

1. Universal Historical Learning

Five hundred years have now passed since the time of Dante, from which point we usually date the rebirth of learning. We Norsemen may well be astonished at this, when we realise that Dante was born at the end of the century of Valdemar II, Haakon IV, Saxo, and Snorri Sturluson¹, with which age the Norse spirit expired. But idle astonishment was never more inappropriate than now, when the world is out of joint. If we are to be rescued from the great shipwreck we must learn to wonder only a moment, even at the strangest sight, and then work with twice the energy and with serene composure. Instead of becoming immersed in pointless speculation over the mysterious course of destiny we must strive to understand only as much of it as we need for the moment in order to recognize our calling and proceed on our designated path. For clarity, deep and total, all-penetrating clarity must indeed be the goal for all endeavour with an awareness of life and spirit; but the very fact that it is the goal and the crown makes it impossible for it also to be the staff on our journey, or the helmet that adorns the head in battle. Never therefore has the enemy of the human race hatched so pernicious a lie as the one that clarity should be the birthmark of light and palpability the birthmark of truth. For nothing under the sun tempts the brightest and best souls so much as the appearance of perfection; yet nothing is more certain than that those who clutch at it miss the mark, which they then do not only lose sight of, but turn away from.

It is clearly this disastrous mistake that has not only made many of the deepest thinkers into false guides in the circle they wished to enlighten, but has turned the life of the outstanding nations, both past and present, into great tragedies with the result that an enthusiastic youth and an active manhood gave way only to spiritless,

naked old age, where they childishly reach out for chimeras and play with shadows, until they sink into gloom, learning too late that all appearances deceive and that human life perishes through the very enlightenment that turns into a shadow.

Thus it must neither surprise nor distress us that the Italian erudition, which was always an illusory idea and produced only shadows in the spiritual world, has in reality passed away with the last century, and like its own shadow strives in vain to rise again in our time. But we must realise that now it is our turn. Either learning must perish, or it must be reborn in Scandinavia on a higher level. I say in the North because it is there that the spirit must have its starting-point, though not its limits. For if we go back to the thirteenth century, when the spiritual development of the Norsemen was cut short unfulfilled, and it would seem, untimely so, then we see that in the previous five or six centuries, say from the year 700, a kindred spiritual endeavour extended throughout England, our Scandinavia and part of Germany, begun by the emigrant Anglo-Saxons and with the Danes and Icelanders ending the period as its chroniclers.

This time, however, it is the aboriginal Norsemen and not the emigrant ones who must be the spirit's main wheel or there will be no Scandinavian learning. For the emigrant kinsmen are either degenerate, or they have lost so much of their old Norse character that it is a question whether they will even join the movement; there is no question of them leading it, that would be quite impossible. Never, therefore, have we Norsemen been addressed by the signs of the times more earnestly than now; never has so clear a call from the spirit of man gone out to us with the great question – Are you willing to give up the crown your fathers and your emigrant kinsmen have fought so bravely for, or will you with serene composure follow in the old footsteps and imitate, not those who make heroic gestures, but those who take heroic strides, which can be imitated only by taking them? If you want the latter, if you want the best, says the spirit, then consider what is lacking in that idea of development of the life of man, which dissolved into emptiness and impotence. Dare to grasp the idea of man in all its mysteriousness, both high and low, heavenly and earthly, if you ever wish to see it illuminated. And fight like Norsemen, with united strength and with the mutual sacrifice of all the individuality that honesty and truthfulness do not sanction, and which is therefore as incompatible with true wisdom as with true love. Do not brood, but seek light where the testimony of the ages

shows you it can be found, and walk and work in that light: then you will become its children, discover its secrets and inherit its glory. Do not brood over what cannot possibly be comprehended until it has been experienced, but use your life for what is worthy of it and what can set it in the light. And do not hesitate; for now every second is precious, now the tribes are casting lots in our world for the last time. 'Too late' are the worst words of all, for they mean that everything is forfeited.

It is clear to any spirit friendly or hostile, good or bad, that the learning that was most recently cultivated received its death-blow during the French Revolution and must either perish, like the learning of the Greeks, the Romans and the Norsemen, or be transfigured into a higher one that can revive it. For everywhere it is cut off from the life of people, that is it is dead, and in its present form, like everything that is dead, it is hostile to the life of man. And no wonder that this Italian, or neo-Roman, this monastic-Latin, papist spiritual culture, which from its very beginning was an artefact, like Dante's Divine Comedy, and at best a hothouse plant, cannot prolong its days beyond the five centuries, the age of the Phoenix, that seem to be the numbered days for all cultures, since not even those of Greece and Scandinavia, although they sprang from the life of the people and were thus in sympathy with it, could exceed that period of time? Actually I said it *almost* disappeared with the last century; for it has perished on the continent and is resuscitated in vain, so that it is only in England that it still has a sort of existence, as will be seen when Dante's death, like Frey's in Uppsala² can no longer be kept secret there, or when the colossal colleges of Oxford and Cambridge topple down and smash in the process everything that leant on them for support. And these great and glorious monuments, not to petty, dull and lifeless erudition, which has only abused them, but to the spirit of the Anglo-Saxons and the Normans that has been more or less excommunicated from them, they must soon topple unless they are reformed better than the so-called radical reformers wish³, for their reforms would only totally destroy them.

My pen cannot therefore express how fervently I wish that I had a voice that could be heard, not just on this side of the Sound and the Dovre mountains, but on the other side of the North Sea as well, and an oration on my lips to persuade all those in whom there still runs a drop of Norse blood, reflecting a spiritual life, in order to unite them and lay the foundation of a new Danish spiritual culture and

learning, living, popular and all-embracing, while the ruins of the past might still be saved and used to advantage.

However, if my pen cannot even express my wish, being dumb from its mother's womb, even less can it speak for my view of the present, of life and of learning. So when I nevertheless attempt to describe it, it is only in the hope that wherever people will lend an ear to the voice of truth and the advice of wisdom, there will also be eyes to see and tongues to speak freely of the demands of the spirit and the needs of the time.

I assert first that there is no country where the Roman-Italian learning is so firmly established as in England, where quite independent of the state it has sufficient means for its existence so long as the rights of property are upheld, and where the people have had a passion for whatever it hatched, more or less every day, over the centuries: gigantic mechanical contraptions and parliamentary fulminations. So when it topples there, there is nowhere it can be saved.

But I also assert that this learning is not worth saving, for it is hostile to all real life in the world of the spirit and is therefore so far from leading us to an explanation of life and death that, on the contrary, it has been guiding us all its days towards renunciation of the spirit and the spiritual death of the people, except when Luther for a moment harnessed it to the triumphal car of the spirit.

Finally I maintain that when one regards the world of the spirit with Norse eyes in the light of Christianity, one gets the impression of an universal historical development of art and learning that embraces the whole life of man, with all its energies, conditions and achievements. This idea liberates, strengthens and delights all that is in harmony with the temporal welfare of the individual, the nations and the whole race of man, and which must of necessity lead to the most perfect explanation of life that is possible in this world. This Graeco-Norse or new-Danish way of life and culture is what gives the Norse myths, in which it is latent, their universal historical significance, and for us especially an inestimable worth. It is this learning I wanted to portray here, both in its nature and in its contrast to the Romano-Italian life course and spiritual tedium.

To be sure, I find it embarrassing to have to describe something that, like life in its contrast to death, can only be expressed by a living voice, and also to have to discuss in passing something that demands

from us a painstaking argument. But it is my hope that the thoughts of Norse readers need only be directed to the Roman monster, and to the heroic Norse race, which gave this Frost-Giant⁴ its death-blow, for them to see far more clearly than I can depict, how terrible it is for humanity and how shameful for the heroic sons of the North that the badly exorcized ghost of the giant has risen from the Pontine marshes and for five hundred years, now deceptively in a friendly guise, now as an open enemy, has oppressed the nations, pecking out their eyes in an eagle's shape and drinking the blood of their hearts.

It is not only by law of nature that a nation's literature must be congenial to the nation – and what an abomination the Roman then must be! – but it is also a historical fact that nearly all of Roman literature, particularly the poetry, is imitation work, and unlike the Greek and Old Norse did not spring from the life of the people and has not been lovingly cultivated over the centuries. On the contrary, it was produced on a basis of sale and return and put out for show, mostly in the days of the tyrant Augustus, to flatter his ears and gild the chains that through Rome's art and wit had been forged for the people around the great Mediterranean Ocean, and which had now become a well-deserved reward, for itself to wear, that is a plain, unshakable truth. And what sort of an art and learning should develop out of such a literature when in addition it had become the corpse of a dead language, – that was easy to predict. But it has been a heavy lot to bear, as heavy as the Roman yoke in all its forms – like the chains in the hands of the Roman Emperor, like the crozier in the hand of the Roman Pope and like the rod in the hand of the Latin schoolmaster. It fell to Norsemen and the Germans to break these chains and it was their joy to snap the crozier, but so far they have respectfully kissed the rod, although it was the most dangerous and pernicious weapon in the murderer's hidden hand; for it scared the life out of the mother and whipped it out of the children so that they never became men enough to break it.

But broken it will be, whatever we do, just as the chains would have been broken by the barbarians if there had been no Goths, and the crozier by the atheists if Luther had never existed. That, however, is not of the spirit; to mankind it cannot be the same whether the rod is broken by the Jacobins or radicals, by the uncivilized mob and the insubordinate schoolboys, or by the educated, sensible champions of art and learning – any more than history would have had a similar

passage if the Gauls and not the Anglo-Saxons had succeeded the Romans in Britain, or Attila rather than Theodoric had become lord of Rome, or if Vanini⁵ and not Luther had been the scourge of the Pope.

No, the question is now as always whether, when the hour of the tyrant strikes because his cup of sin is full, he will merely change his name and grow viler as he ages, or he really is to be overthrown and wiped out. It is a question of whether we are to have a neo-Franconian barbarism which will be the equivalent of the old-Franconian after the fall of Rome and the destruction of the Goths, or a new-Danish advance transfiguring the old-Danish that rose up on the ruins of Rome throughout the northern hemisphere. My vote goes to the latter; that is what I have been working for all my days, and I hope to enjoy the sight of it in my evening hour without being terrified by the ambiguous omens I have so far seen. These omens, though by no means delusions, are still for the most part evoked by the twilight I could not possibly avoid as I worked my way out of an Egyptian gloom, but which I have now passed beyond.

So when I now speak of a new-Danish development, I do not take the Word Danish in the restricted sense which I have often used before now and even more often used as a term of praise. I mean it in the old Norse sense, when Danish stretched not just from the Ejder to Tromsø, and from the North Sea to the Gulf of Finland, but also across the ocean to the Norse people on the remote Isle of Hercules⁶. Similarly, when I speak of the rebirth of a Christian and old-Danish learning, I do not mean two things that only a poet can get into rhyme, nor do I mean something specifically Christian bound to the Christian faith. I mean rather a Graeco-Norse development which with the aid of the Mosaic-Christian way of thinking will be a living advance and a universal historical one.

For whether one is a Christian or a heathen (Naturalist), one cannot possibly be a historian with a glimpse of the spirit, without immediately seeing that in fact it was neither the Scythians nor the Barbarians, but the superior Christian way of thinking that in the days of Rome gloriously shattered the chains of humanity. And it was the same way of thinking, reborn in Luther, that laid the Roman Pope on his death-bed. And it is this way of thinking alone that has set its universal human stamp on the mentality on the education, and on the learning of the new world of nations. This stamp was lacking in the ancient world; and even the monster of Rome, though it has abused it, has not managed to obliterate it.

Such a spiritless and lifeless learning as the Romano-Italian, which by its nature knows no other elucidation than dissolution; which takes pride in dissolving all things spiritual into thin air and the godhead into the four elements; and which was drawn by the golden age of Augustus only as wolves are by human corpses and worms are by the plague, such a learning must naturally regard Christianity, which obviously interrupted Roman enlightenment and Roman felicity, as really a great disaster so it is no wonder that it explains the surprising effects of Christianity from sheer enthusiasm and fanaticism, and lies and superstition, which, however, the worldly wise will refer to by more urbane and better-sounding names. But one does not need be either an ape or a Roman because one is a heathen; that has been sufficiently demonstrated by the poetry and history of Greece and ancient Scandinavia in particular. And so long as one remains a real human being and feels oneself to be essentially different from the dumb creatures and strangely related to the immortal gods, and spoken to kindly by the spirit of God and Man in all the tongues that are known – well then, one bows in deepest admiration to the spirit that on the Apostles' glowing tongues issued forth in the living word from Jerusalem and worked miracle upon miracle for the good of man to the ends of the earth – the spirit that opens the human eye to see down the wonderful path that awaits the jointly begotten children of heaven and earth, and opens for them a smiling view across the sea of death to the land of the living in the eternal kingdom of the Father of Mankind.

Be he Christian or heathen, Turk or Jew, every man who is aware of his spiritual nature is in himself such a glorious mystery that he casts absolutely nothing aside merely because it is strange and seems as inexplicable as himself. On the contrary, he is almost irresistibly drawn to what is strange – because at heart it resembles himself, and because in it he expects to find the answer to his own mystery – an answer he cannot possibly expect from something he can see through in a trice. Therefore such a person, whether in fact he is of this or that creed has or has no particular faith at all with regard to God, never finds himself attracted by transparently enlightened persons, whose whole wisdom one can learn by heart in an hour and possibly even explain to wise dogs. Rather is he attracted precisely by the mysterious and deep natures that sense more than they see, feel much deeper than they can fathom, and speak with far greater enthusiasm than they themselves are aware of. And there are undoubtedly quite

a number of such people here in Scandinavia who, despite all the Roman enlightenment, shun it like the plague rather than they shun poetry; for I myself have met many both as a lecturer and as a writer.

It is for this reason that I am sure that when Scandinavia awakes, and all ancient peoples must awake in our troubled times, then many will lend an ear to the view that, be it now poetical and historical, of natural or supernatural origin, the Mosaic-Christian way of thinking is the only genuine view of human life. By manifesting itself when all the gods of the heathens were extinct, when all spirit had disappeared and eternity was merely an empty notion, through this and through its unequalled and blessed achievements through eighteen centuries it has genuinely guaranteed its own and Christ's divinity; so, it is that way of thinking which in learning as well as in life, must be the lode star we endeavour to follow. Only must we consider before this can happen, not only the difference between Christianity and Bible faith, but also between Christian faith and the Christian way of thinking, and though we seem far from it, the difference is nonetheless both so evident and so important that understanding of this must be near at hand.

It must of necessity be realised by all enlightened people in the serious, historical Scandinavia that the quarrel and the point at issue between Christians and Naturalists is by no means the divinity of Christ and the Christian way of thinking, the divine effects of which through eighteen centuries are an unassailable proof, the quarrel is a quite different one, which may well be correctly expressed in theological terms as the question of Christ's eternal divinity but which historically expresses itself clearly in the contrary belief about natural man. That natural man is created in the image of God and had in the breath of life from God all that he required to reach his great destiny as a son of God, on that point everyone with spirit in them must agree. And that very early on a great accident befell him that brought the earth around him into an oblique inclination to the heavens, time into a disparity with eternity and human nature into a confusion, this is proved so loud and clear by everyday and universal historical experience that no person with a glimmer of spirit and a spark of truthfulness to him can deny it. The main question is not even what we are to call this great accident, for although, of course, the Naturalist does not like the word 'fall', which like all falls sounds a bit flat, and would rather say error or aberration, yet since both terms may be used and since it is undeniable that every deviation

from the natural course must for a spiritual creature be regarded as sin and lead to a fall, the Naturalist must realize it is not worth quarrelling over that either. The point at issue is only whether the injury can be healed by natural means or not. And that is our great church quarrel in which all mediation must be regarded as ridiculous; for here there is no middle way but an infirmity of purpose that must either be the transition to a particular faith or paralyse all activity and send us crashing into the bottomless pit of self-contradiction, which is everlasting death and the spirit's hell. On the other hand when we become totally aware of our division, and endeavour, each in his particular church to articulate them, we shall no longer fear to be in agreement about everything that can be true under both assumptions. Not until then can experience show whether it is the Christians or the Naturalists who went astray, for by its fruits shall the tree be known. But as long as we continue to be bundled together in one church, all that we do is chaotic, and a quarrel, as bitter as it is pointless, is unavoidable. For the Christians believe that through the Fall human nature has become so corrupted that all true healing is impossible, but they celebrate Baptism as a true rebirth in water, in which the believer is spiritually recreated. To raise this new person to a divine union with the Saviour and the Divine Man, Jesus Christ, is the task of their church, both individually and in general. The Naturalist cannot possibly admit this without being guilty of a monstrous contradiction, but must declare this faith to be a great misunderstanding, which, though unable to annihilate the divine effects of the Christian way of thinking, has nonetheless weakened it greatly and prevented enlightenment. So on the contrary he has to claim that the old human nature both can and must be healed, so that it is in no way the purpose of Christianity to be absorbed into Christ, but only that one must spiritually absorb Him into oneself, as the divine example of what we must all be cleansed and clarified for: children of man who raise themselves to God's children. People with spirit will immediately perceive how all important this genuine discrepancy is, without it making any more difference to the history of our Christian way of thinking than the contrary theories in astronomy do to our contemplation of the heavens. In fact it makes the same difference, inasmuch as we derive the same phenomena from contrary grounds, for in both cases it is only a question of whether the sun goes round the earth or the earth round the sun, so that it is only fools who delude themselves that the earth has its own light or