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THE INVASION OF THE NORSEMEN

(By G. M. Bruce)

"From the fury of the Northmen Lord God deliver us" was a regular part of the church prayer offered up by many a priest in the countries exposed to the raids and terrors of the Norsemen during the Age of the Vikings. And well might they thus pray, for wherever the Vikings landed with their fleets and their arms were somewhat successful, they cruelly killed, plundered, and destroyed.

A hundred years ago, however, began a new type of Norse invasion. It caused neither trembling nor fear, but rather a mingled feeling of surprise, amusement, and admiration. The advance guard of this new type of Norse invasion, an invasion which has continued for the space of an entire century, consisted of a small band of only fifty-three, the youngest a little baby-girl born in mid-ocean. There was nothing formidable about either ship or crew. Nor was there anything about the make-up of the party, their manner of landing, looks or numbers that in any way foreshadowed the stream of Norse invasion which had been directed to the American shores and was to increase immensely in volume and momentum until at the expiration of a hundred years a population of Norse blood had been transplanted to a new and far away continent more than equal to the population of the native land from which they and their descendants came.

This significant event in the history of the United States, the landing of the little sloop "Restaurationen", was very

tersely and rather inaccurately chronicled by the New York Evening Post under date of October 10, 1825, thus: "ARRIVED LAST EVENING--- Danish sloop Restauration, Holland, 98 days from Norway, via Long Island Sound, with iron to Boorman & Johnson, 53 passengers."

The New York Daily Advertiser of October 12, the same year, gives a more complete and accurate, as well as a very interesting account, which reads as follows:

A NOVEL SIGHT

"A vessel has arrived at this port with emigrants from Norway. The vessel is very small, measuring, as we understand, only about 360 Norwegian lasts, or forty-five American tons, and brought fifty-three passengers, male and female, all bound for Orleans county, where an agent who came over some time since, purchased a tract of land.

"The appearance of such a party of strangers, coming from so distant a country and in a vessel of a size apparently ill calculated for a voyage across the Atlantic, could not but excite an unusual degree of interest.

"An enterprise like this argues a good deal of boldness in the master of the vessel, as well as an adventurous spirit in the passengers, most of whom belong to families from the vicinity of a little town at the southwestern extremity of Norway, near the city of Stavanger. Those who came from the farms are dressed in coarse cloth of domestic manufacture of a fashion different from the Americans, but those who inhabited the town wear calicoes, gingham, and gay shawls, imported, we presume, from England.

"The vessel is built on the model common to fishing boats on that coast, with a single top-sail, sloop-rigged. She arrived with the addition of one passenger born on the way."

This first contingent of Norwegian immigrants to America, consisted, strange to say, of Norwegian Quakers. Among Norwegian prisoners of war taken by England in her attack on Denmark in 1807, there was one sailor by the name of Lars Larson. He remained a prisoner of war for a period of seven years, during which time he had learned to speak the English language quite well. He had also been brought under the influence of the English Quakers, and upon his release he entered the employe of a prominent Quaker lady by the name of Margaret Allen, with whom he remained about a year. Upon his return to Norway in 1816 he founded the first Society of Friends in Norway in his home city, Stavanger. The Quakers were naturally not regarded very favorably by the Lutheran State Church clergy, and were more or less subject to persecution. In 1821 the little society sent out two emissaries to America to investigate whether it would be advisable to emigrate to that land of religious freedom. These emissaries were Kleng Peerson Hesthammer and Knud Olson Eide. They spent about three years in New York and vicinity, and, having made arrangements for the founding of a colony in Kendall and Orleans counties, New York, returned to Norway in 1824 to give their report. The result was that a little sloop was bought and reconditioned and made ready to sail the following summer.

With fifty-two on board the sloop, renamed "Restaurationen", left Stavanger on the fourth day of July, 1825, and arrived at New York harbor on the ninth of October the same year, after an eventful voyage via England and the Madeira islands.

Kleng Peerson was quite a leader and adventurer among the first emigrants from Norway. He led the immigrants first to New York, then to Illinois, and finally to Texas. Here he died, December 16, 1865, and his grave is found in the Norwegian Lutheran cemetery at Norse, Bosque county, Texas. A stone monument, bearing the following inscription, marks his resting place:

"Kleng Peerson
The first Norwegian immigrant
to
America
Came to America in 1821
Born in Norway, Europe, May 17, 1782
Died in Texas, December 16, 1865
Grateful countrymen in Texas erected this
monument to his memory."

In 1835 one of the "sloopers", Knud Slogvig, returned to Norway, spreading the fame of the new world to his countrymen, who listened with eager interest to his accounts. The following year two more shiploads of emigrants left their native land for the land of opportunity. These emigrants were carried on the two brigs "Norden" and "Den Norske Klippe." In the year 1837 two more ships left the homeland bound for America with a new contingent of immigrants. These two ships were "Egir" and "Enigheden," carrying 170 passengers. From now on the stream of immigration grows rapidly from year to year, as the people of

Norway learn more and more of the opportunities in America. One of the most potent factors in stimulating the emigration from Norway was the publication of Ole Rynning's little guide-book for emigrants, entitled: "A True Account of America for the Instruction and Use of Peasants and Common People, Written by a Norwegian Who Arrived Here in the Month of June, 1837." This book was written by Rynning, who was one of the ill-fated settlers of the Beaver Creek Settlement in Illinois, while he was laid up during the winter following his arrival, nursing his feet, which had become severely frozen on one of his exploration tours. It was taken to Norway by Ansten Mattestad in 1838 and published during that year at Christiania (Oslo). As far as I have been able to learn the only volume of this book in the original in America is now in the library of the University of Illinois. It has recently been translated for the Minnesota Historical Society by Prof. Theodore Blegen. In his introduction, Rynning says: "I have now been in America eight months and in that time I have had opportunity of finding out much in regard to which I in vain sought information before I left Norway. I then felt how disagreeable it is for those who wish to emigrate to America, to be in want of reliable and tolerably complete account of the country. I also learned how great is the ignorance of the people and what false and ridiculous reports were accepted as full truth." Then he goes on to state that his purpose is to answer truthfully every question that he asked himself on his departure from Norway

and to disprove the false reports that he had heard both before leaving Norway and after arriving in the United States.

The following brief extract, taken from Anderson's "First Chapter of Norwegian Immigration", will give a fair idea of the character of the book as well as of the clear insight into American affairs which this early immigrant had acquired. It will also show how well he understood the slavery question in this country and foresaw it would necessarily ultimately result in.

"I have already stated that the United States has no king. Nevertheless it has a person who exercises about as much authority as a king. This person is chosen for four years only and is called president. The legislative power in matters pertaining to the United States as a unity rests with congress, which is composed of men chosen by the various states. The various states have each its own government like Norway and Sweden, but the common congress, the common language, and the common financial system unite them more closely. The number of the United States is now twenty-seven.

"As a comfort to the timid, I can truthfully assert, that here, as in Norway, there are laws, governments and authority. But everything is here calculated to maintain the natural equality and liberty of man. In regard to liberty everybody is free to engage in any kind of honest occupation and to go wherever he chooses without a passport and without being examined by custom house officers. Only the real criminal is threatened with the law and punishment.

"In works written only for the purpose of finding something for which the authors can find fault with America, I have read that the American is faithless, deceitful, hard-hearted, etc. I will not undertake to deny that such people are to be found in America as well as elsewhere, and that the stranger never can be too prudent; but it has been my experience that the American as a rule is a better man to get on with than the Norwegian, more yielding, more accommodating and more reliable in all things. The oldest Norwegians here have given me the same assurance. It being so easy to get a living here in an honest way, stealing and burglary are almost unheard of.

"In ugly contrast with the above liberty and equality which justly constitute the pride of the Americans, is the disgraceful slave-traffic, which is still tolerated and carried on in the southern states. We find here a race of black people, with woolly hair on their heads, that are called negroes; and that have been brought here from Africa, which is their original country. In the southern states these poor people are bought and sold like other property and are driven to work with a whip like horses or oxen. If a master whips his slave to death, or in his rage shoots him dead, he is not looked upon as a murderer. The children born by a negress are by birth slaves even if a white man is the father. In Missouri the slave-trade is still permitted, but in Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin territory it is strictly forbidden and the institution is despised. The

northern states endeavor at every congress to get the slave-trade abolished in the southern states; but as the latter always make resistance, and claim the right to settle the matters pertaining to their states themselves, there will probably soon come either a separation between the northern and southern states or bloody civil conflicts."

It is self-evident that such a report as that given in Rynning's book as well as the numerous "America-letters" must have exerted a powerful influence upon the young people as well as the people living in more or less poor financial circumstances. During the first few years after the arrival of the ships mentioned above, there were only a few hundred immigrants per year, but after the year 1842 it is claimed that the number of immigrants arriving on American shores from Norway never fell below 1,000 per year, rising and falling with the changing economic conditions in the homeland. The varying economic conditions in this country have also had both a retarding and ^{an} accelerating influence upon Norwegian immigration. At the close of the Civil War the immigration rose to past the 15,000 mark. Since that time the annual arrivals have numbered from a few thousand to 38,000 per year. According to the Fourteenth Census, 1920, there were in the United States in that year 363,862 Norwegians born in Norway and 1,033,335 persons born in Norway and born in this country of parents the cradle of one or both of whom had stood in Norway. There were at that time no less than 195,101 Norwegians of foreign birth of voting age.

It is very difficult to arrive at any reasonably accurate figures as to the number of persons of Norwegian blood in the United States, hence estimates will vary considerably. A conservative estimate places the number of Americans of Norwegian extraction, including those born in Norway as well as those born in this country of parents of Norwegian descent at 2,250,000. Mr. O.P.B. Jacobson, Railroad and Warehouse Commissioner of Minnesota, based on an estimate made by Mr. E. G. Quamme of the Federal Land Bank, St. Paul, places the total number of persons of Norwegian blood in the United States at fully 5,000,000. This figure is undoubtedly much too high.

The Norwegians are found in every state in the Union. West Virginia has the lowest number of foreign born Norwegians, only 51, and Minnesota the largest, 90,188. Many Norwegians are also found in Alaska and the other possessions of the United States. A large number has also settled in Canada. According to the Canadian census of 1921 there were in Canada at that time 68,856 persons of Norwegian birth. Of this number 22,186 were born in the United States, 23,568 in Canada, and 23,102 elsewhere, mostly in Norway.

It will thus be seen that the Norwegian invasion of America which began with the very modest number of fifty-three persons, including little Margaret Allen Larson, born at sea, who arrived on the "Norse Mayflower" "Restaurationen" in the year 1825, has been swelled from decade to decade until the invading army and its descendants have reached well into the third million and have become an important and influential element in the American Nation, even considered merely from the standpoint of numbers.

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The Dominion of Canada has also a large number of people of Norwegian descent. According to the census of 1921 there were in Canada at that time 68,856 persons of Norwegian birth. Of this number 22,186 were born in the United States, 23,568 in Canada, and 23,102 elsewhere, mostly in Norway. Since the census of 1921, 319 have arrived from the United States and 5,559 from Norway, making a total Norwegian population in Canada at this time of 74,734. About 46% of the Norwegian population of Canada is found in Saskatchewan and 31% in Alberta.

During the century of Norwegian immigration to America, the Norwegians and their descendants have contributed in a very large measure to the development of both United States and Canada, and have proven themselves to be a very high and desirable class of immigrants. They have distinguished themselves in farming, technical trades, the various professions, and in politics. This is especially the case in the United States where they have been the longest and have reached the greatest number. Here they held many positions of high public trust in community, state, and nation. Eleven men of Norwegian extraction have become governors and six U.S. senators. In Canada they have as yet held few important public offices. In both countries they distinguished themselves as loyal citizens during the recent World War.

The greatest contribution, however, which the Norwegians have made to the life of the United States and the Dominion of Canada is religious and educational. Churches and schools have been built and maintained at considerable personal sacrifice on the part of both supporters and workers. In the United States they have church property valued at upwards of \$50,000,000. Here they have ^{two} ~~three~~ theological seminaries, ^{as four} ~~four~~ full-fledged colleges, besides a number of academies. In ~~Canada~~ Canada they have two academies, one at Canrose and one at Outlook, and they have united with the Icelandic Lutherans in maintaining an Academy at Winnepeg. A large number of the congregations in Canada are mission congregations, the pastoral work among them being supported ~~by~~ mainly by the better established congregations in the states.

In commemoration of the arrival of the sloop "Restaurationen" one hundred years ago, a great celebration will be staged at the State Fair Grounds, St. Paul, Minnesota, June 6-9. President Calvin Coolidge will be present and both the Canadian and Norwegian governments will be officially represented. A large number of Norwegian Canadians is expected to be present on this occasion.

The Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, the largest body of Norwegian Lutherans in the United States and Canada, is making extensive preparations for a fitting celebration of one hundred years of Norwegian immigration and achievement in Amerika. A Centennial History is being published. It is written by Dr. O. M. Norlie, Luther College, Decorah, Iowa. A Memorial Cantata, which will be sung at the congregational festivals to held on Sunday, July 5, has also been prepared. The music of

this Cantata has been written by Dr.E.Melius Christiansen, director of the famous St.Olaf Choir. A special order of service has been arranged for the memorial services to be held on July 5, which will be used by the congregations of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America both in the states and in Canada.

1925 will thus prove an eventful and memorable year in the history of Norse-Americans and Norse-Canadians. The United States government has gone quite far in giving the occasion official recognition. Both a two-cent and a five-cent memorial stamp will be issued, and a memorial medal, the first of its kind, is now being struck off at the U.S.Mint in Philadelphia.