



# THE FOLK HIGH-SCHOOLS OF DENMARK AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A FARMING COMMUNITY

**HOLGER BEGRUP**  
FREDERIKSBORG FOLK HIGH-SCHOOL

BY

**HANS LUND**  
RODDING FOLK HIGH-SCHOOL

**PETER MANNICHE**  
INTERNATIONAL PEOPLE'S COLLEGE  
HLSINGØR (ELSINØRE)

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
**SIR MICHAEL SADLER**  
MASTER OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, OXFORD

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*NEW EDITION*

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## SECOND EDITION

*Two years have passed since the first edition was published. The intermediate period has made some alterations necessary and a few more illustrations have been added.*

## INTRODUCTION

The farmers of Denmark have won the admiration of the world by their alert courage in quickly adapting themselves to changes in economic opportunity and by the intellectual and moral power which they have shown in their successful achievement of many-sided co-operation. All who have visited the country know that among its agricultural population certain qualities of mind and character which have peculiar value under modern conditions are »in widest commonalty spread«. And yet it is not long since the qualities were developed. Almost within the memory of men still living, the Danish farmer had an outlook and a habit of mind very different from those which characterise him to-day. In the early years of the nineteenth century the Danish peasant was still unprogressive; sullen and suspicious; averse from experiment; incapable of associated enterprise. To-day he is forward-looking, cheerful, scientifically minded, resourceful, co-operative. To what causes is due the remarkable change in the tone and temper of a large rural population?

The book which Mr. Begtrup, Mr. Lund and Mr. Man-  
niche have written gives the answer to this question. The secret is open. Character, as Goethe said, makes charac-  
ter. A group of greathearted patriots moved their fellow countrymen by their teaching and by their example. Their teaching was not occasional but systematic: and their

precepts were distilled in corporate life. Danish experience confirms the truth of the epigram: »Educational bands make the strongest ties.«

The man whose personality imprinted itself first on a small body of disciples and ultimately upon the peasantry of Denmark, was N. S. F. Grundtvig (1783—1872) pastor, poet, historian and educational reformer. What Arnold of Rugby did for England, Grundtvig in another sphere of education did for Denmark. Mr. J. S. Thornton, the veteran schoolmaster, who has done more than anyone to make England realise Denmark's message in social reform, wrote some years ago short but moving descriptions of Grundtvig's life-work.\*) Grundtvig, like Thomas Arnold, was a Christian Radical. Both won unpopularity in some circles, enthusiastic devotion in others. Arnold narrowly escaped dismissal from the headmastership of Rugby through his outspokenness. The outspoken Grundtvig had, in a material sense, the more chequered career. His travels as a poor scholar, helped by a travelling stipend from the king of Denmark, brought him to the British Museum. We English may be proud to think that what he saw in England deepened his belief in liberty and in the power of wise, inspiring education to enhance the manliness of the people. »It is my highest wish as a citizen«, he wrote, »that soon there may be opened a Danish High School accessible to young people all over the land where they may become better acquainted with themselves in particular, and where they will receive guidance in all civic duties and relationships, getting to know their

\*) in Special Reports on Educational Subjects (Board of Education) 1897 vol. 1 pp. 593 ff; also 1907 vol. 17 pp. 105—129 and in Continuation Schools in England and Elsewhere

\*) Manchester University Press) 1907 pp. 487 ff.

country's real needs. Their love of their country shall be nourished by the mother tongue, their nation's history, and by Danish song. Such schools will be a well of healing for our people.«

A little sentimental perhaps to our ears, but sincere and, as events proved, in the highest degree practical. The People's High Schools founded by Grundtvig and his disciples (chief among them Christen Kold 1816—1870) gave the essence of a liberal education to farmers' sons and daughters. The humanities, which was all that the schools taught, did not breed ineffectuals. Between 1860 and 1880 they worked a miracle of culture in the Danish country side. The town folk were, as a whole, impervious. But the peasantry was transformed.

In the seventies and early eighties of the last century, Danish agriculture was hard hit by foreign competition in the grain markets of Europe. Wheat fell in value and at that time the chief product of Danish farms was corn. The Danish peasantry turned for a remedy to technical improvements, not to protection. It changed over from the export of wheat to butter and bacon. It proved itself mobile, intelligent, heartily co-operative. And it is universally admitted that the agricultural population could not, but for the work of the People's High Schools, have shown adaptability so great, open-mindedness so intelligent. Grundtvig's policy had found the issue he predicted. Co-operative life in an atmosphere of liberal education had given practical culture. The new leaders of the peasantry, the organisers of the new and effective co-operation, were for the most part High School men. »The co-operative dairies« wrote Mr. Alfred Poulsen of Ryslinge, who read a memorable lecture at the Oxford Summer Meeting in August 1894, »rose like magic.« Butter and bacon saved



Danish agriculture. Behind the new and swift reorganisation of one of the most conservative and individualistic of industries were brains, leadership and unselfish public spirit. The People's High Schools inspired their pupils with energy and idealised labour. »We clenched our fists as we listened to the lectures and yearned to go out and set to work.« In the schools the young men learnt to trust one another. In co-operative enterprise they translated that trust into terms of associated credit. The schools gave them a wide outlook, opening in the pupils' minds new windows through which they looked out on the world. With this effective culture, and with the faith which went with it, the young men and young women saved Danish farming. »The schools awakened in them a yearning for knowledge and a desire to work.«

University College.  
Oxford, June 1926.

M. E. SADLER.

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# BOOK I.

## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	<i>Sir Michael Sadler</i>	Page
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### BOOK I.

#### CHAPTER

1. The Rise of the Danish Peasantry	<i>Hans Lund</i>	15
2. — — — — — II	— —	34
3. Co-operation in Denmark .....	— —	46
4. High-School Influences in the Rural Districts .....	— —	61
5. The Influences of the High-Schools in Northern Slesvig 1864—1920..	— —	69

### BOOK II.

#### CHAPTER

1. The History of the Folk High-Schools N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783—1872). Father of the Folk High-Schools	<i>Holger Begtrup</i>	79
2. The First Period of the Folk High-Schools. 1844—1864. Christen Kold.....	— —	97
3. The Second Period of the Folk High-Schools. 1864—1900'.....	— —	109
4. The Folk High-Schools of the Twentieth Century .....	— —	128

14

CHAPTER		Page
5. A Day at a High-School.....	<i>Peter Manniche</i>	140
6. Borup's High-School, Copenhagen	— —	146
7. The International People's College	— —	155
INDEX.....		171

---

## INDEX.

- Aarhus Grammar School 80.
- Absolute Monarchy 24.
- Absalon 80.
- Agricultural Societies 35, 36, 40.
- Agricultural Methods 38, 39, 41.
- Agricultural Schools.
  - Number of Students 42, 44, 57, 58.
  - Reason for their being founded 41, 42.
  - Date when founded 42.
  - Relationship between Agricultural Schools and High Schools 42, 43, 126.
  - The Agricultural School at Lyngby 126.
  - State Agricultural Advisory Dept. 126.
- Agricultural Tribunal of Investigation (Final Reports) 22.
- Appel, Jacob 131.
- Ashley, Professor W. G. 22, 43.
- Askov High-School.
  - Ludvig Schrøder and his work at 44, 111, 121, 122, 123, 124, 163.
  - Poul la Cour, teacher at 56, 122, 123.
  - Autumn meetings at 124.
  - Extended Courses at 73.
  - The Work of the School during the Slesvig Holstein Controversy 112.
  - Prominent ex-pupils of 141.
  - Curriculum 120, 121, 122.
  - The Village of Askov 124.
  - Charlotte Schrøder and her work at 117, 118, 119, 120.
- Autumn meetings 124.

Beowulf 87.  
 Bertelsen, S. 33.  
 Bjørnson, Bjørnstjerne 28.  
 Borup, Johan 132, 146.  
 Brandes, Georg 30, 110.  
 Bredsdorff, Thomas 140, 166.  
 Buus, Inspector 40.

Collective Liability 46.  
 Constitution, the new 24, 36.  
 Constitutional struggle 30, 31, 32, 121, 127.  
 Constitutional Government 98, 101.  
 Conservatives 39, 48.  
 Continuation Schools 66, 72, 75, 135.

#### **Co-operation in Denmark.**

Co-operative Associations 28, 39, 41, 58, 59, 125, 127.  
 Co-operative wholesale Society 53.  
 Co-operative stores 47.  
 Essential difference between co-operation in Denmark and  
 that of other countries 47.  
 High-School influences bearing on co-operation 50, 51, 52.  
 Co-operation in the dairying 53, 54, 55.  
 Chairmen and managers of the co-operative movement 56, 57.  
 Network of organisations serving a Danish farm 58, 59.  
 Denmark's especial contribution to co-operation 60.  
 Co-operation in Denmark (History) 46—60.  
 Cour, Poul la 56, 122.  
 Crisis, economic 36, 37, 39.

#### **Curriculum.**

At ordinary High-School 140—145.  
 At Askov extended High-School 120, 121, 122.  
 At the International Peoples' College 163, 164, 165.

Dairying 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 114.  
 Danish Association 92, 100.  
 Defeat in 1864 138.  
 Divisions, political between Town and Country 29.

»Eight Days People« 132.  
 Encyclopedia, Danish Biographical 43.  
 Esbjerg High-School 146.  
 Estates, Large 21.

Farms, medium sized 21.  
 Farmers' Association 36.  
 Feilberg, H. F. 66.  
 »Friends of the Peasants« 26.

Gaardmænd 42.  
 George, Henry 33, 130.  
 German invasion 70.  
 Germany: defeat of Denmark by 138, 67—75.  
 Government, local 42, 139.  
 Grants, State 134, 139.  
 Growth of a Peasant Citizenship 7—10, 15—45.

**Grundtvig, Nicolaj Frederik Severin.**

His early influence on intellectual life 26.  
 His faith in, and support of, the peasants 28, 29.  
 His activities as public lecturer 51, 98.  
 Date of birth 79.  
 Sketch of life and work 79—96.  
 His conception of History 141.  
 His belief in the power of »the living word« 162.  
 Community spirit inspired by 63.  
 Grundtvig and Kold, the beginning of the Folk High-School  
 movement 100—108.  
 References to Ludvig Schrøder's application of Grundtvigian  
 principles 110—127.  
 Democratic spirit of the Grundtvigian High-Schools — 161.  
 Grundtvigian High-Schools compared with other High-  
 Schools 146, 162.  
 Grundtvig's ideas and the town dwellers. 146—154.  
 Grundtvig's House 132.  
 Quotations from his songs 27, 38, 108, 113, 162.  
 Gymnastics 65, 135, 142.  
 Gymnastic Societies 64, 65.

Helsingør in Denmark, International People's College 155—169.  
 Hertel H. 50.  
 High-School Association 132.

### High-Schools.

Number of students of, from towns 18.  
 Number of students of, from country 19.  
 Administration and daily routine of 133.  
 Statistics relating to attendance at 133.  
 in Norway 134.  
 in Sweden 134.  
 Courses 134.  
 Curriculum 134.  
 Lectures 135.  
 number in Denmark 138.  
 Object of 139.  
 Hindholm High-School 108.  
 History, High-School teaching of 141, 164.  
 Holberg, Ludvig 15.  
 Holders, small (Husmænd 32, 42, 48, 130, 133.  
 Holdings, small 21.  
 — , practice and routine of 21.

Industrialisation 32.  
 International People's College, Committees of 161.  
 International People's College, staff of 166.  
 International People's College, courses at 164, 166.

Kold, Christen 51, 67, 97, 108, 128, 137, 138.  
 Krak's Blue Book 44.

Land, Reform Legislation 19.  
 — , Allotment of 17, 18.  
 — , Ownership of 23.  
 Lassen, Vilhelm 56.  
 Left Party (Venstre) 27, 30, 31, 32, 33, 127.  
 Liberalism 21, 24, 25, 26, 32, 48, 94.  
 Ling, Peter Henrik 64.  
 Lutheranism 81, 86.



- Manors 34.  
 Marx, Karl 116.  
 Meeting houses 62, 63, 67, 93, 94, 139.
- Nexø, Andersen Martin 153.  
 Nielsen, Director, Anders 51.  
 Norway 82, 134.  
 Nutzhorn, H. 110, 120.  
 Nørregaard, Jens 120, 121.
- Peasant Citizenship in Denmark 7—10, 15—45.  
 Physiocrats 19.
- Quakers, the 156, 167.
- Radicalism 32, 33.  
 Rationalism 80.  
 Romanticism 80, 122.  
 Rural Districts 61, 130.  
 Rødding, High-School 97, 98, 100, 102, 107, 112, 137.
- Savings Banks 36.  
 Saxo's Denmark's Chronicle 85.  
 Schrøder, Ludvig 44, 45, 110—127, 147, 163.  
 — , Charlotte 117, 118, 119.  
 Singing in High-Schools 140, 141, 145.  
 Single Tax movement 33.  
 Skjoldborg, Johan 154.  
 Slaughter Houses, co-operative 59.  
 Slesvig Holstein 25, 69, 70, 73, 74, 75, 98, 109.  
 Sonne, Dean 46.  
 Steffens Henrik 80, 92.  
 Students at High-Schools, number of 18, 19.  
 Subsidies, State 31, 107, 134, 139.  
 Sundbo, J. P. 146.  
 Sweden 134.
- Technical Schools 125, 126.  
 Tesdorf, Mr. 41.  
 Testrup High-School 120.

Thisted, birthplace of Christen Kold 99.

Town Trades 33.

Trier Ernst 64, 121, 126.

University Extension Movement 62.

~~Week-at-a-High-School~~ Movement 132.

Youth Associations 63, 65.

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AN invaluable contribution to the study of education which few who are interested in the subject can afford to miss.

DAILY NEWS, 19th. October 1926.

This is the story of how the country folk of Denmark, about a century ago, began by the establishment of popular high schools, providing a general culture to be gradually transformed from inefficient to highly efficient agriculturists.

BRITISH WEEKLY, 11.—11. 1926.

No single factor has been of greater importance in developing the modern prosperity of Denmark than the folk high schools.

THE OBSERVER, 9.—1. 1927.

This book, by three Danish educationists representing the folk high schools of Denmark, will be studied with great interest by those who see a noble future for rural adult education in this country. The Danish movement was due, as is pointed out by Sir Michael Sadler in his valuable introduction, to N. S. F. Grundtvig (1783—1872), »pastor, poet, historian, and educational reformer«. England is ripe for such a movement, and it may be that in due time we shall have our Grundtvig.

TIMES EDUCATIONAL SUPPLEMENT.

30th. October 1926.

The book is one which none can afford to neglect who believe that in adult education, the development of rural life and the restoration of a reasonable religious idealism lie three of the best clues to the reconstruction of industry and establishment of peace in social and international life, after the years of open warfare and subsequent condition of disorder and discontent.

FRIEND, 12th. November 1926.

The exciting part of the story is that these schools never aimed directly at material progress. Their inspiration was and is idealistic, and their purpose was to promote culture and the growth of character. Though they were never linked to any party or church, their atmosphere was always one of free religion and liberalism in the wider and better sense of the word. They are residential colleges, in which young men and women, who have had only an elementary education, spend five months in winter or three in summer. Its history is admirably told in this attractive little book, in which perhaps, the British reader will find that the chapter which concerns him most directly is the lively sketch by Peter Manniche, of the International High School, Elsinore, in which, British, German and other foreign students are working with Danes, on the Danish model, and broadening its purpose in the interests of international idealism and peace.

NEW LEADER, 12th. November 1926.

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EVERYONE who wishes to understand modern Denmark is advised to buy and read this little book, together with the report of Sir William Ashley on Denmark presented to the British Board of Agriculture in 1924.

GEOGRAPHICAL TEACHER,

A first-hand account of an extraordinary development in rural education, humanistic and vocational. A rural revival in England seems highly probable; indeed one can already discern its early stages. The example of Denmark is, therefore, of special interest at the present time, and this short but sufficient treatise, printed in Denmark we observe, thus appears at the right moment.

JOURNAL OF EDUCATION, December 1926.

Americans will still have difficulty in understanding the Danish movement, but this volume provides an admirable approach; at least, no one need now be satisfied with second-hand interpretations.

THE NEW REPUBLIC, 8th. December 1926.

In this singularly interesting book, the work of three Danish writers, all of whom are actively engaged in the field of education, we are given a valuable survey of the origin and development of the Folk High-School and its extraordinary influence in moulding the destiny of modern Denmark.

IRISH INDEPENDENT, 18th December 1926.

As a description of the high school movement, the book will be welcomed by a large circle of cooperators and educationists. A book like this, written from the inside by writers who are in the true line of descent from the prophets and inspirers of the high school movement, has an appeal that other books do not possess, for we catch the spirit of the high school, as well as gain an understanding of the objects and methods of the schools.

Mr. Begtrup contributes the chapter on the history of the high school movement. No better interpreter of Grundtvig and his successor would have been found.

CO-OPERATIVE NEWS, 15th. January 1927.

In spite of the old and close connection of Denmark with England, it is only very recently that England has paid much attention to a movement which has transformed the people of Denmark. Even now far too little is known in this country of the Danish Folk High Schools and what they have accomplished. Three of the present-day leaders of this movement, Holger Begtrup, Hans Lund and Peter Manniche, have now presented an English public with this book in admirable English, and there is no longer any excuse for ignorance on the subject.

GOODWILL, 15th. January 1927.

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## THE FOLK HIGH-SCHOOLS OF DENMARK

THE role of the Folk High-Schools in this intellectual levelling up can be understood only in its historical setting. Of this a lucid summary is provided in the first section of the book by Hans Lund. Mr. Lund's narrative affords an apt illustration for the familiar controversy, of interest to all educators, as to how far «ideal» factors, social philosophies and the like are real influences in historic development. The author asserts the view, prevalent among his colleagues, that the Danish economic and political renaissance is to be attributed primarily to the Schools. The community life of the school is a microcosm of Society. The phenomenon is of special concern to the social psychologist: it implies the rapid growth of a new «social heritage»; what had made the national mentality fit soil for the new seed? The gradual and peaceful growth of a co-operative spirit is specially worthy of note — without a frontal attack and without coercion; individualism and competition have been in large measure eliminated. Does this purely voluntary collectivism offer an alternative to our rival political creeds, and does it in any way harmonize with the ideals of our modern «Functionalists»? And what is true of agricultural production holds good for higher education; the Folk High Schools are not units of a centralized system under State control, but arise spontaneously under the guidance of some pioneer who, if he makes good, can acquire assistance from public funds. Readers of the volume will find therefore a historic survey of the movement, an interpretation of its aims, and a detailed but summary account of its present position.

JOURNAL OF ADULT EDUCATION, March 1927.

This little English book, printed in Copenhagen, furnishes also a clear picture of these schools as going concerns. They are all privately owned, the proprietor usually being the principal, or warden. They are residence schools, with a small staff of three or four teachers. Being with the young people, who come to them voluntarily. Public aid is received both by the schools and by needy students, but the state exercises no control over either.

NEW YORK HERALD-TRIBUNE, 22.—5.—1927.

The book will be found of the greatest interest and should prove an inspiration to everyone who is convinced of the necessity of making our education in India, real and practical.

PIONEER ALI AHABAD, 10.—7.—1927.

The account of Denmark's Adult Schools and their effect on national life are admirably described.

PROGRESS, Oct 1927.

It is wisdom to glance occasionally into our neighbour's garden. It tends to a just estimate of the virtue of our own activities. Those to whom we have entrusted the great task of shaping our systems of education should find inspiration in the work of Grundtvig and his disciples as revealed to us in this stimulating volume.

IRISH SCHOOL WEEKLY