

If there be any difference between the Norwegians of to-day and those of the past, it is, I think, a difference in degree and not in kind. Wherever the traveller goes in Norway, he finds the same strong spirit of sturdy independence manifesting itself among the people. The rigorous isolation of farm from farm, each on its own freehold, has tended strongly to foster and develop this feeling. If you enter into conversation with the post-boy on the seat behind, says Bjornson in his Norwegian sketches, you will find from his questions and answers that he is possessed with a dauntless view of life and upright courage, and you will understand the truth of the saying, "These people are masters over the nature they live in; they soar higher than the mountains." These then, are the people from whom he comes and of whom he writes.

Now, it is not always to the world's great critics that we should go for the clearest insight and keenest appreciation when any particular matter is to the front, for, as Ruskin remarked of Mr. Whistler, it is the lot of critics to be remembered by what they have failed to understand. When, however, we have the dictum of one who was probably, on the whole, the greatest literary artist the world has yet seen, it is well that we listen with respect. Plato, in a fine passage, lays it down that it is the business of the poet, and indeed, of every artist, to create for us "the image of a noble morality, so that the young men living in a wholesome atmosphere may be profited by everything, that, in work fairly wrought, may touch them through hearing or sight—as if it were a breeze bringing health to them from places strong for life. As I read one of Bjornson's peasant stories, and wander with him far up on the mountain side among the wild flowers of the saeters or catch a breath of the pure salt air that blows in off the waters of the silent fjords, when I contemplate the earnest longing of

Arne, the simplicity of Synnove, the pervasive atmosphere of an austere morality, the quaint farm houses, and the lonely mountains rising up into snow and clouds, while through the valley comes faintly the sound of church bells, I remember the words of Plato and acknowledge that truly this man is an artist.

In the mild atmosphere of one of the healthiest and most charming villages of Norway is Aulestad, the villa and farm of Bjornson. The surrounding country is hilly, the forest is magnificent, and in the distance the jagged cliffs of the mountains rear themselves abruptly. He has also a residence in Paris, but at neither place is he to be found, save at rare intervals, as he travels most of his time from village to village, delivering popular, scientific and political lectures. He is a great favorite with the peasants of the surrounding villages, as he evinces an interest in all their domestic joys and sorrows, and not seldom takes a meal with his whole family in one of their humble cottages. In his love for the common people, he is the Tolstoi of Norway. While mentioning the name of the great Russian, I may say that I know of no piece of literature that may so well be twin brother to Bjornson's work, as the chapter from Anna Kerinina, where Levin works in the field with the mujiks. But Bjornson is more than this, he is a philanthropist. This story is told of him in Norway:

Some thirty-five years ago, Arne, a fine-looking, vigorous young man, who had been a sergeant in the Norwegian army, and as such had become noted for his athletic strength, as well as for his kindly disposition and honest character, had a serious feud with one of his neighbors in his mountain home in Valdres. His enemy was a dissipated, mean, cringing, and base scoundrel, who, at a party, succeeded in getting Arne drunk, and persuaded him to sign papers by which he lost his old homestead. The feud grew in