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A VISIT TO THE FRIENDS OF IBSEN.

IN the summer of 1872 I received special leave from the Principal Librarian of the British Museum to visit Denmark and Norway for the purpose of reporting on the state of current literature in those countries. Of my Danish experiences I have given an account in my book called *Two Visits to Denmark* (Smith, Elder & Co., 1911); but hitherto I have not published any of my Norwegian adventures. I am led to do so now, in consequence of a letter which I have just received from Rektor Frederik Ording, of Holmestrand, who is engaged on a biographical work on ‘Henrik Ibsen’s Ungdomsvenner,’ and who tells me that it has become almost impossible to obtain information about the particular group of men of letters whom I conversed with more than forty-five years ago. They are all long since dead, and no one survives who recollects them in their prime. No one—so it appears—but me! The fact is a solemnising one. I feel like the Moses of the poet:

Je vivrai donc toujours puissant et solitaire ?
Laissez-moi m’endormir du sommeil de la terre ;

but before I am allowed by Norway to do that, it seems that I am called upon to disgorge my recollections. They are, I am afraid, though founded on a full journal, rather slight.

Ibsen, as is well known, was at that time, and had long been, an exile from his native country, where his plays were ill received and his character subjected to a great deal of stupid insult. But there was a small circle of his early friends who remained true to the devotion which his genius had inspired in them. When I was in Copenhagen, it was impressed upon me that these men formed the real Norway, the fine flower of Norse culture and intelligence, and it was to them that I took introductions. They were mainly jurists, archeologists and historians, whose studies into the annals of their country had given them a determination to support existing institutions. They were called ‘conservatives,’ and by the radical press were treated as though their ideas were desperately retrograde. But in any other country but Norway, fifty years ago, they would have been called advanced liberals. They desired to introduce broad and sweeping reforms, and they were particularly desirous

to follow the example of England. If I understand their position aright, they were rather Constitutionalists than Conservatives, for their first idea always was to bring their views into line with the Constitution.

A short time before my visit, the barrier which surrounded and isolated the group of men of whom I speak had been emphasised by the development of the Venstre, the national radical party, which was urged on and supported by the Peasants' party. The debates in the Storting in 1871 and 1872 had been very bitter, and public opinion was sharply, but unequally, divided over the burning question of the admission of ministers to the national assembly. Without going further into the obscurity of foreign politics, it is enough to say here that the group into which I was for a short time admitted, as an indulged and attentive guest, had the hope that, with all its talents and knowledge, it would be called upon to take over the government of the country. It was thought that Aschehoug would oust the radical Sverdrup as the next Prime Minister. The reign of constitutionalism would begin; the peasant leaders would be sent back to their farms; and Norway would open a splendid period of conservative re-action. In this, the friends were supported by the most powerful newspaper of the country, *Morgenbladet*, which like themselves had long been frankly democratic, but had recently taken a very strong line in opposition to the Left. *Morgenbladet* was boisterously attacked by *Dagbladet*, the rival newspaper, edited by Samuel Bætzmann, a bearded and very tall young man, who was pointed out to me in the street, with execration and contempt, by Jakob Lökke.

The hope of my friends was not realised. The whole tendency of Norwegian life was in the opposite direction, and a few days after I left Christiania, the death of King Carl had the effect of still further encouraging the liberals. The group I had known were swept out of public life by the tide of radicalism, and suffered the obscurity which awaits the unsuccessful politician. Now, as it appears, when all passion has died down, there is a great curiosity about men whose talents and accomplishments, as well as their high patriotism, were an asset in the civilisation of Norway at a critical moment. Hence, when it is almost too late, and when I am left the only survivor, I am appealed to for my recollections, pale and slight as they must be.

Late, then, in the summer of 1872 I arrived in Christiania, armed with cards and letters of introduction from friends in Copenhagen, and with a recommendation from Tennyson to Professor Ludwig Kristensen Daa, who had been very civil to the poet when he visited Norway. I arrived in the midst of the excitement caused by the recent celebration

of the 1000 years' festival, and in particular we crossed Prince Oskar who was returning to Stockholm from being present at Haugesund on that occasion, when he had unveiled a colossal symbolic statue of Harald Fairhair. Before my first evening closed in, I hastened to explore the length of the city right up Carl Johans Gade to the New Park; and in the Eidsvoldplads, a square opposite the Storting House, I received a little shock, for gazing up at the new bronze statue of Harald Fairhair, I saw the drapery rise and flutter in the wind. This was not a replica of the national statue at Haugesund, but an independent design, put up in lath and plaster to see whether public opinion approved of it. It occurred to me afterwards that it was the symbol of the stalwart conservatism of the group of friends of whom I am about to speak, who trusted to their heroic attitude to impress public opinion,—and failed.

Early next morning I called on Jakob Lökke (1829–1881), who was head-master of the Christiania Cathedral School, and the leading educational authority in Norway. I had been able to be of some assistance to Lökke in London during the year 1871, and his hospitable and genial acquaintance was now very valuable to me. Close to the great church of Our Saviour, in the centre of the city, in the first house on the left-hand side of the Stor Gade, Mr and Mrs Lökke had an apartment on the third story in which they received a small, but extremely distinguished, circle of guests. Lökke was pompous in manner and a touchy man, but full of warmth and generosity under a somewhat difficult surface. His hospitality to me, on this occasion, was untiring, and it was wholly owing to him that I was admitted to the remarkable group of Norse Tories who were making so resolute and so vain a struggle to stem the rising flood of radicalism. Lökke's 'tredie étage' in Stor Gade was a typical home of lost causes, and the group of friends were all ardent supporters of Ibsen, whose satirical temper was then looked upon askance by the various popular parties.

The first person to whom Lökke presented me was Emil Stang (born 1834), the son of the then prime minister of Norway, Frederik Stang, and a leading advocate. He became very cordial when he learned that I was bent on introducing Ibsen to the English public, and had begun to do so; and he told me that he held a brief for the poet at that moment. It will be remembered that Ibsen then resided in Dresden. Taking advantage of this exile, a Danish publisher of the baser sort had produced a pirated edition of the *Warriors of Helgeland*, with an announcement that a similar reprint of *Madam Inger at Österraad* would follow. Stang laughed as he told me of Ibsen's gigantic anger

at this offence; he had immediately put the matter into Stang's hands, and had desired him to get a full indemnity from the Danish publisher. But it was the usual case of trying to bleed a stone. The man would not even withdraw his edition, though no more was said of the projected piracy of *Madam Inger*. Mr Stang told me that the case was still dragging through the courts; I never learned the result.

Lökke took me to the University Library to see the Librarian, Ludwig Daae (not to be confounded with Daa), who was born in 1834 and died in 1910. The visit was untimely, for Daae had not arrived, and only one single clerk was on duty. This man was ready to be friendly, but he was being bullied by the Principal Librarian of the University of Stralsund, a typical loud-voiced Prussian, to whom I took a violent dislike. This man was acquainted with Lökke and attached himself to us; he spoke with great contempt of the Library of the British Museum, which he said he knew very well. We proceeded to the Record Office, in order to see Mr Michael Birkeland (1830–1897), the Master of the Rolls, of whom I shall have much to relate. The Record Office (Riksarkivet) was then in the same clump of buildings as the Storthing House. We did not find Birkeland in, but we found an even more illustrious person, J. E. W. Sars (1835–1915), who was already deep in the preparation of those works which have made him famous as the most philosophical of Norwegian historians. He was shortly after my visit appointed Professor of History in the University of Christiania.

My introduction to Ludwig Daae was only postponed. The next time I called at Lökke's house, a little shabby man with a beard, with woefully dishevelled hair and snuff-coloured old coat, was dancing a sort of lonely pirouette in the middle of the floor, while he talked. He stopped at my entrance, and Jakob Lökke, coming forward, presented me to him as 'the Librarian of the University, Ludwig Daae.' 'The author of that delightful *Gamle Kristiania*?' I asked. 'Ah, do you know my book?' he said, and seemed pleased. I felt very much drawn to Ludwig Daae from the first, and he spoke Norwegian so plainly and elegantly that it was particularly easy for me to follow him. All through the rest of my visit to Christiania I had the benefit of his kindness and wit, his ingenuousness and his fund of knowledge. His book, *Gamle Kristiania*, a picturesque series of essays on the history of the city up to 1800, was familiar to me, and I had written a long review of it in the *Spectator* for Richard Holt Hutton, in which I had ventured to say that it would be impossible for any one in future to attempt a

history of modern Norwegian affairs without the help of Mr Daae's admirable book.

The name of this gentleman offered much difficulty, because, by a very odd coincidence, there were at that moment three unrelated persons whose names were in sound identical. There was Ludwig K. Daa, and there were two Ludwig Daaes, my friend, and a politician whom I did not meet. Norwegians themselves found the identity of the three very confusing. My Ludwig Daae had begun his literary career with an ecclesiastic history of the diocese of Throndhjem, published in 1863, and had gradually extended his range from church to general history, but his gift really lay in the picturesquely biographical. He had just been made lector in æsthetics in the Cathedral School when I saw him, but he held this but a very short time, being soon after my visit appointed Professor of History at the University.

I had now the honour of being admitted every day to the company of Daae and his friends, and it was clearly explained to me that they formed a compact and still influential body of resistance to the subversive policy of Björnson, Sverdrup and the terrible peasant Jaabæk, whom they regarded with peculiar apprehension. Hans Christian Andersen had given me a note of introduction to Björnson, and in spite of the objections of my new friends, I found that I could not resist the temptation to use it. Accordingly I went to the house in Munkedamsveien which Björnson shared with the philosopher G. V. Lyng (1827-1884) whom I had met in Denmark. They occupied a small house in a long suburban lane on the edge of the city. I had been told that the poet was very formidable, and as I waited in the hall, I heard him growling 'Saa! saa? saa!' over the card and note I had sent in. I quaked, but I plunged; I was ushered into a pretty room with trellised windows, where a large and even burly man (Björnson was then under forty), who was sitting astride the end of a narrow sofa, rose vehemently to receive me. His long limbs, his athletic frame, and especially his remarkably forcible face, surrounded by a mane of wavy brown hair, and illuminated by full blue eyes behind flashing spectacles, gave an instant impression of physical vigour. He was truculently cordial, and lifted his ringing tones in civil conversation. Resuming his singular attitude astride the sofa, he entered affably into a loud torrent of talk, lolling back, shaking his great head, suddenly bringing himself up into a sitting posture to shout out, with a palm pressed upon either knee, some question or statement.

His full and finely modulated voice, with his clear enunciation,

greatly aided his not a little terrified visitor in appreciating his remarks, but he spoke at great speed, and it strained the attention of a foreigner to follow his somewhat florid volubility. He expressed himself highly pleased with the reception his romances had received in England, but seemed surprised that his dramas were not known. He recommended to me a new viking-play, called *Sigurd Jorsalfar*, which he had just sent to press, and which had been refused 'though with the loveliest music by Grieg ever heard out of a dream' by the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, a repulse which Björnson flatly attributed to the malignity of the manager, Molbech. He promised to send me to London a copy of *Sigurd Jorsalfar* as soon as it was published, and he was so amiable as to keep his word.

This little adventure in the head-quarters of the opposition was not at all well regarded in Stor Gade. Accordingly I was taken, as a counterbalancing influence, to be presented at his country parsonage of Vest Aker to the old poet and folk-lorist Jørgen Moe (1813–1882). Lökke and Daae were my companions on this visit to the celebrated collector, in common with Asbjørnsen, of the so universally admired Norse legends and fairy-tales. The situation of Vest Aker is magnificent; as we drove past the little church to the court of the 'præstegaard,' the whole of the head-waters of the Christiania Fjord wound and sparkled below us, golden in the blue circle of the hills. Moe, dressed in clerical black, with the white ruff round his throat, greeted us delicately. He was a charming man, with his soft voice and beautiful stag-like eyes; a perfectly gracious and venerable figure, not incapable, however, of receiving a mild excitement from the fact that his poems were presently to be introduced to the English public. Almost immediately after my visit Jørgen Moe was appointed Bishop of Christianssand. As we came back from Vest Aker, my guides showed me the grave of the biographer and bibliographer, Botten-Hansen (1824–1869), and the famous grotto of Wergeland, once in the country, but, already in 1872, touched by the outskirts of the city. As we were crossing the streets in the neighbourhood of the Uranienborg Church, a pale old face appeared for a moment at an upper window. Daae said this was the house where Johan Sebastian Welhaven (1807–1873) was being nursed, and he thought that it was Welhaven we had seen. Lökke did not think it was, so that I shall never know whether I did, or did not, catch a glimpse of the illustrious and the dying author of *Norges Dæmring*. My companions were much amused, and I think gratified, by my eager interest in all these literary associations.

I now left the capital for a little tour by myself in Ringeriget and Gudbrandsdalen, where I had an invitation to meet Asbjørnsen, with whom I had corresponded from London. He had been staying at Ringebo, at the parsonage of the Dean (*Provst*) of Gudbrandsdalen, Dr Neils Christian Hald (1808–1885). I did not, however, go thither directly, but at the advice of Daae, posted over the hills to Drammen, a magnificent drive by a very circuitous route. Daae had given me letters of introduction; he had passed his youth in that town, and was Professor of History there until he was brought to Christiania. His friends received me with generous hospitality, and among the merchant princes of Drammen I found a greater appearance of luxury than I happened to meet with in the capital. When I finally reached Ringebo, I was disappointed to find that Asbjørnsen had been obliged to leave for Romsdalen, on his duties as Torvmester or Forester-General. I was equally unlucky in an attempt to see the poet Kristoffer Jansen (1841–1899) at his school-house at Fykse-in-Gausdal, for he was spending the holidays at Tromsø, in Finmark. After a most enjoyable stay in the picturesque parsonage of the kind Halds, I returned to Christiania.

On the 7th of August I was back in Stor Gade, and was helping Lökke with the notes to a school-book in English literature which he was just publishing; afterwards we called on the Hellenist, Frederik Ludvig Vibe (1803–1881), who was Librarian of the Cathedral School, and a great ally of Lökke and Daae. I was shown his translation of Æschylus into Norse. My acquaintance with the group of Ibsen's friends was now further extended, for on the evening of the next day (August 8), Ludwig Daae asked me to supper, and, when I arrived, I found, beside the host, Michael Birkeland and Dr Oluf Rygh.

I have already mentioned Birkeland's position at the Rolls Office, which he had entered in 1852, and now commanded. He was not, I think, ambitious of literary fame, and he had at that time published, of an original kind, little except pamphlets. His best-known work was his minutely executed 'Reports of the earliest sessions of the Storting,' but this was only a part of his multifarious research into the whole political history of the country. Birkeland was the life and soul of the *Norske historiske Forening* (Norwegian Historical Society), which then and since did so much for the science of history. He was constantly publishing for the government inedited matter from the very copious archives under his charge. Underneath the mask of the archivist he barely concealed a burning political ambition to be a part of the new constitutional life of Norway. The Master of the Rolls was one of the most attractive men

I met in Scandinavia. He was still, in early middle age, very handsome, well set-up, with a fine head excellently poised above broad shoulders, and with brilliant, dancing eyes. The fault of Norwegians in that day was their deadly seriousness, and their excessive sensitiveness to the slightest indication of criticism. But Birkeland was superior to this local weakness, and was genial, without the least pomposity. The fourth member of our party, Oluf Rygh (1833-1899), was united with Birkeland in his devotion to archeology. He also had at that time published very little, but I was told that his investigations were of the highest value, as indeed they amply proved to be. He was the bosom-friend of Birkeland, with whom he formed a singular contrast, being as reserved as the other was effusive, and a small, squat figure, with a round bald head and a bare face, horny and spectacled, which reminded my pert fancy of the shell of a crab.

Daae's house, where we met, was in the country, to the west of Christiania, on the Drammensvej, and close to the sea, with a fine view across the fjord to the royal palace of Oskarshol. There was much conversation at supper about politics, and my companions were emphatic in their conviction that the only hope for a healthy development of the Norwegian nation was a return to conservative methods. Daae spoke with deep resentment of the 'fanatical measures of the Radical party,' and with horror of the peasant leader Sören Jaabæk (born 1814), who had just become very prominent owing to his being refused Holy Communion by his parish priest, Pastor Lassen, as a protest against his republican views. My friends thought that the incumbent of Lyngdal had behaved with courage and propriety in 'fencing the table' against him. When the meal was concluded, Birkeland proposed my health, and, standing up in the Norse fashion, made a little speech. He said 'Englishmen often come to us that they may climb our mountains or fish in our lakes, but it is rare indeed for a young man of letters to visit us that he may investigate what is most dear to us, our native literature, the labour of our hearts and our heads.' He also spoke at length with regard to the 1000 years' festival, which appeared to occupy the thoughts of the whole group.

We all came away together, Daae accompanying us to the boundary of the City. At this western end, Christiania then (1872) consisted of very new and fantastic villas whose inhabitants, Daae told me, had never got over the affront which the poet Welhaven had paid them of calling their suburb Snobopolis: which name still stuck to it. It was midnight when we reached the heart of the city, and as the hour boomed forth

from the Cathedral, Birkeland held me there in the great square while he discoursed on the history of the building, and on the vestiges of Catholic architecture in Norway.

On the 9th of August, I spent the morning with Lökke in his study, and then we paid a visit to L. K. Daa (1809–1877), the ethnographer and archeologist. I have said that even Norwegians were easily confused between Daae and Daa, and they escaped from the dilemma by calling the younger ‘Bibliothekaren’ and the elder ‘Grænskeren,’ the title of the newspaper he had edited. Daa, to whom I presented Tennyson’s message, was extremely gracious, and he took me over to the Ethnological Museum, of which he was Director, and showed me some objects recently come to him from Lapland and Finland. Daa was a man of great eccentricity of appearance, tall and gaunt, with limbs flung wildly about, and his fine head recklessly bestrewn with disordered hair, grizzled and reddish. He was very restless and active, and talked English admirably; he admitted to me that he was a full-blown Anglomaniac. Daa was very much pleased to hear from me that Tennyson recollected their meeting when the poet visited Norway in 1858; Daa had served on that occasion as Tennyson’s cicerone. He told me that there was great trouble caused by the English poet’s extreme near-sightedness, which made him unable to drive himself in the little karjol which was then the only mode of conveyance in the interior of Norway.

Next day, I went with Lökke to visit the lexicographer and inventor of the ‘landsmaal,’ Ivar Aasen (1813–1896), who lived in one little room, containing a bed, two chairs and a few shelves of linguistic books. He has exercised an immense influence on the language and literature of his country. I found Aasen a prematurely shrivelled little man, with a parchment face, thin, shy and nervous. In conversation he was dull, until Lökke spoke about philology, when his eyes began to sparkle and his cheeks to flush. He talked, then, quite fast, but with a curious inward manner of speech; I confess I could not understand what he was saying.

In the afternoon Lökke and Birkeland took me for a long drive to Frognersæteren, a cottage high up in the mountain above Christiania, whence there is a magnificent view over the whole valley, and even to the Swedish frontier. The fjord, though seven miles away, seems at our feet, and is visible as far down as Moss. Up at the sæter we were received by Professor Torkel Aschehoug (1822–1909), who had been so kind as to wish that I should be presented to him. Aschehoug was the leading jurist of Norway, perhaps of Scandinavia, at that time. His

great book on the Laws of Norway, which was appearing in slow instalments, contained in a form never before approached the history and the essence of the national constitution. He had been for a quarter of a century professor of civil law at the University of Christiania; he had taken up, and pushed much farther, the investigations of J. R. Keyser, when that eminent jurist died in 1864. But the extraordinary respect with which Aschehoug was regarded in the group of friends was founded on other qualities than were included in his scientific reputation. He had been drawn more and more definitely into practical politics; for the last four years he had been the leading member of the Storting for Christiania. I was told that he was 'the coming man,' the heaven-born leader of the constitutional party which was about to reorganise Norway, and drive back the onset of the horde of radicals and peasants. I was told to observe Aschehoug, for I should live to see him the greatest politician in the North of Europe.

When we found him at the sæter, my companions greeted him with a mixture of warm affection and deep respect. He reminded me, in the eyes and mouth, and in his general bearing, of Mr Gladstone. Aschehoug was very polite to me, but I found him very alarming, and was glad that he mainly talked politics with Birkeland. In the evening, Birkeland, whose kindness to me was untiring, took me across to the eastern side of Christiania, to Oslo, the city which was destroyed to build the new capital. He showed me what he believed to be the sites of the mediæval palace and cathedral; and, so far as he could judge, the exact scene of the great battle between Haakon and Skule, which Ibsen paints in his *Kongsemnerne*. It was thrilling to go over the vestiges of the ancient city with so enthusiastic and so learned a guide as Birkeland. As it grew late, we supped together at a restaurant, and then Birkeland, in very high spirits, declared he would show me 'the night-side' of Christiania. However, we saw nothing very exciting or amusing.

Of the subsequent days of my visit to Christiania, whence I returned to Hull towards the end of August, I find nothing particular to relate. My last evening was spent at the Lökkes', in company with Daae, Birkeland and a very lively Mr Thoresen, who was a near relative of Ibsen and related amusing anecdotes of the poet's manners. Lökke went down to the quay with me next morning, and stood waving his hat as the 'Scotia' slipped down the fjord.

EDMUND GOSSE.

LONDON.