodland." Collin says that the soul of the village would be the church spire, which suggested the hard Calvinism of the North, an austere biblical protestantism, exhibiting a cold exterior but holding underneath burning possibilities of passion.*

Björnson also broke away in a characteristic manner from the established traditions in the language he used in his peasant tales, as he produced a new style, called

*Brandes: Moderne Geister--Essay on Björnson.
" " Vol II p. 24 f.
Goose: An Essay on the Writings of Björnson. Sect.II.
the "sagastil" which is found at its best in "Synnøve."
Although at the time the style received a harsh criticism, years later so great a linguist as Prof. Jørgen Moe says that Bjørnson was right in using the form he did. In spite of all opposition Bjørnson went triumphantly on, overcoming obstacles like the oaks and fires in growing up the mountain in storm and tempest, and demonstrating the fact that he was an exponent of the new age which tried to break the trammels society had imposed in ages past.

"Synnøve Solbakken," with which he made his debut not only into Norwegian literature but into world literature, is a lovely, idyllic story. To some extent Saemund is a picture of his father, Karen Solbakken of his mother, and Thorbjørn of Bjørnson himself. In Granlien and Solbakken are pictured symbolically the two great traits, the gloomy and the happy, of Norwegian nature and Norwegian people. It is intensely Norwegian in its love scenes, nature, and peasant description, "redolent of the pine, the spruce and the birch trees." It is radiant with sunshine, pure as a mountain lake, refreshing and delightful. It has poetic beauties in its play of fancy; it has a satisfying artistic unity in its flawless plot, its classic scenes like the conversations outside the church door, and the meeting of Thorbjørn with his father, Saemund, and their carrying their sacks to the mill. It has an undisturbed faith in a kind
Providence that guides the destinies of men; it can be recommended to any soul weary of the modern skeptical naturalism and realism.*

His next peasant tale was "Arne," which also was received in a critical spirit; yet Brandes thinks it the most interesting of the peasant tales, because it stands as a "monument of the eventful soul battle in the poet's life—the conquering of himself." Vinje says that it was impossible for peasants to have such lofty ideals and motives as are found in "Arne," yet Bjørnson disproves that statement in his own achievement. Collin writes that Bjørnson began "Arne" with the intention of making it tragic, but the characters fled away with him, and the story wound up happily. This is typically Bjørnsonian: he cannot get away from his own optimistic spirit that finally sees the happy and the good in everything.

The story of Arne is in many ways the story of Bjørnson; the philosophy of Arne is the Philosophy of Bjørnson. At the time he was writing Arne he was also writing the trilogy "Sigurd Slembe," who tears

Cosse: Section II.
Payne: p. 26 f.
Phelps: p. 85 f.
himself away from home; he was in the midst of a political campaign, and was fighting desperately to keep the Bergen theater from going under. In addition to all this he was in love with Karoline Reimers, but his own love affair made Arne's love affair so much purer, nobler and sweeter, and gave the story an earnestness impossible without it. In his life as in "Arne" there were the two conflicting elements: the desire to get away "over de hoie fjelde" striving with the love to keep him at home.*

The story of "En Glad Gut" is the story and development of Bjørdenson in another direction. Øjvind represents the new day when the peasant boy can break away from the narrow home surroundings, go to school, come back to the same community, and become so influential that he is accepted in marriage into the richest family in the community. Øjvind's saga is Norge's saga among the nations. Norway had a hard fight for its nationalization and freedom, and it was a testing time for it as it was for Øjvind, who would be depressed by gloom and melancholy but for an hour, when he would arise, sing "Lofte dit hoved," and return to work as sprightly as ever. As Øjvind had to go away to learn new ideas so

*Brandes: Moderne Geister.
Phelps: p. 85 f.
must Norge. The story reveals the author's profound knowledge of the intricate motives and workings of human nature; and it is as refreshing as a fine evening spring rain after a hot dusty day; it characterizes the good poet in its deep, noble feeling, its beauty, its love, its hope; it inspires the reader with confidence and determination to conquer difficulties and achieve something of value in life.*

What has been said of the peasant tales to show the trend of Björnson's actions and deeds may be repeated in speaking of the saga dramas, because the work in the dramas went hand in hand with the work in the tales. Reference has been made to the interest the saga ages had for northern writers, Björnson, Ibsen, Oehlenschläger, Welhaven, Tegner--ages as interesting to them as the days of king Arthur are to English writers. Björnson's purpose in writing the saga plays was to awaken interest in matters strictly Norse, and rouse the beauty and vigor of the national life. The battles of Olav Tryggvason and Olav den helige. There is still the strife between light and dark powers; there are bigotry, jealousy, greed, wickedness, selfishness, sin to fight. Because he had seen the tragic battles fought in the lives of the peasants under the very peaceful and quiet shadows of the church spire; because he

*References page 46.
had lived with them, shared their joys and sorrows, was in fact one of them—he could be their interpreter, and take up their battles for them. So in the saga plays we have Björnson himself, as Gosse says, "the portrait of the poet's own huge shadow." He may be seen in Sverre, a man with a devil in him, cast out as an agitator of Norway, who nevertheless loved his Norway; in Sigurd, whose paternal birthright has been denied him, who yet affirms the right to serve his people; in Jorsalfar, who is sick and mad until he learns the lesson that moral health may be obtained only in the pursuance of civic duty.*

Björnson has drawn some outstanding female characters in his saga plays. Audhild in "Sigurd Slembe" is one of his subtlest and finest creations, while Helga and Frakark in the same play are the most wicked. Boyesen says that he (Björnson) has gazed deeply into the Northern paganism, and has here produced "the heroic anarchy" of the viking times. He says that Frakark is the Lady Macbeth of this play, but Lady Macbeth's bloody hands pale into insignificance beside Frakark's. Brandes points out a fault—an offense in the historical sense—

Gosse: An Essay on the writings of Björnson, Sec.III.
in Twistark's 19th century remark about the immortality of the race. He comments further that she was too cruel to speak like that, and that people who do speak about such matters do not torture their enemies to death, they backbite them. In spite of criticisms that may be adduced to discredit historical fidelity in the peasant tales, their success, nevertheless, is technically and morally certain. Björnson has certainly written some extraordinarily fine poetical passages in the saga plays, some beautiful descriptions of Norwegian nature. In "Sigurd Slembe" what could be more exquisite than the meeting of Sigurd and the Finnish maiden? It is perhaps one of the finest scenes in all of Björnson's plays. Brandes says she reveals herself as "a radiance of Northern lights; her words have the charm of the brilliant midnight sun; her glad love of life, of sunshine, of summer, her unreciprocated love for Sigurd, the delicate and transitory nature of her sorrow are a fragment of living poetry of nature."

Into the midst of his saga plays he interjected his "Maria Stuart i Skotland," a subject which interested him because he believed the Scottish types had a kinship with his Norwegian Saga types. Bothwell says: "The

Brandes: Ibsen and Björnson, p. 152 f.
Norwegian Viking race from which we claim descent was one of these will-trees; it was driven on these shores, it struck root in their rocks, and now the people dwell beneath its shade." Although historical accuracy is lacking, the author has an understanding sympathy with the Scottish national character. The first performance of the play was a great joy to him; he declared: "This has been a joy that I have not in all my literary life experienced the like of." *

The depth and beauty of much of his thought in the plays written before 1863 can be understood only in the light of his unshaken faith in the principles of Christ. He did not hesitate to pray to God as did King Olav in "Arnljot Gelline": "kast mig paa baulet som ved, bare slaegterne taendes deraf" (throw me on the fire like wood, only that the races may catch fire therefrom), because he believed "forever and always in the victory of the race." Because of this belief he would labor on even when his soul cried out: "Lord-God, how I must fight here." ** Yet in "Halte-Hulda" a beautiful stanza expresses his very joy of living:—

"God morgon, sol mellan Gronne lov—
ungdomssinn i de dype dale,

*Brandes: Ibsen and Bjørnson, p. 144 f.

Chapters in Norwegian Literature, p. 171.

**Gro-Tid. Vol. I. p. LXXIV-LXXV.
smilet i deres mørke tale,
himlens gull på al jordens stov."

Or the hope in Öjvind's song in "En Glad Gut,"--
"Det hoie straelende haab,
son over verden hvaelver;" etc.

Or again the trustful prayer in the mother's son in "Arne,"--
"Herre tag i din stærke hand
barnet, som leker vid stranden," etc.
CHAPTER III.

The New Outlook on the Problems of Life.

Following the year 1874 Björnson grew cosmopolitan, and assumed the task of dealing with the social and political problems of the day, arising out of the new industrial and social conditions of the times—problems that increased men's ambitions to make money and to satisfy the ever growing desires. The age brought with it many advantages and pleasures, but it also brought with it many evils.

With "En Fallit" Björnson made his debut into the field of modern problems. It is the outcome of his new study of Mill, Taine, Max Muller, Spencer, Darwin. It also shows the influence of his studies of Augier, Sardou and Dumas fils. He had now left the Scandinavian orthodoxy, his romantic production of youth, and would henceforth devote his talents to the stern and real problems of the age. Many regretted the change that had taken place, because the poetic, the saga touch was gone; the delightfully Björnsonian was gone, and in its place had come "a dry prosaic style." The critics said that he had evidently worked out his vein, had ceased to be a poet, had lost his ideal view of life when his childhood's faith was gone, and he had now become a mere prosy chronicler of uninteresting everyday events. Nevertheless "En Fallit" met a good reception on the boards, and
has played a vital role in Europe.

The theme—a new one for Scandinavia—is the place and function of money in the modern business world. The commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," receives a new interpretation; it is an appeal for a higher standard of finance. The ethics of the business world forced Tjaelde into questionable business relations, risking his fortune, reputation, his family life, to avoid the crash. This was inevitable, and he loses everything, yet the family is re-united and love reigns again. The blessedness of a humble life of service and love far excels the vain glory and honor of apparent riches. There are some choice passages in the play; Gosse says that the fourth act is like a refreshing cool evening after a tropical day.*

Ibsen as well as Björnson could see in the old Norwegian poetry something actually related to modern times. In saga times, too, there was such a problem as the unhappily married woman—a motive used in Ibsen's "Haermaendene" and Björnson's "Halte-Hulda." Marital disaster is discussed in Pinero's "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," "The Profligate," and "Mid Channel." Marital misery from

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*Brandes: Ibsen and Björnson, p. 158 f.
Chapters in Norwegian Literature, p. 173 f.
Gosse: An Essay on the Writings of Björnson, Section IV.
another point of view is to be seen in Tchekhov’s “Ivanov,” and Strindberg’s “Dance of Death.” Björnson deals with marital misunderstandings and remedies in the “Newly-Married,” “Geography and Love,” and “When the New Wine Blooms.”

“De Nygifte” (The Newly-Married) is a sentimental, optimistic drama written in 1865 before he had acquired the cosmopolitan ideas on problem plays. It reflects the charm, the beauty, the delicacy found in his saga plays and peasant novels. Gosse thinks it is ahead of Ibsen’s “A Doll’s House.” Brandes says it is a psychological caprice of the author to let us question, “Is Laura, in the beginning of the play, Axel’s wife in the full sense of the word, or is she not?” He thinks also that Axel is weak and stupid, and that it is a poor expedient to have Axel and Laura come to their senses by reading a novel treating their marriage relations. Laura, a girl who has been sheltered too much, is ready to give up her husband for her parents but finally the love in her heart for her husband awakens for its own sake.*

“Love and Geography” is a domestic satire bordering almost on the farcical, but yet has a Björnsonian seriousness. It has been a success on the stage for years, and was given in February, 1922, in Kansas City by the

*Brandes: Moderne Geister.

Gosse: Section VI.
Kansas City Repertory Theater. It is the study of a temperamental Professor who drives his family from home by his hobby of accumulating maps, but recovers his senses before serious consequences follow. Gosse thinks the third act is preposterous after having such a fine beginning. With all its probable defects it teaches its moral; and it maintains its optimistic opinion of the good in human nature even in faults.*

"When the New Wine Blooms" is rather too advanced in dealing with the estrangement of man and wife. In it the reverse side of the usual attitude is taken, and it is the husband who is neglected by the new woman. The three daughters as well as the wife snub and ignore him, and watch him with a "supercilious amusement." Provst Hall suffers because his wife is not intimate with him any more and he yearns for a lost youth and fresh emotions. He says that when Arvik is watching the new wine bloom in Alvilde, his wife's niece, he feels the old wine ferment in himself. In both the old men the old wine is fermenting, and both resent the domination of woman in marriage nowadays and cling to the old-fashioned doctrine.**

This is Bjornson's last play, written in 1901, the year before his death. It reveals how far he had diverged from his opinions on moral matters in the days

*Gosse: Section IV.

**Chandler: Aspects of Modern Drama. Chap. VIII.
of his writing the saga plays. The play is suggestive but vital in spirit and fresh, in fact too fresh. He could not have written such a play in his younger days (nor could he in 1909 if he had remained true to his convictions), would not have allowed his mind to dwell upon the low, sentimental, and passionate, and would not have intimated that success and pleasure in married life consists in the satisfaction of purely physical desires. The play lacks the higher ideals and virtues that surely tend to make success of marital relations.

Many dramatists of the day were interested in social conditions; Ibsen limited his studies to the individual soul, while Bjørnson put greater stress on the individuals in their social relations. Three of his plays were typical: "Redaktøren," "Kongen," and "Det Ny System." "Redaktøren" makes a furious attack on the license of the press, and appeals for a higher standard of journalism. A weakness in the play is the author's desire to wreck vengeance on a well-known publisher in Norway, from whom he had received much criticism on his activities in public speaking. The play said also too many disagreeable things to be successful in Kristiania. But the subject was timely, and Bjørnson had a theme worth while in the power of the press to ruin a man's career justly or unjustly. Boyesen says: "the satire is savage; and the quiver of wrath is perceptible in many a sledge-hammer
phrase." The characters are interesting and original because Björnson lived them before he put them into print. Brandes thinks the play can be understood best as an allegory, and as such Halvdan stands for Wergeland, and Hakon, the eldest brother, for the Norwegian people; then Björnson himself would pose as the hero of the play.*

In 1877 Björnson produced "Kongen," which he thinks is his best play. Some have agreed with him that it is his most powerful and imaginative work, while others have considered it too radical, socialistic and tragic; and have seen in it a superficial relation to V. Hugo's "Le Pope." The theme of "Kongen" is the study of the institution of monarchy, a tracing of its influence upon society which maintains it, and upon the individual who wears the crown. It is an attack on the monarchial principle itself, a subject dear to the heart of Björnson. As he was writing the play his country was engaged in an acute republican agitation, and he was intensely concerned in it, as he could never refrain from taking an active part in any campaign once started for the political liberty of his Norge. Flink in conversation with the king incognito

*Brandes: Ibsen and Björnson, Section VIII.

" On Björnson in Moderne Geister.

Chapters in Norwegian Literature. Chapter XI.

Cosse: Section VI in Essays on the Writings of Björnson.

Sharp: B. B. Dramas. Introduction (2 volumes.)
defines kingship in the following terms: "an insurance company in short! A few preachers, office-holders, noblemen, landowners, merchants, militarists have a few shares in it. And they give, to be sure, the director no permission to commit any follies."

The play met with a storm of disapproval, and brought much scurrilous abuse on its author from his political opponents. Politically it involved him in annoying troubles, as he was accused of making a direct attack on the King of Norway and Sweden, who was also a poet and sailor. Björnson stoutly denied this accusation, and made an apology. The play is not an appeal for a republican form of government, but for a higher standard of monarchy itself. In a later edition of "Kongen" he prefixed an essay on "Intellectual Freedom," in which he explained further his position, and states his chief purpose in writing the drama was "to extend the boundaries of free discussion."

"Det Ny System" is a comedy of manners, a social satire, says Gossé. The underlying idea is much like the idea of Ibsen's "Pillars of Society." Björnson thinks he has mastered his dangerous rival's secret, and tries to be a realist like Ibsen. He leaves out the fantastic and lyrical elements, yet he has written scenes of great

beauty and power, which reveal his profound understanding of human nature. The play received a harsh reception, but the critics admitted that it exposed a glaring and shameful condition at home. When Ibsen's "A Doll's House" appeared a little later, people forgot Björnson's play, and he was silent and disappointed.

Hans Kampe (in "Det Ny System") had learned new ideas and systems in foreign countries, and when he returned to Norway he introduced them against everybody's advice. They disrupted the community, and brought on ruin including him in it. The proposition that great states cannot subsist without sacrificing the smaller states, and that the small states cannot subsist without sacrificing their great men, in fact their very greatest, is analysed and discussed. Great truths may explode the whole society, and in small states only small truths can be tolerated, only "twenty to the inch." The play exposes the hypocrisy of the social and intellectual conditions of Norway; we are shown that the state of affairs in the old system is bad, but are not convinced that the proposed new system is a satisfactory substitute. In all probability there must be a compromise, though ignoble and artificial, as the only possible form of solution.*

Björnson takes up the sex problem in "En Handske," in which he discusses the two standards society has set

*References p. 53
up for the purity of men and women. With his usual sense of fair play he attacks forcibly the proposition that a woman must be chaste before and after marriage. What right does society have to be lenient with the man who falls short in this respect? The day is coming when such distinctions cannot be made, and women shall have equal rights with men in all their relations to society. "En Handske" heralds that day. Björnson believes positively that an unchaste man is as much unfit for society as a woman with a blemished reputation. The climax is reached when Svava throws her glove in Alf's face; an act symbolical of her attitude toward the society that defends the man with "a past" while it scorns the woman. Reconciliation is impossible after her act, and the moral is the more strongly enforced.

In "Leonarda" Björnson began the fight against the old set conventions of society. Its theme and message is moral and religious toleration; as in "Magnhild" it deals with morality as an institution and as a law of the heart. It is a protest against the conventionality and bigotry of the age in regard to the woman question. Although Leonarda as a character is somewhat hazy, and it is not clear just what sin she has committed, the play "Leonarda" is one of great beauty. Brandes says that it is one of Björnson's most poetic works.*

*See references on p. 58.
"Over Aevne," Part I, although written in 1883, ten years after his mental struggle, is a very interesting and beautiful drama on the mystical element in Christianity—the trust in miracles, in faith healing, in the potent effect of prayer, hope, and love. Other writers had studied the subject, as Jones in "Judah" and Moody in "The Faith Healer." "Over Aevne" is mystical, symbolical, suggestive; is a closet drama, yet effective on the stage. It is one of Björnson's greatest dramas.

When Björnson wrote part I, he had not yet been able to dispel completely Grundtvigianism for Darwinism. The simple orthodox Christian faith is strongly in evidence in the play; it reflects more trust, less doubt, in things holy than any other of his plays or novels of the second period. Elias defines a Christian: "Him alone do I call Christian who has learned from Jesus the secret of perfection, and strives after it in all things"—a definition which any believer in "holiness," "perfect love," "second blessing," or "sanctification" would probably accept. Björnson certainly writes as if he had had this higher experience in the Christian life; no doubt he received it in the parsonage home with his father. It was an unfortunate day when he lost it.*

"Over Aevne," Part I is a delightful deviation from his problem plays. In reading it we forget about the ills.

*Chapters in Norwegian Literature, p. 176.
and vices of the highly socialized society, turn again to nature and the simple life, and find our languishing spirits and weakening faiths revived by invigorating mountain air and pastor Sang's holy faith, which is as pure as crystal, as abiding as the mountains in which he lives. What exquisite enjoyment can be had in the scene in which we can smell the fragrance of the cherry blossoms and see the beauty and grandeur of the mountain sides after the heavy spring rain! Or the touch of pathos that moves our souls as we behold Sang speaking soothingly and caressingly his love to his bedridden wife!

But twelve years later Björnson could give us no such tonic, when he wrote "Over Aevne," Part II. He brings us back to the dust and turmoil of everyday cares. Elias is now a Christian because he is revolutionary and anarchistic in society; the drama is harsh and cold and skeptical. The faith in Divine Power to remedy the evils of mankind is gone. The study of Taine, Renan, and Darwin, with Brandes' persistent encouragements, had taken its effect; he fell away "from the faith of his fathers and great was the fall of it." *

* Chapter XI, p. 176

Also references on p. 58.
first and second periods. The fountain of imagination from which he drank seemed to have dried up. In the literary style there is a similarity, but in the tone, in the spirit, and the purpose there is a radical difference. When turning, for example, from "Synnove Solbakken" to "In God's Way" one notices quickly the depressed change of air, as if one had come suddenly from the mountains into the sick room. What striking contrasts there are between the charming love scenes in "Synnove" and the sick room scenes in "In God's Way," as, the repulsive scene of Ragni's spittle! Ragni, after having been married to a disgusting old man, is rescued by the young Dr. Kallem and married to him. Her actions are continually misconstrued by society, whose attitude chills her to the marrow of the bone and actually freezes her to death. But after her death, society realizes her purity and is dissolved in shame and remorse. One of the characters in the novel in philosophizing on the nature of events, exclaims that faith does not come first, according to orthodox teaching, but life—"God's supreme word to us is Life; our highest worship of him is the love of the living." The moral of the novel may be found in Tuft's final word of understanding: "Wherever good men walk, there are the ways of God." *

*Chapters in Norwegian Literature. Chapter XI.

Gosse: An Essay on the Writings of Bjørnson, Sec. VII.
Bjørnson's new thinking led him also to discuss, in the longest book he ever published, the subject of the force of heredity in "Det flager i byen og paa havnen"—a theme rather new for Norwegian society. His discussion is somewhat confused and cumbrous because he had not assimilated thoroughly the new thought. True to form he is ready to serve the present day whenever and wherever he sees an opportunity or need to do so; thus he attempts in "Det flager" (The Heritage of the Kurts) the new role of professor of pedagogy. All sorts of theories are aired: "Hygiene for gospel, gymnasium for church, acrobatic feats for religious aspirations." Phelps thinks that it is an intolerable bore.

Thomasine Rendalen, whom society forces against her will to marry John Kurt, the last of a race of violently corrupt foreigners, questions, when approaching maternity, the wisdom or the right to perpetuate such a race. Like Svava in "En handske" she denounces the shame and lies of society but to no avail. She attempts to cure the headstrong boy of hereditary tendencies by placing him in a girls' school, where in time he becomes a teacher, but slowly the inherited tendencies conquer him too. The educational program proposed is too candid, and reflects a lack of finer sense of what should be kept from full daylight. Candor is needed in education, and an entire knowledge of life and character is important, but the
whole matter should be regulated by good judgment.*

Björnson went to such extremes in moral matters—as the advocating of free love—that he was accused of immoral tendencies. This accusation he denied, but upheld the principles of free love, and believed that unwise unions founded on falsehood should be broken. In "Mary," a novel written in his ripe old age, he analyses a girl's heart, and the new idea of mental as opposed to female chastity. Mary gives herself to her lover on the theory that woman is sovereign of her own body, and that there is nothing immoral in a woman's free gift of herself. If Björnson had proved true to the faith of his fathers, or like Tolstoi had studied the New Testament more than Taine and other skeptics, he could never have written a novel like "Mary," nor could he have drifted so far in his theories from the solid moorings he had in his youth. Yet it can be said that in actual life he practised the teachings of Christianity while in his philosophy of life he threw many or most of them overboard.**

Chapters in Norwegian Literature. Chapter XI.
Goose: An Essay on the Writings of Björnson. Sec. VII

" " " " " "Den fri Kjaerlighed" p. 177
Payne: Bjørnstjerne Björnson. p. 84 f.
Phelps: Essays on Modern Novelists. p. 84 f.
CHAPTER IV

The National Skald.

Ibsen and Björnson are so closely associated in the work they have done for Norway and its literature that a study of one of them calls for at least a casual notice of the other. They are so important to Norwegian literary history of the last half of the 19th Century that their age may be called the "age of Ibsen and Björnson, or the age of new ideas and of new problem poetry." Their works are in many ways similar, and the results of their work comparable. Their courses run parallel: they were self-taught to some extent, were public debaters early in life, theater-managers, and romantic saga writers before they turned to modern problems. Their very physiques were similar, typifying the stern and forbidding aspects of a Norwegian fjeld. They possessed "path breaking originality," and were the champions of the new Norway. Ibsen was the more cosmopolitan, and his plays exerted more influence on other European and English literatures, but Björnson's works are the more typically Norwegian, as he spent more time in Norway than did Ibsen, and became more familiar with the strictly Norwegian problems. Both have written so well that they have established themselves in the literature of the world.

Ibsen and Björnson early felt the European airs blowing in upon Norway, winds of new literary and poli-
tical ideas and ideals, and especially those that emanated from France. They became intensely nationalistic in their tendencies, and together fought for the nationalization of Norway in politics as well as in literature. They were tireless in their patriotic efforts, and took advantage of every opportunity, whether by writing, speaking, or debating, to promote their cause. They organized a political club, which had as members politicians, students, musicians, anybody who was interested in the fatherland. One of the greatest meetings of the club was that evening when Björnson read his poem "Har du hort, hvad svensken siger?" *

The Norwegian saga drama as created by Ibsen and Björnson displayed some French influence.** One of Scribe's motives is the passion of a married woman for a young talented man, who is, however, more attracted to a young and innocent maid. It is interesting to observe that the two authors have chosen the same theme for their historical dramas: Björnson's "Halte Hulda" and Ibsen's "Haermaendene paa Helgeland." In these a passionate, unscrupulous saga woman loves a gallant

Boyesen: On Björnson in Essays on Scandinavian Literature.

warrior, who, though attracted to her, loves an innocent young girl. The revenge is certain, so Hjordis in "Haermenendes" kills Sigurd with her arrow and throws herself into the sea, while Helte Hulda imprisons Eyrolf and herself in a hall, where she dies with him as the hall is burned by Eyrolf's enemies, whom she has conspired with for this purpose.* Ibsen shows French influence when writing "Tree Inger till Astraat," which is a sort of transplanting of Scribe's historical play "La Verre d'eau." Bjørnson followed with "Mellen Slagene."

Ibsen was always more fortunate than Björnson in getting a hearing for his plays. Björnson's would travel ordinarily to Berlin, Vienna, or Hamburg first before they were accepted at home. Ibsen's technique was stronger, as he was studying and perfecting his plays while Björnson was leading a political campaign. If Björnson lacks some of Ibsen's technical skill he excels in genial full-blooded humanity. As a true poet Björnson is superior to Ibsen, and is the greatest of the Norwegian novelists.**

Between the two writers there is a great difference in their conceptions of life. Ibsen's are the views of darkness, pessimism, and despair, while Björnson's are the views of light and optimism. Ibsen mistrusted all

*Chapters in Norwegian Literature, Chap. X, p. 156.
**Phelps: Essays on Modern Novelists, Chap. IV.
the powers and organizations of men, but Björnson had faith in them and in men themselves. Ibsen considered all collective forces as the family, the party, or the state to be hindrances to individual growth, while Björnson believed just the opposite. Accordingly Ibsen leaves you nothing but hopelessness and despair after reading many of his plays. Ibsen is the better surgeon in his ability to diagnose the disease, the ills of life, as, his analysis of Nora in "A Doll's House," the sins of sexual disease and its hereditary tendency in "Ghosts."

What remedy does he have for the utterly hopeless pessimism in "When We Dead Awaken"? In none of Björnson's plays or novels is there found the despair of Ibsen, for in some way or other he will give some hope like the following taken from "Paa Guds Veje": "For, I believe in God, the God of Life, and in His incessant revelation in life."

Brandes in comparing the two writers says that Ibsen is a judge while Björnson is a prophet; Ibsen is a great revolutionist, while Björnson is a conciliatory speaker. Ibsen loves the idea, while Björnson loves the man, and fights for humanity. Ibsen despises the common people, is by nature solitary and hides in foreign lands away from the noise and turmoil of the every day life in Norway, but Björnson rushes into the bustle and confusion of life, and fears no contamination." (*next page)
The friendship between Ibsen and Björnson continued for many years, although they were rivals. But Björnson had a much greater capacity for friendship, and was much more loyal to his friends than Ibsen, who was not always true to Björnson. Ibsen would not hesitate to impose on Björnson to gain selfish ends. In Björnson's letters we find that very often did Ibsen hurt his feelings, particularly in the dramas, and especially when "De unge forbund," which Björnson had encouraged Ibsen to write as a satirical play, appeared as a personal insult, even a treachery to Björnson and his friends. It was a bitter disappointment for Björnson, and it pained him deeply. His enemies rejoiced but his friends remained true and cheered him on again. In 1870 he had discovered the faithlessness of Ibsen, and wrote to Lina Bruun August 15, 1870, regarding the treatment he had received at the hands of Ibsen. He tells her frankly to show the letter to Ibsen if she cares to do so.**

It was not Björnson's nature to retreat in the face

*References for page 70:
Boyesen: An Essay on Scandinavian Literature.
Brandes: Ibsen and Björnson.

**Gro-Tid. Vol. I. XXVIII, LXXVI.
" " " II p. 365, 365.
of difficulties, even though Ibsen and all others would desert or oppose him. He had learned the art or secret of patience and persistence from his association with Norwegian nature. He was born a fighter, and as Brandes says, was "half-chieftain and half poet, a warrior and scald." His literary work was great in quantity and astonishingly wide in range, from sages to divorce laws. He has written some 50,000 letters, some 10,000 pages of newspaper articles, in addition to his other literary labors, political campaigns, etc. Yet never did he have any spine or lung trouble, nor did he have to resort to stimulants. His interests were world-wide; he would use his pen against the Russians for the Finlanders, against the Hungarians for the Slovaks, and against Russia for the Poles and the Danes. Yet, though pugnacious by nature, he was peace loving and strove for universal peace.*

Like Milton Björnson seems to have known always that he must be a poet. When but a small boy he wrote a psalm and showed it to his mother, who told him that there was no rhyme in it, a matter, he says, he never thought of. He never did cease to look forward to a poet's career, although not only his parents but also the girl who was waiting for him objected to his making poetry his profession. If at any time he had entertained

doubts what to do, the "one clear call" came to him when he experienced the signal event of his life--his trip in the summer of 1856 on the Scandinavian students' tour to Upsala, Sweden. This was the absolute deciding factor whether he was to be a poet or not. He looked forward to this trip with the wildest expectations, and on the student ship he was the gladdest of the glad, and rejoiced the most of the rejoicing students. The historical places and cities of Sweden: in Riddarholmskyrkan (the Westminster Abbey of Sweden), where he stood before captured banners, or by the coffins of the hero kings; or at the museum, where he stood close to the armor, weapons, and relics of the great Swedish champions and seemed to be transplanted into the days of Sweden's greatness; or the view of the gilded spire and roof of Riddarholmskyrkan, and the city behind it, as they were leaving Stockholm by boat one glorious summer evening, while thousands on the shore were waving farewell and shouting tremendous hurrahs; or at Kalmar and at Upsala, where they were over-whelmed by cheers of welcome, profusion of flowers, and great orations to which he listened with rapt attention--these evoked emotions so great in his imaginative soul that he felt an overpowering desire to become their interpreter. He says: "All, all was sun and greatness; with flowers in my lap and visions before me I sat in prayer to God that I might
become a poet."

But the climax of impressions came upon him in the farewell scene. He says that full of "poet-longing" he had gone from one impression to another. As he was walking down to the ship with his host a young girl came suddenly forward out of the throng and gave him a laurel wreath. Her action called forth his secret thoughts from him as though she would crown them. The situation became embarrassing, as he stood as if fixed to the spot, and while fingerling the wreath nervously he asked her rather harshly why she had given him the wreath. She became frightened at his attitude, but two aunts came forward to explain that she wanted to give it to the Norse student she liked best. Björnson interpreted this explanation in his own strange fashion: that, since there were a hundred better looking students than he, a higher power had sent her to him. He placed, therefore, the wreath firmly and confidently on his own head as though he was crowned already poet-laureate.*

Björnson found the poet's life no easy one. During the financial and political crises of the time the literary atmosphere at home became so depressing that he

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found it necessary to leave home repeatedly for Copenhagen and Europe, but only to return to resume his work. Norway had become so commercialized and cold that he became spiritually frozen. Nevertheless he never lost confidence but believed that something worth while would result from "the winter of materialism." And never did he fail to measure up to his ideal and conception of the poet's mission in the service of humanity: "Digeren kaster straaler vid ain personlighed, giver solglade ord, hjælper till at lægge livet tilrette; at kunne sige ord i rette tid som flammer--det er at vare digter."

In reply to the criticism that he was misusing his talents by devoting so much of his time to the work of a politician Bjöörnson says: "Oh, yes, 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 long-haired man who sits on the top of a tower and plays upon the harp while his hair streams in the wind. Yes, a fine kind of a poet is that! No, my boy, I am a poet, not primarily because I can write verse (there are many who can do that), but because I can see more clearly, feel more deeply, and speak more truly than the majority of men. If by my song or speech I can contribute ever so little toward the amelioration of the lot of the millions of my poor fellow creatures,
I shall be prouder of that than of the combined laurels of Shakespeare, Milton, and Goethe." That speech revealed a scion of the saga times, when scalds were warriors as well as singers, who could fight equally well with the sword, the battle-ax, and the pen.*

As a writer of poems in the strict use of the word Björnson did not produce a great quantity, but he considers all his work, the short stories, novels, and plays as the works of poetry. The themes of his poems (in the limited use of the word) are many and varied: love, beauty, joy, religion, patriotism, weddings, funerals, anniversaries, bazaars, etc. The largest number of poems he wrote on patriotism in its broadest sense. In these poems there is no party politics; it was not for the peasants alone and their party that he wrote, but for the nation as a whole. The poems are mostly lyric, melodious and singable; many of them were written in the novels. They reflect the various moods of his soul, his love for Norway, and his faithfulness to the mission he had chosen for himself. They have a charmed optimism and delicious freshness about them that is catching. The beauty of the


" " II, p. 277 f.

Palmer: Introduction to Poems and Songs by B. Björnson.
diction and rhythm defy translation, yet the patriotic emotion cannot be missed in a song like "Ja vi elsker dette landet," set to music by Richard Nordraak, Kjerulf and others:--

"Aye, we love this land of ours,
Crowned with mountain domes,
Storm-scarred o'er the sea it towers,
With a thousand homes.
Love it, as with love unsated
Those who gave us birth,
While the saga night, dream-weighted
Broods upon the earth."

or:--

"There's a land where the snow is eternally king,
To whose valleys alone come the joys of the spring,
Where the sea beats a shore rich with the love of
the past,
But this land to its children is dear to the last.

In the midst of the heated political campaign of 1859 he published in the Saturday "Aftonbladet," December 17, 1859, an article as a sort of Sunday meditation, which had a marked effect on all contending parties in the capital by imparting to them an element of mercy toward each other:--

"Love thy neighbor, to Christ be leal!"
Cush him never with iron-heel,
Though in the dust he's lying!
All the living responsive await
Love with power to recreate,
Needing alone the trying."
The message of these lines has appeared again and again in Björnson's stormy life, and has always sounded the true keynote of his character. Poetry to him was as music to Luther after each day's toil. It was the joy of his labors, was as refreshing to him as the evening zephyr; it cleansed his thoughts and revived his soul after the heat and dust of the political day.*

In the stream of world literature Björnson occupies an important place, although he was "the most agitated and agitating of the modern European men of letters." Payne says that for fifty years his fame widened, and when he died he was one of the three or four greatest writers of the world. He is one of the world's greatest writers on children, women, and old men. Gosse says that he had a happy intuitive insight into the hearts of women, and a skill to follow their secret

Palmer. Songs and Poems by Björnson, the Introduction.
meditations. He says also that Björnson, since he touched so many unrelated and diverse types, has been accused of having no originality, yet this is not true; we can now see his "consistent manner and persistent intention."

To the day of his death his outstanding characteristics were his hopeful faith in the improvement of humanity and his impassioned love for his fatherland—characteristics that kept him young and active, and in an atmosphere entirely different from Ibsen's, in whose pessimistic world he would have perished. Gosse states that when Browning died there was but one remaining great optimist in Europe and that was Björnson. He was writing dramas and novels until, in Paris, April, 1910, his great heart, which was great enough to embrace the whole world in its love, stopped its beating forever.*

Before any one else in his age Björnson was the true Norseman, and the first poet of Norway that could be called truly national. But one look at him could convince the skeptic that he was "typical of his people, an incarnation or personification of all that which composes the power and peculiarity in the Norse nationality." He loved his fatherland as he loved his wife and home, and his married

*Chapters in Norwegian Literature, Chapter X.

Gosse: An Essay on the Writings of Björnson. Introduction and Section VII.

Payne: Bjørnstjerne Björnson.
life was as happy and beautiful as Browning's. When in foreign lands he would experience an indefinable or inexpressible love (emhed) and admiration for mother Norge, and would pray for "mit lille Faedreland, for vilket Jeg i mit Liv vil virke." The cause of Norway to him, then, was a very personal matter; it was as near to him as father or mother or wife. In the eighties when the enemies were bitter and the future was dark, a rumor was started to the effect that he would settle in Germany. He replied: "In Norway will I live, in Norway will I lash, and be lashed, in Norway will I sing and die." *

It is a matter of satisfaction to the Norwegians today that they recognized and honored him while he was yet living. In his old age he was honored especially by young Norge. He was besieged by invitations to speak at banquets, patriotic meetings, in campaigns, in fact on all occasions, in Norway or in Denmark, and wherever he appeared he received a tremendous welcome, and everywhere they sang to his honor "Ja vi elsker" to the music written by his cousin Nordraak. When he spoke it was as if Norge spoke. Brandes states that when Bjornson appeared it was the same thing as unfurling the flag of

Norway. Yet that flag was not unfurled to avenge enemies but to call friends and enemies to gather around the standard for march forward. Bjørnson was the great sower, and now since his departure the seeds have been growing in bleak Norway. It is but right and natural that the Norwegian people should feel his loss keenly, and that they should keep his name and memory in continually increasing respect and reverence.

If one should choose any one stanza of Bjørnson's poems with which to characterize his life's work one would probably choose the following stanza from the poem "Good Cheer," which concluded the first edition of his "Poems and Songs":--

"I lived far more than e'er I sang;  
Thought, ire and mirth unceasing rang  
  Around me, where I guested;  
To be where loud life's battles call  
For me was well-nigh more than all  
My pen on page arrested."

Or to typify the larger conception of the mission of the poet-prophet we may select the following from the poem "The Poet":--

"The poet does the prophet's deeds;  
In times of need with new life pregnant,  
When strife and suffering are regnant,
His faith with light ideal leads,
The past its heroes round him posts,
He rallies now the present's hosts,
    The future opes,
Before his eyes,
    Its pictured hopes
He prophesies.
Ever his people's forces vernal
The poet frees,—by right eternal." *


Björkman: Bj. Björnson in "Voices of To-morrow."
Brandes: Ibsen and Björnson. Introductory note
    and Section I on Björnson.
Palmer: Poems and Songs by Björnson. Introduction.
APPENDIX
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Chronological Biography.

1832 Born December 8 in the Bjørgen parsonage, in Kvickne, Astedalen.
1838 Moved to Naesset in Romsdal.
1844 Sent to Latin School at Molde.
1852 Sent to Christiania to University.
1853 Spent summer at Naesset.
1854-56 Devoted to dramatic criticism, and book reviewing for "Aftenbladet," later "Morgenbladet."
Years of battle for Norse scenic art, and a more true to nature poetry.
1856 During summer, attended students reunion at Upsala, Sweden. Students from Norway, Denmark, Sweden.
1856 Editor of own paper "Illustreret Folkeblad."
1856 To Hamburg and Kiel.
1856 In fall to Copenhagen.
1857 In June back to Christiania.
In September to parents at the parsonage of Sogne.
In October to Christiania.
In November to Bergen.
Published "Synnøve Solbakken," with which he began his literary career.
Spent part of summer in Stockholm and Copenhagen.
1858 Director of theater in Bergen.
1853 September 11 married Karoline Reimers.
1859 In spring editor of "Bergensposten."
    In August a month's vacation at Søgne parsonage.
1859 September to Christiania.
    Became assistant editor of "Aftenbladet."
1860-63 Travels in Europe.
    Reached Rome Christmas eve 1860.
    Last in Paris March 1863.
1863-65 Spent at home, Copenhagen, Christiania, etc.
1865 Theater-manager of Christiania theater for two years to 1867.
1866 Editor of "Norske Folkeblad."
1868 At home, Christiania, Copenhagen, etc for few years. The years 1864 to 1874 slackening of intellectual forces, was in politics, etc.
1870 Published "Poems and Songs."
1875 From now on home at Aurestøl in Gausdal except
    at the times of travel to Europe, or U. S.
1874 Recovered imaginative powers. From now on produced novels and dramas of modern realistic cast.
1879 Was winter guest of Grand Duke of Meiningen.
1881 Lecturing in the United States in spring and summer.
    To Germany because of political attitude toward
    him at home.
1882 Returned to Norway.
1882 Went to Paris, made it headquarters for a few years.
1886 Spent summer at home.
    Back to Paris.
1889 Received a great ovation at the opening of the national theater in Christiania. "Sigurd the Crusader" performed.
1900 Re-elected member of Nobel Committee.
1903 Awarded Nobel prize for Literature.
1910 Died April 26 in Paris.
Portraits in Magazines

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Sat. Evening Post 197:33  My. 9, 1925
Chronology of Björnson's Literary Works.
(Not including newspaper articles or letters.)

1856 "Thrond"—Written when Bjornson was 24 and was living by journalism in Christiania. Published in Carl Plaug's and Clemens Peterson's paper "Faedrelandet," March 1857. Is a miniature of the class of bonds-novellen. Tale of purest Norwegian isolation. What Thrond says to his mother Bjornson might say to mother Norway: "Nei mar! hjem egjen vil jeg ikke, for jeg kan spille, hvad jeg har set i dag."

1856 "En munter Mand."—short story. Written in Copenhagen.

1856 "Ei faarleg friing"—short story.
"Et farligt frieri"—short story.
"Mellen Slagene"—short saga play, 11 scenes, no acts, prose.

1857 "Bjørnejaegeren"—short story.
1857 "Synnøve Solbakken,"—peasant novel. 9 chapters.
Bjornson received 50 speciedaler for "Synnøve," "Mellen Slagene" and articles in "Illustreret Folkeblad."
4th " Dec. 1859.
5th " Gyllendahl (F. Hegel) Copenhagen, 1866.
In 1872 included in "Fortællinger" in which it has appeared since. Translated into German 1859 and many times since. Into Dutch 1859, Spanish 1865, French 1868, Russian 1869, English the first time 1870.

1858 "Halte-Hulda"--saga drama. 3 acts, many scenes. Poetry, iambic pentameter.

1858 "Arne"--peasant novel. Published in 1859, when writing the novel he was busy in politics, was theater-manager, and was in a love affair. Many consider this his best novel.

1859 "Faderen"--short story, written at Sognes parsonage during summer. Published before Christmas in Stockholm in "Nya Nordiska dikter och skildringer." Inspired to write it after reading the preface to a collection of sermons of
Hofacker, who died before he was 30, yet had gone through the "high school of pains."

1859 "Arneredet"—short story.
1859 "En Glad Gut"—peasant novel. First published in "Aftenbladet," Christiania. At first popular opinion against Björnson but wholly in his favor when 10th chapter was published.

1862 "Sigurd Slembe." A dramatic trilogy, a saga drama. Not performed on the stage very much. Staged in Chicago in 1908, only Part I and under inadequate conditions.

Part II—The flight. Three acts. Prose.


1865 "De nygifte"—Social drama. Two acts. Prose. Written in Copenhagen.

1866 "Jaarnbanen og Kirkegarden"—Short story.
1868 "Blakken"—Short story.
1868 "Trofasthed"—Short story.
1869 "En livsgade"—Short story.
1869 "En ny feriefart"—Short story.
1870 "Arni jot Gelline"—Poem. 15 cantos.
1872 "Brudeslatten"—Short novel. Written in Christiania. As a text to four designs by the Norwegian Painter, Tidemand.
1872 "Sigurd Jorsalfar"—Saga drama. Four acts.
1874 "Redaktoren"—Problem drama. Four acts. Written in Florence. Published in Copenhagen. Rejected at Royal Theater of Denmark and Norway. In translation performed at Cardenbourg. Eventually on Norwegian stage.
1875 "En Fallit"—Problem drama. Four acts. Written partly in Tyrol. Published in Copenhagen. Success on boards. First Sweden, then Christiania, Bergen, Copenhagen, Berlin, Munich, Vienna, etc. Success at Theatre Libre in Paris. All important repertoires of Europe included it. At Royal Theater in Munich it was given more than sixty times without exhausting popularity.
1877 "Kongen"—A problem drama. Written at Aulestad.
Published Copenhagen. Four acts.


1879 "Det ny system." A social drama. Five acts.

1882 "Stov"--Short story. Published first in "Nyt Tidsskrift."

1883 "En handske"--social drama. Published in Copenhagen. Three acts. Prose.


1884 "Det flager i byen og pa havnen." Novel embodying theories of our heredity and education. Copenhagen.

1885 "Geografi og Kjaerlighed." A social drama.

Three acts. Prose.

1889 "Et Styggt Barndomsminne"--Short story.

1889 "Pa Guds Veje"--Novel, more remarkable than any of his other novels. Copenhagen.

1892 "Mors haender." Short story.
1893 "En Dag"—A short story—Published first in Nor. magazine "Nyt Tidsskrift."

1894 "Ivar Bye"—A short story.

1894 "Absalon's Har"—Short story.


1895 "Lyset"—A cantata.


1906 "Mary"—novel.

Collected Editions.

Samlede Vaerker--Published by Gyldendalske Boghandel--Nordisk Forlag, Kristiania og Kjøbenhavn. 11 volumes, 1900-1902.

Samlede Vaerker--Published by Gyldendalske Boghandel--Nordisk Forlag, Kristiania og Kjøbenhavn. 10 volumes, 1914.


Vol. I. Synnøve Solbakken, Translated by Julie Suter.
   " II Arne, Translated by Walter Law.
   " III A Happy Boy, Tr. by Mrs. W. Archer.
   " IV The Fisher Lass
   " V Bridal March and One Day.
   " VI Magnhild and Dust.
   " VII Captain Mansana and Mother's Hands.
   " VIII Absalon's Hair and a Painful Memory.
   " IX In God's Way Tr. by Carmichael
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