

BRIEF HISTORY

THE seeds of a national state were not sown in Norway until the ninth century, when order and organisation began to come out of a system of government consisting of small local "things," or parliaments, where all had a voice.

These extended to governments over larger districts. Strife developed among leaders, and, in the year 872 Harald Haarfagre, partly by force, partly by prestige, unified the country into a nation with himself as King. Two years later Norsemen discovered Iceland and added it to Norway's possessions. In 983 Eirik Raude landed on Greenland, and about 1000 A.D. Leif Eriksson, his son, discovered the North American continent.

By the middle of the thirteenth century, Haakon, a younger son of Harald, had driven the elder son, Erik Bloodaxe, out of the country. Erik's men colonised the Faroe, Shetland, and Orkney Islands, the Hebrides, Man, and Ireland, and retained still enough energy to annoy Haakon by harassing the men to whom he had given their lands. So Haakon pursued them and took over their colonies.

When the royal line died out, in 1319, the kingdom passed through a daughter to Sweden and again by marriage to Denmark. Queen Margaret of Denmark united all three kingdoms in 1397.

Now the great vigour of young Norway seemed to be spent, and the colonies were lost to them. It was not until five centuries had almost passed that the national spirit awakened. In 1814, the union with Denmark was severed and Norway was given a constitution of her own by Prince Christian of Denmark. However, it did not last long, for five months later Sweden marched into Norway, Christian abdicated, and Charles XIII. of Sweden ruled with the constitution Christian had given the country.

But the spirit of independence grew, and, in 1905, a peaceful revolution persuaded Sweden to allow the Norsemen to resume self-government. In 1920 Norway annexed the island of Jan Meyen, and, in 1924, she ratified a treaty placing Spitzbergen with Bear Island under Norwegian sovereignty.

Norway's constitution provides for the King to hold supreme executive powers, working with a Council of State which assumes responsibility for his acts. The "storting," or parliament, represents 100 country districts and 50 towns. At its first meeting after election it divides itself into an upper house of one quarter of its members, who must ratify the decisions of the lower house. The King has a power of veto over legislation, but any bill passed by three successive parliaments must go through.

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family in modest circumstances. Mrs. Undset's earlier works have an air of joyless workaday life, in the monotonous blocks of a respectable but dreary part of the capital. Then, as a young girl, she went on a summer trip to Sel in Gudbrandsdal and beyond, up into the hills. To her, who had as yet only seen the depressing streets of Oslo, the venerable farms, with the well-proportioned buildings and the dignified manners of the inhabitants, appeared like a revelation from mediæval times; and still more enthusiastic she got when she came up to the saeter tracts, where the high northern wind keeps the sky clear and the air bracing, while the snow-clad peaks of Rondane tower above the immense, rolling highlands.

Other Aspects and Other Writers

The true discoverer of the silent, sober beauty of the woods and lakes of eastern Norway was Peter Christian Asbjornsen (1812-85), the collector of folk-tales. He was also a pioneer in the development of

the somewhat prosaic but strong and straightforward modern style.

We may mention Sven Moren (b. 1871), from the eastern-most valley in Norway, Trysil, on the Swedish frontier. Here the inhabited parts are separated by six-mile, ten-mile, or twelve-mile forests—and the old Norwegian mile is equal to seven English miles. The ten-mile forest, then, means a seventy-mile range of hills and woods, moors and lakes. In winter time the temperature often sinks to 40 degrees below zero. Sven Moren writes in such a way that the readers can both feel the cold and see the endless snow-covered moor, and a man with a horse, striving to drag home a sledge-load of hay in the winter night. The next morning the horse stands shivering and the snow falls over the dead man on the sledge.

Olav Duun (b. 1876) is a native of Namdalen, the northern part of the Trondheim district. Here the characteristics of south-eastern Norway appear again on the western coast, with rolling fields, broad open valleys, immense forests and imposing farms with long narrow buildings.

Norwegian Poetry

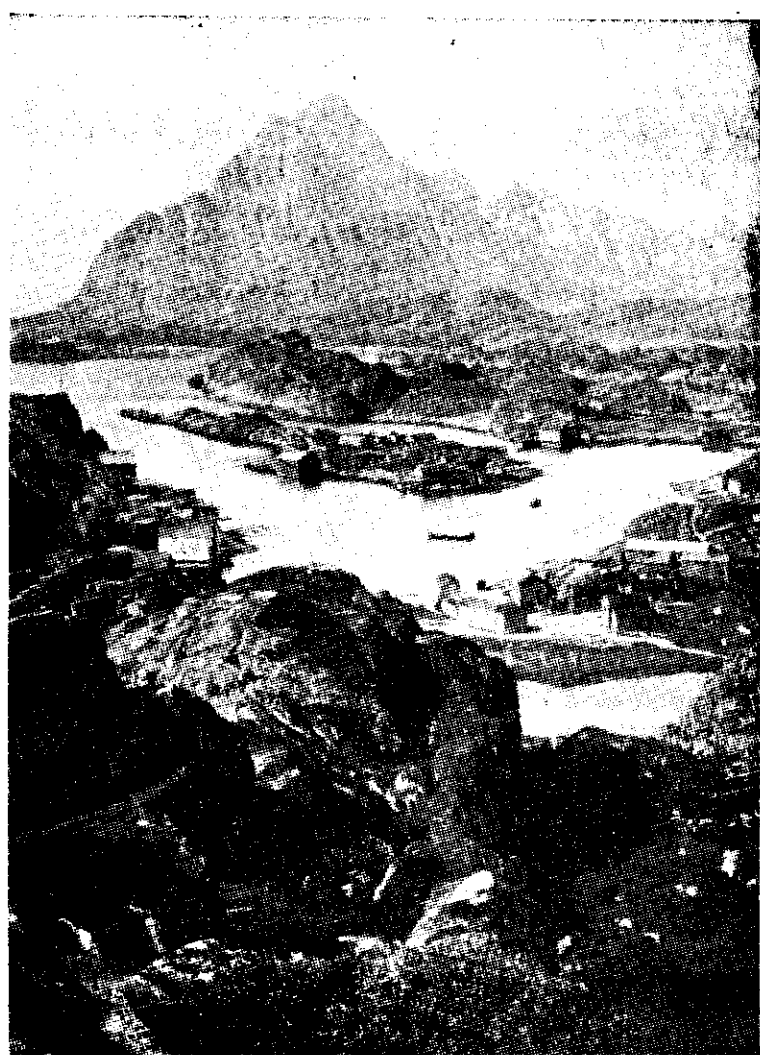
It is no wonder that these new-Norse authors, almost every one of them born in the country, prefer to write about things they know best: the life and atmosphere of their birthplaces. This is most apparent in the foremost of Norwegian poets, the tragic character Aasmund Vinje (1818-70). His work is pervaded by an almost fanatical love of Nature. He was born in the parish of Vinje, Upper Telemark, one of the most out-of-the-way parts of Norway, where life was still mediæval. Here some of the farmers still worshipped their private gods, inherited from heathen times; here the old ballads were still sung to weird, melancholy tunes, and the fiddlers played dances even more singular in character—echoes of which are heard all over the world in Edvard Grieg's masterly adaptations.

The Telemarking has an inborn talent for poetry, and the collectors of folk-lore and old songs have made a richer harvest in this district than in any other part of Norway. Here Vinje grew up. Escaping from the drudgery and poverty of the capital, he spent his happiest days in the highlands, and his finest poem, perhaps the best in the whole Norwegian literature, is inspired by the sight of the Rondane:

*I now again have seen such hills and dales
as those I in my early youth beheld. . . .*

It is the fate of lyrical poets that their true worth can only be appreciated by readers who are familiar with their language. A Norwegian author, and especially a lyrical poet, has therefore a very limited circle of readers.

Nevertheless, our authors have contributed more than any other group of men towards the fulfilment of the task that rests on the Norwegian nation: to maintain a standard of culture against heavy odds, in a land of difficult access and scanty resources, at the northernmost limit of Christendom.



The work of Knut Hamsun, one of the most distinguished of living Norwegian writers, was much influenced by the rugged Arctic Nordland coast where he spent his boyhood.

Facts About Norway

Area: 124,964 square miles.

Population: 2,809,564 (1930), compared with 977,500 (1820).

Has many lakes: Mjosen is 60 miles long and its bottom is 1,080 feet below sea level.

The Jostedal glacier is the second largest in Europe (to Vatnajökull in Iceland). It has an area of 580 square miles, is 87 miles long by 6 to 22 miles wide, and falls to within 150 feet of the sea. Two per cent. of the country's area is under glaciers.

From the many hundreds of waterfalls engineers estimate Norway could develop 13,000,000 horse power. At present she uses 3,000,000.

Before the war took its toll the Norwegian Merchant Marine was fourth largest in the world, with 4,000 ships of a gross tonnage of 4,071,000.

The population is roughly divided as follows: 84,000 in agriculture, 700,000 in industry, 200,000 in fishing and whaling, 450,000 in commerce, and 100,000 in shipping.

The Norwegian church is Lutheran, and to it all but 3% of the population belong.

From Newcastle-on-Tyne, Bergen is 21 hours steaming by fast passenger motorship, Stavanger 24 hours. From Newcastle to Oslo takes 38 hours, but from Hull to Kristiansand and Oslo takes only 30 hours.