# THE MODERN WORLD A SURVEY OF HISTORICAL FORCES Volume III: NORWAY

## THE MODERN WORLD

A SURVEY OF HISTORICAL FORCES

Edited by The Right Hon. H. A. L. FISHER, M.P.

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## NORWAY BY G. GATHORNE HARDY

WITH A FOREWORD BY
THE RIGHT HON. H. A. L. FISHER, M.P.



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## EDITOR'S FOREWORD

Norway is a country with no enemies and many friends. Some are attracted to Norway by sport; others by the stern beauty of its rockbound coast: others, again, have come under the spell of the old Norse literature, and are thus led on to take interest in the fabric and growth of Norse society. The merit of Mr. Gathorne Hardy is that, quite apart from his exact and well-proved Norse scholarship, he writes with a hearty enjoyment of every side of Norway-of its fishing, its scenery, its literature old and new-and is, besides, thoroughly instructed in its political and economic history. He is thus able, in the short space allotted to him by the editor of this series, to present a balanced view of Norwegian civilisation founded on intimate knowledge and inspired by a lively recollection of delightful hours spent among the fiords and fells of his favourite land.

H. A. L. FISHER.

### INTRODUCTION

I no not think that I am giving too free a rein to my enthusiasm for the country and its inhabitants in claiming that Norway is rightly accorded an independent place in this series. If we lay the stress on the first word of the expression "Modern World," we may plead that the renaissance of Norwegian independence dates from the present century—1905; that, though not directly engaged in the late war as a belligerent. Norway has been economically affected by it to an extent not traceable in the case of any other neutral; and that, apart from this, she is at present . undergoing a most interesting period of transition in spheres as apparently distinct as those of industry and religion. But besides all this, it may be urged that a country which has achieved so large a measure of world-wide distinction in proportion to her scanty population deserves special and individual considera-The great literature of the Eddic poems and the prose sagas is not the common heritage of Scandinavia; it was the achievement of Norwegians, whether at home or in colonies which they had founded does not greatly affect the question. Names such as Holberg, Ibsen, and Björnson in literature, or Amundsen and Nansen in other fields of activity, are known and respected all over the world, and, while other names might be added to the list, this is no bad showing for a nation whose total population, even at the present day, is not much more than 21 millions.

One is nevertheless perpetually confronted by the fact that Englishmen as a whole think in terms of Scandinavia rather than of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. When remonstrated with, they invariably demand a comparison, and wish to know what, after all, are the essential differences between the three nations. The question is rather embarrassing, not because great differences do not in fact exist, but because comparisons are proverbially odious, and apt to sound invidious. Conscious as I am of the fine qualities possessed in common by the whole of Scandinavia, I am reluctant to

pursue the matter deeply, and would rather leave the reader of this book to make his own deductions from it. A few of the factors which tend to distinguish Norway from her neighbours may, however, be indicated.

Geography makes of Denmark a continental, and of Sweden a Baltic nation. The backwardness of Russia has turned the interests of Sweden also to the continent of Europe, where, in the past, she attained a great reputation. Norway is naturally the most isolated She has been less subject to external of the three. influences than either of her neighbours, and, in so far as she has been susceptible to these, the country with which she has had the closest relations has been Great There is, in fact, a remarkable sympathy between Norway and ourselves; so much so that Norwegians have assured me, with every appearance of sincerity, that they can more easily appreciate the point of view of an Englishman than that even of a Swede or a Dane.

But Norway remains predominantly Norway. While Sweden has taken pride in a cosmopolitan outlook, and Denmark has continuously been exposed to German influences, Norway has developed on more national lines. The historical fact that, in union with each of the other two countries, she was forced into a subordinate position has accentuated nationalist sentiment to an exceptional degree. Fortunately, the physical circumstances which rendered her inaccessible to alien influences have conduced to the formation and preservation of peculiarly fine characteristics. Her people have always, even under the most adverse circumstances, been able to retain an exceptional measure of freedom, while they have learned, in isolation, to think and act for themselves. In Denmark, a country of short distances and relatively easy communications, tyranny, in various forms, had greater scope. peasantry there were little better than serfs until nearly the end of the eighteenth century. An allpowerful though effete aristocracy was only super-

seded, in 1660, by an autocratic monarchy which lasted almost to living memory. Bjerregaard's panegyric on Norway as frihedens tempel could never have been applied to Denmark without irony. In spite, therefore, of their long political subordination to Denmark, Norwegians seem always to have felt a certain measure of proud superiority to their masters. Molesworth records this attitude as long ago as 1692. and I am afraid that, however little it may be justified at the present day, the average Norwegian's sentiment, towards the Dane would still be fairly expressed by the Scotsman's phrase, "Puir wee bodies." His feelings may be as affectionate, when he is not annoyed by some legacy of the old régime such as the Greenland question or the retention of Norwegian archives, as those of a man for a woman or a child, but they usually retain, I think, a trace of subconscious superiority. Possibly the disproportion between the size of the respective countries, considered apart from their populations, to some extent contributes, however illogically. to the persistence of this attitude.

As between Sweden and Norway, the boot has hitherto tended to be on the other leg. Four hundred years of Danish domination, while it left the Norwegian still personally free and independent, levelled the classes of Norway into a homogeneous mass with a superficial resemblance to peasantry. To the Swede, who prided himself upon courtly manners and fine social distinctions, the Norwegian population seemed rather boorish and uncivilised. Though this impression was in fact unjustified, and based on a misunderstanding of the superficial appearances, there was in reality, until recently, a very marked and fundamental difference between the social organisation of Norway and of Sweden. In Sweden, as elsewhere, democracy has of late made its influence felt, but within living memory the situation was pretty much that described by a character in Newland's Forest Scenes in Norway and Sweden—a book, by the way, which is on the whole

distinctly pro-Swedish. "We in England don't care much about precedence, as you know. . . . But it is not so here; they all know their places, like schoolboys, and fight for them like dogs at a feeding-trough if you happen to make a mistake about them. . . . Half the people you meet with here are counts and barons . . . but, besides this, there were their confounded orders of knighthood: there are knights of the Cherubim and Seraphim, and knights of the Elephant and Castle, and knights of the Goose and Gridiron, and Heaven knows what besides. Then came the officials, from the Prime Minister down to the postmaster, and their sons and grandsons. Why, there was not a tradesman I dealt with, hardly a beggar I gave a skilling to, who had not a clear right to go before me-aye, and showed every disposition to exercise it. too!"

This, needless to say, was a caricature, even at the time when it was written, but it embodied a substantial truth. Norway, on the other hand, was at this time and even earlier almost completely free from class distinctions: there, the raw material for a democracy was present even before such a form of government was established. It is easy to see, therefore, how such conflicting ideas as to the proper organisation of society were bound to lead to misunderstanding and friction under any form of union between the two countries. The Norwegian to the Swede seemed rustic and uncouth; the Swede to the Norwegian artificial and arrogant. The Union broke for more tangible reasons, but differences in the national character of the two nations prevented it from ever being really harmonious.

But enough of this subject, upon which I have only entered reluctantly and under pressure. No one would dream of expecting three cousins, each born in a different environment, educated in a different school, and engaged in a different profession, to be exactly alike, especially if they had notoriously quarrelled during the greater part of their past lives. They would still preserve some strong resemblances, the

separate achievements of each would be a source of some pride to all, and all would feel a certain amount of family solidarity, but it would be unscientific simply to lump them together as "the Browns" or "the Robinsons." The indiscriminate use of the convenient expression "Scandinavia" is open to the same objection, and now that every variety of union tried since 1319 has finally broken down, it is time that we began to think and speak of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark.

Of these three nations, Norway should be to Englishmen the most interesting and the most intelligible. Interesting, as the least affected by continental influences, and therefore the best fitted to illustrate racial characteristics, in so far as it differs from ourselves; particularly interesting now, when it is undergoing a period of rapid transition, the ultimate effects of which are very difficult to forecast. Intelligible because through centuries of almost unbroken and generally friendly intercourse the Englishman and the Norwegian have developed a very similar mentality. the Norwegian antagonism to us during the South African War was animated by a fundamentally British sentiment, sympathy with the little man who puts up a plucky fight against a big one. In studying Norway we are not only learning something about an interesting and attractive foreign nation, but throwing fresh light upon our own development, habits, and character. is a study which deserves far more elaboration than the present volume can hope to provide, but if it directs attention to the subject and encourages a more general interest, it will not have been written in vain.

For the unstinted help which Norwegians have given me I can never be sufficiently grateful: I fear that they may feel ill-repaid when some topic into which they have entered deeply has had to be dismissed in a few words. I can only plead the necessity for observing some proportion, and assure them that my thanks are not to be measured by the space which I have been able to accord to their respective subjects. Above all, I would

have their friends to know that the opinions expressed are in all cases not theirs but mine. I would not have them held accountable for heretical historical theories or dubious political views. At our next meeting, I can assure them that they will find it all too easy to convert me, at least for the time being, since all my Norwegian acquaintances exert a charm which completely anæsthetises the critical faculty. I take this opportunity of adding that the translations, metrical and otherwise, to be found in the book are also mine. Since the Norwegian language is not very generally understood in this country, some attempts of this kind seemed necessary, especially in dealing with the literature.

The names of all who have helped me with information are too numerous to be recorded, though selection seems invidious. Yet I think I must mention my friend Rolv Laache, Dr. Jakob Worm-Müller, Professor Seip, Professor Paasche, and Mr. Vidnes of the Press section of the Utenriks-Departement. In this country the help which I have received has also come from one who is a Norwegian by birth, though now a naturalised British subject, Sir Karl Knudsen, K.B.E. To all of these, and others whose kindness is no less appreciated, I beg to tender my most grateful thanks.

G. G. H.

July 1925.

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