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THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Report

of

Committee on Thesis

The undersigned, acting as a Committee of the Graduate School, have read the accompanying thesis submitted by Tony Ullereng for the degree of Master of Arts.

They approve it as a thesis meeting the requirements of the Graduate School of the University of Minnesota, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Report

of

Committee on Examination

This is to certify that we the undersigned, as a committee of the Graduate School, have given Tony Ullereng final oral examination for the degree of Master of Arts . We recommend that the degree of Master of Arts be conferred upon the candidate.

Minneapolis, Minnesota

May 20 1918

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Henrik Wergeland and the Awakening of National  
Consciousness in The New Norway

A Thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Minnesota

by

Tony Ullereng

In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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1918

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Henrik Wergeland and the Awakening of National  
Consciousness in The New Norway

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### Introductory.

The Norwegian constitution, which was adopted in 1814, embodies the principles of democracy and national self-government. During the previous centuries Norway had been a semi-independent nation, and the people had not had the chance to participate in the affairs of the state. For this reason the Norwegians were at first not in position to appreciate and take advantage of the privileges given them by the constitution. Democracy had to be taught the people before they could understand what it meant to them. The poet Henrik Wergeland deserves a great deal of credit for the work which he did to make democracy a living force in the nation. Wergeland was primarily a poet; but he was a poet who knew how to co-ordinate his authorship with life. His beautiful songs won for him the devotion of his countrymen; but his name is loved and cherished fully as much because he was a patriot, because he loved his countrymen and lived to make them free and happy. Wergeland was a factor in public life for the short period of fifteen years, and it is true that he did not live to see fruits of all his labors; nevertheless, he exerted a profound influence in the process of awakening the national consciousness in The New Norway.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> By the term "The New Norway" is usually meant Norway after 1814. But a closer examination shows, however, that the actual beginning of this new era in Norwegian history is more accurately placed about the year 1830.

"Who is this Henrik Wergeland under whose silent supremacy we live?" writes Erik Vullum in his historical sketch.<sup>1</sup> "He has become for us what the household deity was for ancient peoples. They might hate or love the god, it made no difference, for all had to worship him and bring him their offerings. All had to have him with them in their work. We may support or oppose the ideas Wergeland advocated, but we must in any event have him with us. It is as tho we feel that there is no hope for an enterprise in this country unless it has the consecration of the name and spirit of Henrik Wergeland, and all try to make him their own. He is disrobed and attired according to the needs of the hour and the party. Are there ten of us who have the same conception of this indispensable one, who unites all under his sway?

"It is not thru his poetry he won this unlimited power over us. A poet may be loved by all, but is not equally indispensable to all. Wergeland has been a greater power in our national life than rhyme and rhythm can become, even tho they be as perfect and melodious as the music of the spheres. Not thru his stormy life, nor his beautiful death, nor even thru his genius has he won the everlasting glory, which he now enjoys, of sitting enthroned in "sympathetic and believing human hearts" as the prince of patriots. He won his immortal fame by constant effort devoted to the needs of the hour."

<sup>1</sup> Erik Vullum: Henrik Wergeland i Digt og Liv. (1881).

It will be the purpose of this paper to answer the question: "Who is this Henrik Wergeland under whose silent supremacy we live?" And particularly will it be the purpose to show how he co-ordinated his authorship with life and was an influential factor in the national awakening of Norway in the period 1830--1845. But in order thoroly to understand the conditions under which he worked it is necessary to review briefly the situation as we find it in the period immediately following the Napoleonic Wars.

Henrik Wergeland begins his "Constitutional History of Norway" thus: "'To be or not to be' was indeed the question for Norway in 1814. She was a Hamlet among the countries: born to rule and unhappy as he, deceived and sacrificed by false kin and looked upon by the world as being insane."<sup>1</sup> When we review conditions in Norway at the time we feel the force of this striking statement. During the first years after 1814 there was depression in every field. It seems reasonable to suppose that the momentous events of 1814 and its memories would have caused lasting enthusiasm and induced activity and progress; but not so. The new conditions were strange; there was economic depression; the institutions subordinate to the constitution were weak; the press was limited and far from inspiring to new efforts; the university was in its infancy; and there was no literature produced in this period.

<sup>1</sup> Henrik Wergeland: Norges Constitutions Historie, Sanlede Skrifter. Vol. IX.

The first cause for concern was, however, found in the reactionary tendency in European politics. As soon as the Norwegian constitution was finished, built on the 'principles of '76 and '89', the great reaction in European politics set in. When the wars of Napoleon were at an end, the nations longed for rest and security. The spirit of the age was a marked conservatism, and it seemed as tho the work and aspirations of the "Congress of Vienna" would be crowned with success. Every trace of the revolution of 1789 seemed in danger of being blotted out. The newly built Norwegian Ship of State thus had the misfortune of starting out against the prevailing currents of the political atmosphere. For the great powers were by no means inclined to let little Norway alone with her democratic constitution.

The political atmosphere in Europe as a whole thus made it hard for the Norwegian people to continue the good work done by the constitutional assembly at Eidsvold; but the main difficulties in the political situation were found at home on the Scandinavian peninsula. It was not to be expected that Charles John and Sweden would be satisfied with the manner in which the union between Norway and Sweden was effected. In 1809 Sweden had lost Finland in her war with Russia; but by the treaty of Kiel in 1814 she was promised Norway as a compensation for this loss. Instead of receiving a province Sweden did get a troublesome brother state which in every way wanted to be its equal. But the Swedish king and especially Charles John, the crownprince, were not thus inclined, and they did all in their power to weaken Norway's position



in the union. This policy is clear when it is seen in the light of the king's address to the Swedish Riksdag in 1815, when he said in part: "When two peoples of their own free will submit to the same government, everything tending to produce a difference between them in relation to their king ought to be carefully cleared away, otherwise the union will sooner or later be disrupted."<sup>1</sup> The Swedish amalgamation politics were thus more or less of a tradition, based on the dissatisfaction with a union which had granted Norway too much independence and a constitution much more democratic than the Swedish. It was this threatening amalgamation policy that was Norway's greatest danger. Her statesmen had to be continually on guard against the intrigues of Swedish diplomacy, lest the king's powers were to be increased at the expense of the constitution.

The economic depression, too, was very serious and was largely responsible for the unprogressive state of affairs. The finances were in a most critical condition; the new government started with a large debt and an empty treasury. Denmark-Norway had supported Napoleon in his Continental System against England. This had almost entirely paralyzed Norwegian commerce and industries, and it took years before this state of affairs was relieved to such an extent that the people could think beyond the needs of the hour. The Norwegian statesmen do, however, deserve the admiration of their countrymen

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Knut Gjerset: History of the Norwegian People, Vol. II, p. 450.

for being able to defend and preserve their constitutional rights and maintain Norway's position among the nations during these troublesome years.

Socially the Norwegian people was divided into two strata. The cleavage effected at the time of the Reformation, when Danish was introduced as the church and literary language, still existed. The rural population still adhered to their own customs and spoke their own language which in many localities had only slightly been modified by the Danish. On the other hand the city people and the official class including the clergy, which was strongly mixed with foreign elements, had thoroly assimilated the Danish language and culture. The absolutistic tendencies in the Danish government during the Union Period with Denmark had fostered a distinct aristocratic spirit among the upper classes, which differentiated them sharply from the rural population not only in language and mode of living but also in views and sympathies. The greater part of the people had little to do with the affairs of state; it was the official class that held the power.

It is indeed remarkable that a constitution, embodying sound democratic principles, could be framed under such conditions; but it must be remembered that the "back to nature movement," which Rousseau and his followers had taught the French and other European nations, was known also in Norway, and the American and the French constitutions served as guides for the framers of the Norwegian constitution. Concerning this Dr. Gjerset writes: "On

the whole the constitution framed by the "Men of Eidsvold" is<sup>1</sup> one of the most remarkable instruments of its kind ever written, whether we consider the sound democratic principles it embodies or the clearness with which they are expressed..... The framers were for the most part members of the official upper class, who possessed the power and had the opportunity to perpetuate their own power by constitutional provisions. But they understood that liberty was the Norwegian people's ancient heritage, a fruit of their own unremitting struggle thru the ages, and they knew that a free nation could only be maintained by the bónder, who represented the strength of the nation, and who had preserved the freedom of the people thru the centuries of the union with Denmark. True to these principles which had been reenforced by the republican ideals of a government "by the people and for the people," they chose with unselfish patriotism to make a constitution for the kingdom so truly democratic in spirit that it lodged all power in the hands of the common people and deprived both the king and the upper classes of the power to exercise political leadership. So clear are the provisions on this point that altho it had to undergo the severest tests of analytical controversial interpretation for well-nigh a hundred years, the closest scrutiny has only revealed how thoroly it has insured to the people full liberty, sovereign power, and democratic popular government."

1 History of the Norwegian People, Vol. II, p. 427.

The momentous political change necessitated a radical social readjustment, if the bønder were to take possession of the power granted them by the constitution, for they were not yet ready to assume political leadership. The upper classes carried the burden and the responsibility of the government for several decades after 1814. They constituted the majority in the Storting, and the singular fact is that altho they would resist all assaults on their democratic government from the outside, they began in a small way to look for privileges for their class, and resisted as long as possible all plans for local self-government. Before true popular government was possible, the great mass of the people had to be enlightened and the national consciousness awakened. It is here that we shall find Henrik Wergeland in his greatest role. By educating the common people he would bridge the gap that existed between the two main strata of society and make the lower classes fit to take that part in the government which was truly theirs.

Literary pursuits had been sadly neglected for many decades previous to 1830. The intellectual awakening in Germany and Denmark, known as Romanticism, had not yet reached Norway. The upper classes held that Norway was dependent upon Denmark for higher intellectual culture and refined literary tastes; but they were unable to realize their theory in practice. They had not brought to Norway the ideas which had stirred the Danish people to new activity; but they were satisfied with the literary ideals which had flourished in Denmark several decades earlier. These ideas were of the old intellectual stock, which

were brought along from the Union Period and had become associated with everything aesthetic and traditional. These ideas could produce no new growth, but acted rather as a hamper on the natural and healthy development of the nation. The upper classes were, however, well satisfied with living in this intellectual repose, which they considered the height of cultural perfection. The need of the hour was "an intellectual and social revival," which could arouse the people to new life and national self-consciousness. Then would the people be able to enter into full possession of their liberty and begin the new development which their independence and free institutions made possible. This revival came in 1830 with Henrik Wergeland, who in aspirations, love for country, and untiring efforts to build his native land has become the "personification of the New Norway."

Henrik Arnold Wergeland was born at Kristiansand in 1808. His father was Nicolai Wergeland, a prominent member of the Constitutional Assembly, which at Eidsvold framed and adopted the constitution of 1814. The elder Wergeland remained thruout his life an ardent advocate of political liberty. He was a clergyman but came from sturdy farmer stock; he was a man of strong personality and energetic temperament. From him the younger Wergeland inherited his love for strife and his power of mind. He was very intimate with his father, who exerted a great influence over him. When he was a mere child, his father noticed his extraordinary gifts and took particular care with his bringing up. After

Henrik Wergeland began his public career, he admired and advised him, and more effectively than others he came to his defence when attacks were made on his person or authorship.

Wergeland's mother had much Danish and Scotch blood in her veins. She was a cultured woman, who loved literature and art; she looked on the bright side of life. Then as now Lutheranism was the faith of the established church of Norway, but theology was strongly tinged with rationalism. The home of Wergeland was no exception to this, and he was allowed wide religious latitude, which encouraged the development of that universality of spirit and those humanitarian ideas which form the underlying principles of his life and his writings.

When Henrik Wergeland was nine years old, his father was called to the charge at Eidsvold. Here the younger Wergeland came into the midst of the most interesting environment of the time. The momentous historic events that took place only a few years before, the scenes of the Constitutional Assembly, and the scenic beauty of the surrounding country could not fail to make a vivid impression on the patriotic mind of Wergeland.

When he was eleven years of age he was sent to the Latin school at Christiania. Here he studied for six years and went thru the classical drill of the day. His lessons did not interest him very much; but outside reading, especially history, occupied much of his time. He began very early to write poetry and farces, and he often worried his teachers by inserting a great deal of

poetry in his compositions. At the age of thirteen he made his debut in "Morgenbladet" with a short story "The Bloodstone." He had already made up his mind that he would be a poet, but his imagination was too vivid for his means of expression and therefore his early verses were difficult to understand.

In 1825 he was admitted to the University of Christiania. He began the study of theology; but this did not hinder him from participating in the rather frivolous life of the students. For this reason his university career was not in all respect creditable. He entered freely into the rather riotous student life, and his exuberant vitality often found outlet in boyish pranks, which often led to conflicts with authorities. Yet he pursued his studies quite industriously, and in four years he passed the examination which made him eligible to a charge in the established church. This, however, was as near as he came to being a clergyman. For several years he applied regularly for a minor call, but he was disappointed just as regularly. His participation in the "Battle of the Marketplace," his Seventeenth of May addresses, his intimate association with the radical members of the Storting, and his contributions to the party organs which opposed the government, were well known to the king, Charles John, who told Wergeland that he would at least have to act "sage" for a year or two. "But when did I ever do that?" Wergeland would reply.

When he had applied repeatedly for five years, he gave up his theological aspirations and began the study of medicine, but he continued this for only a year or so. Then he secured a

position as amanuensis at the university library; but a year afterwards, in 1835, he had undertaken to edit "The Citizen." For several years previous he had published a series of writings "For the Common People," in which he presented problems of particular interest to the lower classes. But his connection with the radical paper "The Citizen," the only minority organ, and other escapades barred him definitely from the ministry. He did, however, get an annual gratuity from the king's private fund as a token of the king's appreciation of his authorship. Wergeland accepted this gratuity on the condition that he should be allowed to compensate for it by writing for the common people. In 1839 he received a position in the state department as keeper of the archives. This in addition to the gratuity made him financially independent. Now as before he devoted a large share of his time to literature and journalism, and he discussed the political issues of the day with as much vigor as any one of his time. But his straightforward temperament led him into almost continual strife from the time he first entered the discussions in the "Students' Union" until his death. He was a born fighter; opposition and defeat could not destroy his optimism nor his hope for ultimate victory.

Wergeland's first literary productions were clear reflections of what he read. He was particularly interested in French and English literature; he read the plays of Shakespeare and the poetry of Byron and Shelley. His productions were, however, original enough in regard to both style and contents.



He did not feel firmly bound by traditions nor established rules of poetry. What he wanted was to carry his ideas to his readers in as direct a manner as possible. Wergeland was very prolific, and his writings extend thru a wide latitude. He wrote erotic and lyric poetry, social and political satires, farces, epigrams, history, text books, editorials and life sketches. Shortly after Wergeland's death the "Students' Union" put itself at the head of a national movement to erect a Wergeland monument. The subscriptions did not at first bring a sufficient amount, so the Union decided to use a part of the fund for an edition of Wergeland's collected works. This work was left to Hartvig Lassen, who has edited the most complete edition. It is found in nine large volumes, which are supposed to contain about one half of all his writings.

His most voluminous poem "Creation" is a world-allegory and gives expression to his philosophy of life. It is an attempt to explain creation and the harmonious progress of man towards a more nearly perfect future. The poem shows that he believes in theological evolution or in other words in the theory that life in man and in nature is a single long chain of development that always tends towards perfection. According to these ideas Wergeland could not sympathise with the literary tendency of the age; he was no romanticist. He would praise the present and make it better instead of extolling the past as the romanticists did.

In his writings as a whole he voices the aspirations of a nation, born in a troublesome period of European history, but full of hope and vitality. He was a democrat not only in theory but also in his understanding of the common people, in his self-sacrificing labor for their physical and spiritual welfare, and in his faith in their ability to rise. His father characterizes him thus: "Henrik Wergeland has from his earliest youth been an ardent liberalist, philanthropist, and patriot; and he has not yet proved untrue to this characteristic. He has been inspired by love for the freedom and happiness of his fatherland and for the enlightenment and well-being of the people; no one has loved the people so much, and no one has to a like extent sought to serve them in all possible ways; no one has so unselfishly espoused their cause without regard for the annoyance and misfortune which he reaped from it."<sup>1</sup>

In 1839 Wergeland married Amalie Bekkevold with whom he lived a short but exceedingly happy married life. She was by no means his first love, for in his youth he seems to have been an easy victim to feminine charms. Very early he conceived in his mind an ideal woman, whom he called Stella, and to this ideal he remained true even tho it was personified in different individuals. It was his love for this ideal woman that inspired his great poem "Creation" and many of his earlier poems. In many respects his early disappointments in love affairs helped

<sup>1</sup> As quoted by Dr. Knut Gjerset: History of the Norwegian People, Vol. II, p. 468.

him to find himself as an author and as a worker for the cause of humanity.

Wergeland was not granted a long life. In the spring of the year 1844 he exposed himself and contracted pneumonia, which developed into hardening of the lungs. But on account of his robust constitution he lingered for more than a year. During this time he worked as hard as ever; he continued his paper "For the Working Class", wrote his autobiography, revised some of his works, and wrote some of his most beautiful poems. On his deathbed he became reconciled with many of the enemies whom he had made during his stormy life, and some of his closest friends, who had become estranged from him, sought him now to ask his forgiveness. This made his last hours happy, and he looked forward to the end with a smile of contentment, which robbed death of its bitterness. The capital city had never witnessed so large a funeral procession. The bitterness of party strife had passed away, and many thousands followed his bier to pay the last honors to the leader, whose life and influence were destined to be "the dawn of Norway."

## Political Ideas and Activity.

The political and social institutions created by the "Men of Eidsvold" were indeed suited to the most democratic society. The liberal and progressive ideas embodied in the constitution of the Seventeenth of May had their origin in the English political institutions and scientific thought, and they had found their full development in the revolutionary struggles in America and France. The ruling power was lodged with the bønder, for the constitution provided that two thirds of the representatives to the Storting were to be chosen from the country, while only one third could be chosen from the cities. This provision gave the bønder control of the legislative hall, if they chose to elect men of their own rank. As a matter of fact they were not accustomed to political leadership, and chose many of their representatives from the upper classes, who then continued to rule in the old spirit even under the new constitution. It soon became very evident that the old spirit of class prejudice and desire for special privileges still prevailed in the higher social circles. Their ideas and views of life remained almost unchanged, and they were glad to settle down to the old ways of political and social preference. They had not thought of what the

results would be when the bönder would gain political control; it had not entered their minds that such a course of events would be possible.

By the year 1830 the time was ripe for this new course of events. During the period of the European reaction, the Norwegian statesmen had followed a conservative defensive policy; that is, all they did or could do was to guard the constitution as it was against the assaults of hostile elements. But by 1830 it was possible to begin the offensive move, to build further on the work that the "Men of Eidsvold" had so well begun. By this time a new generation had grown up and begun to assert itself in public life. It had grown up together with the constitution and looked upon the independence as a matter of course. Economic conditions were better; the people could begin to look ahead and not merely care for present wants. Forward was the slogan. Of this new generation Henrik Wergeland was the first to mature. By temperament, environment, training, and aspirations he was the best fit leader.

Henrik Wergeland was a patriot in the true sense of the word. All issues on his program were directly or indirectly of national scope. Private affairs were at all times subordinated to the interests of his country and his fellow citizens. He was an ardent democrat at heart and always remained loyal to democratic principle even tho he loved the king, Charles John, for his powerful and winning personality and his magnanimity towards the poor. "Wergeland," says Dr. Gjerset, "was a repre-

sentative of that spirit of the age which manifested itself in the struggle for nationality and liberty in every part of Europe, and which in England found its best expression in the poetry of Byron and Shelley. The effort of the human spirit to free itself from the political and social oppression, and to break thru the narrow systems of conventional views and arbitrary rules of art, engendered a feeling of "weltschmerz", but created also a charming hope that liberty, once established, would regenerate the world and usher in the millennium. The struggle of the Greeks for freedom had become the cause of all Europe, which Byron had glorified with his poetry and consecrated with his death. On no one had these events made a more profound impression than on Wergeland.<sup>1</sup>"

His sympathies with the Greeks were sincere, and if he had been a wealthy and powerful Lord Byron, instead of a young disappointed student, he would have rushed to their aid. In a letter written in 1827 he wrote: "When I think of the future, everything grows dark for me - - I tremble. I said to my father that I must go to Greece, in order that my life may not be wholly in vain."<sup>2</sup> And after the death of Canning he wrote a poem to the glory of England, which "like a sharp-beaked sea-eagle rises from her foggy nest to aid the Greeks."<sup>2</sup>

1 Dr. Knut Gjerset: History of the Norwegian People, Vol. II, p. 467.

2 Erik Vullum: Henrik Wergeland i Liv og Digt, p. 36.

But it was not only the struggle of the Greeks that interested him and taught him what democracy meant to a nation. It was a time when nationalism and liberalism seemed to join hands to dethrone the reactionary politics in many European countries. The uprising in Poland and Belgium and especially the July - revolution in France gave impulse to a more aggressive forward movement also in Norway. Imbued with this spirit of liberalism Wergeland wrote in 1831 a large poem, "The Liberated Europe," in which he glories in the fact that the thrones of Europe trembled and fell. In 1831 he visited France, and his ardent devotion to liberty was further strengthened by personally coming in contact with the most advanced liberal ideas. French and English literature further developed his political theories and his whole view of life. Wergeland was thus the medium through which the Norwegian people became acquainted with the pulse beats of Europe in this period. As Norwegian liberty in 1814 sprang from the great French Revolution, so were also the germs of the new revolution in France carried to Norway, where they found opportunity to produce a great awakening in the people.

Wergeland did, however, get his first lessons in democracy at home. One of the reasons why he comparatively early got a clear view of what his lifework ought to be, is found in the fact that he grew up at Eidsvold where the constitutional assembly had met. The historic environment breathed the philosophical ideas of that time, and Wergeland became thoroughly acquainted with

the "principles of '76 and '89"; so it is no wonder that his enthusiasm for these principles, as well as his enthusiasm for The New Norway built on these principles, became the keynote of his lifework.

Wergeland was not satisfied with having the constitution "framed and enlarged" hanging on the wall in every home; he wanted the principles it embodied to become a living force in the people and in the new national development. Hitherto the feeling of nationality had consisted in boasting of everything Norwegian, and the democratic movement was coupled with class animosity. It was class interests and not the good of society as a whole that was the motive for action even in the legislative halls. In theory the people were supreme; Wergeland would make them supreme in practice. It has been said of Wergeland that he laid no new foundations. This may be true; but it is equally true that he was the chief architect who built Norway on the old foundation and continued in the spirit of the framers of the constitution. "It became his task to create a new national life and self-confidence, to unite the people in the effort to make themselves truly independent, and to create a literature and higher culture of their own. For this work he was qualified not only by his literary genius, but also thru his ability for hard work, his love for everything national, and his profound sympathy for all who were poor and needy, traits which made him the national leader and invincible idol of the common people."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> History of the Norwegian People, Vol. II, p. 486.



Henrik Wergeland was not a politician in the sense that he held political office. His influence was indirect rather than direct; he helped to create the undercurrent that molded public opinion. Still there were some political issues in which he took an active part. He was the leader in the struggle to make the Seventeenth of May a national holiday; and he made the people realize the significance of the day. Wergeland has been called "the father of the Seventeenth of May," and if he had done nothing else than to establish firmly the right to celebrate the national birthday, he would still have had a place in history and in the affections of his people.

During the first decade after 1814 no attempt had been made to commemorate the Seventeenth of May in a public way. But a small beginning was made in 1824. Then the students "decided to commemorate the day in their own midst." The following years the day was also celebrated by the students except in 1828, when the regular fete was dispensed with "on account of circumstances." Charles John had issued a proclamation forbidding any kind of celebration. The king was afraid that the constitution would mean too much to the people, as this would seriously hinder his amalgamation policy. He suggested that Norway's national birthday should be commemorated on the day that the union with Sweden was accomplished. But the king had reckoned without the patriotic Norwegian people, and his dogged persistence in persecuting

any innocent little demonstration did more than anything else to irritate the people and put the national feeling on edge. This and many other imprudent and hasty acts caused the flat failure of the amalgamation policy. The national sentiment in Norway increased every time the king proposed new measures that tended toward the consolidation of the two countries.

In 1828 the people had heeded the king's proclamation tolerably well, but the following years the matter came to a crisis. The Students' Union with Wergeland as one of the leaders decided to make the Seventeenth of May one of its regular holidays and the celebration an annual event in spite of the king's wishes. The fete in the Students' Union clubrooms caused no trouble, but in the afternoon many people assembled on the wharf to see the steamer "Constitution" arrive in port, as steamboats were rare in those days. With Wergeland as cheer leader the gathering greeted the ship with "hurrahs" and the singing of national songs. Later in the afternoon the people assembled without a demonstration in the marketplace to enjoy the fresh air and the splendid day. The authorities considered this a demonstration and ordered the people home. The crowd resented this order as there was no reason for it, but the Statholder, von Platen, determined to have his way, and he sent the mounted police to clear the place. Several people were ridden down, but no one was seriously injured. Henrik Wergeland was struck over the shoulder by the flat side of a sabre. He considered this

such an insult to his student uniform that he sent it by messenger<sup>1</sup> to the commandant of the fortress the next day.

The whole incident, which is known as the "Battle of the Marketplace," aroused indignation thruout the country. The people of Christiania vowed that they would not submit to such an outrage to a quiet and lawabiding public, and a memorial was addressed to the Storting protesting against the outrage and demanding that the matter be taken up with the king. Accordingly, the Storting adopted an address to Charles John maintaining that the right to celebrate the Seventeenth of May belonged to the people. This day thus became a recognized national holiday, and it was commemorated regularly afterwards. Wergeland's persistent effort to make the day what it is, and his continued participation in the celebration as a leader and speaker of the day gained for him the coveted name, "the father of the Seventeenth of May."<sup>2</sup>

In 1833 he was the leading speaker at the dedication of the statue to the patriot statesman, Christian Krogh, who had been the leader in the opposition to a closer union with Sweden. It was the first real public celebration of the Seventeenth of May. On account of the unveiling of this statue the government considered the affair as showing a great deal of "opposition," and for that reason all prominent men connected with the government stayed away. Several of the foremost politicians and statesmen were asked to deliver the address; but they declined,

<sup>1</sup> Samlede Skrifter, Vol. VIII, p. 555.

<sup>2</sup> J. E. Sars: Norges Historie, Vol. VI 1, p. 238.

because they did not want to provoke the wrath of the king. Thus it came that young Wergeland was chosen as the speaker. He appeared in a suit of homespun, which he had borrowed from a representative to the Storting, for he had no decent clothes of his own. According to some sources he had given them to the poor, and his closest friends would not lend him their clothes, for they knew that they also would be given to the poor. Wergeland was an admirer of everything strictly national, and said that he felt it more appropriate to wear homespun for the occasion than a suit of fine cloth.

His address was received with a great deal of enthusiasm by the common people in and about the capital city of Christiania. The burden of his address was to love the fatherland; the statue showed the triumph of popular government; it was an evidence of the existence of a united people and a public opinion that supported their constitutional government. The monument was to speak of democracy to the Norwegian people and thru it to all Europe. "Our mother country is poor yet there is honor in her house; there is more honor in her homespun than in foreign glitter; more sweetness in her speech than in a stranger's voice. We will be as Krogh's statue, Norwegian thru and thru and still be free to get a broad view of the world."<sup>1</sup> This occasion was a stepping stone in Wergeland's life; it brought him before the people as their courageous leader, and it gave him the prominence

<sup>1</sup> Samlede Skrifter, Vol. VII, p. 382 ff.

and the prestige that made it possible for him, as for no one else, to place his stamp on the New Norway.

It is quite evident that such behavior made it more difficult for him to secure a call in the state church, and soon other things happened that did not speak in his favor. In 1835 he spoke at the May fete in the Students' Union. In this address he glories in the fact that the Union has been able to observe every May day since 1829 in face of the strongest pressure brought to bear upon them by royal authorities. He said in part: "Storms from the crown howled like demons about our tree of freedom, and many frail leaves did not stand the test but fell to the ground. But the brethren of our Union were not they as strong green leaves that endure the storms?"<sup>1</sup>

The same year Wergeland once more departed from the straight and narrow path; he entered upon his career as editor of "The Citizen." This was a weekly, and the only organ that voiced the truly national movement in Norway. Its former editor, Solvold, had been forced to retire for misdemeanor. The paper had been badly managed and brought into ill repute for its repeated attacks on the official class. Wergeland said about it that "at the time the devil was less feared in Norway than 'The Citizen'." Wergeland did not agree to the manner in which it had been edited; but he could not stand quietly by and see the only paper which voiced the opposition to the regime of the official class go out of existence, and so he undertook to shoulder

1 Samlede Skrifter, Vol. VII, p. 410 ff.

the responsibility. It became his task to lift this journal to a place that would merit the respect of the people. His avowed enemies did, however, find new cause for attacks on his character as he was blamed for all the scandalous articles that the former editor had ever published. Wergeland's most determined adversaries soon launched an organ of their own, "The Constitutional." Between this paper and "The Citizen" there was a bitter feud that has not been equaled in Norwegian journalism. But Wergeland was in his element. "How glorious to live in strife when one is armed!" he says.

As an editor Wergeland had a splendid opportunity to make the public acquainted with the principles of national self-government. Those were given first place in his editorials and no one has done as much as he to awaken the national consciousness. It was natural, too, that these questions were to be discussed, for at no time had the king been more menacing in his pro-Swedish activity. It was only too evident that Charles John would make Sweden the "Primus inter Pares." To Wergeland Norway's cause and the cause of independence were one; therefore he allied himself and his paper with the opposition to the king, who would increase his own power at the expense of the constitutional government. The immediate cause for this stormy period in Norwegian political history was a decision of the king to dissolve the Storting at a time when many important measures relating to local self-government and to Norway's position in the

Union were to be discussed. The Storting, however, used the few hours it had to its disposal to start impeachment proceedings against the members of the cabinet who had not advised the king against the dissolution of the Storting. During this time and during the impeachment of second minister Lövenskjold the press was very active in both countries, and Wergeland used his paper to make his influence felt. He supported the opposition to the regime in poems, speeches, and editorials, and his contributions were as daring as any that gave expression to the cause of Norway.

The circle of readers that he could reach thru his paper was not large enough for Wergeland; he published a series of pamphlets, which he distributed everywhere. He held that it was the privilege and duty of every citizen to know and realize<sup>1</sup> the importance of the recent events. In these pamphlets he discussed the underlying causes for the repeated conflicts between the king and the Norwegian people, and he suggested a manner of treatment, that would remedy the evils and bring harmony in place of existing strained relations. "We find the cause," he says, "in Norway's as well as in his majesty's relation to Sweden. ...A king that was Norwegian only, a king such as our hearts would find joy in having, would not in his realm nor in his position find cause continually to put himself in opposition to the will of the people in regard to the most precious pearl in its diadem of freedom. Such a protracted blockade will be more dangerous than if he tried by one stroke to obliterate certain paragraphs of the constitution. Even if we should think

1 Samlede Skrifter, Vol. VII, p. 173 ff.

of the constitution as his work, his constant effort to change it would destroy the gratitude, and it would not take long before he in the countenance of every Norwegian could see Einar Tambsjelve's reply to his king: 'That was Norway off thy hand, O king!' But the action permits of explanation when we remember that the king is the king of the united countries, and that he rules Norway from Sweden. If the Swedish monarchy shall continue unchanged, the Norwegian independence must suffer. This eagle must not be permitted to rise to such a height that it can be seen over the mountains, for in that case it will frighten the quiet swans on the Swedish lakes. The younger brother must not possess anything that might make the older jealous. The rule by the people in Norway must not stand in too sharp contrast to the rule by the aristocracy in Sweden. Norway must take care that she keeps the proper distance behind Sweden; still I think it would be better if that nation increased the speed and kept pace with the political tendency of the age instead of being left behind and separated almost at the beginning of the journey. - - Separated? That was a thot! Can that surprise? However, we shall consider that later."<sup>1</sup>

It seemed that Wergeland foresaw the final breach of the union. The two governments were so different that almost any little thing would lead to strained relations. This effort of the king to strengthen the royal prerogative was one of the many

<sup>1</sup> Samlede Skrifter, Vol. VII, pp. 188-189.



attempts which forced the countries ever further apart and created a prolonged political struggle which culminated in the separation of the two kingdoms in 1905.

When he was editor of "The Citizen," Wergeland was the chief spokesman for the interests of the bönder. The first Storting in which the bönder were in the majority was elected in 1833, and they began to enact measures in their interest at once. One of the propositions to be discussed when the Storting was dissolved in 1836 was the grant of local self-government. In 1837 this important feature of a true democracy was made a law, and Wergeland has been given credit for helping to fight this measure thru.<sup>1</sup> As will be seen later it was particularly his work as an educator and organizer of the country people that counted in bringing about this result. But it was not the interest of any particular class Wergeland advocated; he would give the individual, as well as the nation as a whole, the right to decide his own affairs and determine his own future as far as an individual is permitted to do<sup>so</sup> in a commonwealth.

When we consider Wergeland's philosophy of life as presented in "Creation," it is only natural that he was a republican. His evolutionary view of Christianity and life in general could lead to no other form of government than the republic. At one time he called his world-poem "The Republican's Bible," for he was conscious of the fact that he had given expression to such teachings, and during those years that political ideas

1 Halvdan Koht: Henrik Wergeland, p. 90.

played an important part in his literary and editorial work one can notice how well rooted these ideas were. He was convinced that "the constitutional monarchies are only transitions to republics." He predicted that the time would come when all western European nations would be republics, and "Russia and Austria constitutional monarchies - - - the only remnants of a past epoch in the world's history."<sup>1</sup> We may well believe him when he says that he has never felt "so happy at heart and so elastic in spirit" as when he first set foot on French soil. To him France was the "promised land of freedom," of which he says: "I felt as if I had a Frenchman's blood in my veins, when I entered the land I love most next my own."<sup>2</sup> But it was not an easy matter to start a republican propaganda in Norway in those days, and Wergeland did not at any time try to put this theory into practice, except so far as those theories of government can be made to harmonize with a limited monarchy.

Henrik Wergeland loved the king in spite of the fact that he was an ardent republican and continually acted contrary to the king's wishes. In his life sketches he writes of his relation with the king:<sup>3</sup> "Since my twentieth year Charles John had in his possession a token of my love for him, which, I think, worked as an amulet in my behalf. In 1828 the king had proclaimed a firm resolution against the Seventeenth of May festivities. My father had gone to Christiania, but before we knew

1 Hartvig Lassen: Henrik Wergeland, pp. 62-63.

2 Samlede Skrifter, Vol. VIII, p. 566.

3 Samlede Skrifter, Vol. VIII, p. 616 ff.

he was home again. "Of course," he said, "the king found it a very striking coincidence that it was my son, son of the man upon whom he had bestowed particular favors, that was the most persistent of the students to act contrary to his majesty's will in regard to the Seventeenth of May." Up to this time I had always seen in Charles John the republican from France. It caused me great pain to throw overboard this opinion; I therefore answered quickly: "Yes, when the king acts like a despot I am against him."

He then wrote a poem addressed to the king and written in French; in this he gave expression to the most sincere loyalty.<sup>1</sup> When his father again appeared before the king, he was taken aside and questioned about his son.

"A poem in French as an answer, Sire."

"That I shall keep," said Charles John smiling.

Wergeland did not do much to encourage this favorable turn of events. Especially was his conduct in 1833 a bold demonstration, but still the king received him kindly, when he sought his audience in 1835. The king complimented him on his unusual literary ability, to which Wergeland replied that it did not seem to speak in his favor. "And yet," he said, "it is not my greatest fault that I have a head, but that I have a heart."

With a smile the king replied: "I believe that, but the reason must lead the heart."

<sup>1</sup> Je n'ai que mon esprit et ma vie;  
 mais ils n'appartiennent à moi;  
 ils appartiennent à mon roi,  
 qui est l'ami de ma patrie.

"Not always, Sire!"

"True enough, monsieur Wergeland, there can be no great deed without passion."<sup>1</sup>

It is quite true that Wergeland often was moved to action by passion when reason ought to have been the determining factor. But with all his shortcomings he gained the good will of the king during his later years.

Wergeland gave further proof of his patriotism in 1836, when he sent out an invitation to the Norwegian people to erect a monument at Eidsvold in memory of the Constitutional Assembly -- a "Statue of Liberty" in other words. He wrote in part: "It is important that we have a national monument at Eidsvold, erected by the Norwegian people about the greatest and happiest event in its history on the very spot where it took place -- a memorial to the constitution worthy in its construction of the people which erected it and of the event it shall make eternal."<sup>2</sup> This that was dear to all Norwegians and it ought to have been realized quite easily. The immediate result of Wergeland's invitation was, however, that the grounds and the buildings in which the Constitutional Assembly met were purchased the next year, and donated to the state; thus the "birthplace of the constitution" was made national property. This was not an exact realization of Wergeland's plan; but

1 Samlede Skrifter. Vol. VIII, P. 616-620.

2 Samlede Skrifter. Vpl. VIII, P. 228.

the grounds and restored buildings are as fitting a memorial as anyone can desire.

The one political issue which particularly interested Wergeland during his later years was a movement to grant Jews admission to Norway. The constitution excluded the Jewish people from the country. Wergeland considered this the one dark blot on that beloved document and an injustice to the Jewish people. It had happened that Jews, who were shipwrecked on the coast or otherwise forced into the country, were prosecuted and punished. In Norway Wergeland was first to arouse a sentiment in behalf of the Jews. He first called attention to this in 1832, and when he thought public sentiment was strong enough to support him, he introduced in the Storting a constitutional amendment which provided that Jews be granted all the privileges of citizenship in Norway. Wergeland did not only introduce the amendment, but he also molded public opinion and swung representatives of the Storting into line for the cause. The press was extensively employed, and in order to soften the hardened hearts of the people, he wrote his two cycles of beautiful poems, "The Jew" in 1842 and "The Jewess" in 1844. These poems portray the heart-rending sufferings that Jews had been, or might have been subjected to in Norway, and they breathe the love and sympathy that the poet felt for the persecuted people.

When the matter was to be discussed on the floor of the Storting, Wergeland distributed a leaflet to the representatives. It was addressed "To the Storting" and read in part: "That course which is morally right ought to be pursued, for it is morally necessary and beneficial, even if the benefit is not evident now. This is just as certain as it is true that whatever is morally bad contains its punishment in itself, even if it does not appear to be so at the moment. This is the constitution of God's universe, in the moral world-order, and it is recommended for consideration in regard to the question of the day concerning our constitution paragraph two, the last section. Furthermore, there are a great many positive commandments from the life of Christ and his apostles, which all prove the statements made above.<sup>1</sup>"

It was Jonas Anton Hjelm, Wergeland's staunch friend and supporter in all his political activities, who wrote the resolution recommending the adoption of the amendment. When this report of the constitutional committee had been read, the president of the Storting read a letter from Wergeland, in which he further justified the principles embodied in the amendments, quoting twelve passages from scripture, which show that tolerance is not only in harmony with scripture but demanded by it. He concludes this letter to the Storting thus: "This proposition does perhaps belong to those reforms that are evidences of a

1 Samlede Skrifter, Vol. VIII, 454 ff.

more enlightened and further advanced epoch; but the tolerant and hospitable character of the Norwegian people gives a well-grounded hope that this measure can be carried this year."

He was destined to be disappointed, however, for the amendment did not receive the necessary two thirds majority, even tho a majority of the votes were cast for it. But Wergeland was undaunted, for the very same day he wrote a communication to the Storting, in which he asked that the issue be taken up for consideration at the next regular session. As the time for the opening of this next session approached, he published his cycle of poems "The Jewess!" Even after a year of sickness, he was just as enthusiastic about the cause as ever. And only a month before his death he wrote a private letter to Sorensen, the President of the Storting, in regard to another question involving religious tolerance: "I do not need to encourage you, warmhearted champion of light! But when the day comes in the Storting, then fight, rave, and weep; and when nothing helps, then unmask the egoistic and uncivilized members. - - The nation's honor is at stake. The friends of the cause, who have decided to speak for it, should unite their efforts and single out their opponents." The opposition to the Jews was very bitter and Wergeland did not live to see his dream realized. It was six years after his death, in 1851, that the Jews were granted political and social privileges in Norway.

1 Samlede Skrifter, Vol. VIII, p. 456

2 Samlede Skrifter, Vol. VIII, p. 487.

3 Carl Nærup: Utvalgte Skrifter, Vol. IV, p. 653.

. It is, however, generally conceded that Wergeland did more than any one else to secure the final adoption of the amendment. Even before it was passed, he was given a token of gratitude by the excluded people. Before his own people could honor him by a monument, the Jews of Sweden and Denmark erected the monument on his grave. It was dedicated in Stockholm in 1847, and two years later a delegation of Jews, provided with passports, was allowed to bring the statue to Christiania, where it was finally dedicated in 1849.

The base bears the significant inscription: "Henrik Wergeland, the untiring champion of the freedom of mankind and the rights of citizens."



Wergeland's Attitude towards Foreign  
Cultural Influence.

It was not only political independence Wergeland would assure the Norwegian people; he wanted Norway to be culturally independent as well. During the period of union with Denmark Norway had become a province of that country with respect to culture in the broad sense. The literary language, social standards, customs and usages were all Danish so far as the upper classes were concerned. The Danish capital was the center of learning and everything accessible in literature was supplied from that city. So strong were the ties with Denmark that a large proportion of the educated people in Norway frowned upon any attempt to sever these ties. To these people life and letters seemed too crude to do without the inspiration, refinement and guidance of Denmark. Against these views a national movement had begun in Norway soon after the separation from Denmark. The ambition was to develop Norway on original lines, to produce a national life with roots in the nation itself.

This movement had no recognized leader in literature until Henrik Wergeland appeared "in the midst of this sedate and self-satisfied autocratic elegance as a huge storm center, causing an intellectual upheaval such as the nation had not yet experienced. Long cherished literary views were challenged, and old social ideas were given a rude shock. It was a storm

which electrified and cleansed the atmosphere and stirred the germs of life into new growth.<sup>1</sup>"

The period 1830 - 1845 is without question the most important and the most interesting in the intellectual awakening of Norway. It was a time of conflict between the old and the new. The English naturalists and still more the French romanticists had emancipated themselves from established rules in regard to literature, arts and social conditions. In Norway this tendency found expression in Wergeland, who became the central figure of the period and is the historical personification of it, for the period has been called "The Wergeland Period." He cleared the ground and pointed out the general direction for progress, not only in his own time, but also for the period following. But it is ever true that everything new causes conflict before it is recognized and gains ascendancy. The time was a real "Sturm - und Drang" period. Everything truly Norwegian in literature, arts, language, and customs was now given prominence. This was part of the program of a small party of patriots, of whom Wergeland was the leader.

The storm began in the student society at the university. "The Students' Union" was at first organized for social purposes, but by 1825 it had become the arena for the discussion of all questions of national scope. The students had an exaggerated idea of their own importance, and the whole community watched

1 History of the Norwegian People, Vol. II, p. 466.

them with an attention and deference which might well have turned the heads of older and wiser men. With all their shortcomings these students regarded themselves as called upon to raise aloft the banner of the ideal. The nature of this ideal was of course hazy to most of them; but in general the old revolutionary catchwords, "liberty, equality, and fraternity," applied to politics and social conditions, expressed the aspirations of the youths as well as of the mature minds of the young democracy.

As to the means of realizing this ideal opinions differed, and the Students' Union split into two camps over the issue of how to bring about an intellectual revival in Norway. It was the publication of Wergeland's poetical work "Creation" in 1830 that precipitated the great national struggle. This poem aroused the opposition of Johan Welhaven, who published an anonymous poem "To Henrik Wergeland," in which he in exceedingly bitter terms assailed the poet and stamped him a "Madhouse Candidate." It was particularly his style that Welhaven objected to. He, too, would bring an intellectual revival to Norway; he was slightly influenced by the Danish romanticists, and he agreed with the upper classes that all new ideas and higher culture necessarily must come from Denmark. He therefore clung with scholastic fidelity to the old rules in regard to poetic form and diction. Welhaven regarded poetry as tender sentiment and beautiful images, which he "perched in serene tranquility above the clouds." His

own poetry conforms in every detail to his hard and fast rules of poetic art. He believed in "art for art's sake."

To Wergeland, on the other hand, poetry gave expression to thots and experiences, to the storms, the struggles, the sorrows and happiness of life itself. It was a weapon to be used in his battles, a means towards an end. Dr. Gjerset characterized his poetry thus: "There are living heartbeats in his rhymes and rhythms, tears and triumphs, battle shouts and joyous laughter in his lines. It is doubtful if ever another poet to a like degree has succeeded in making life poetry and poetry life - - the real secret of his unique influence." <sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note his own statement of a poet's calling and of what poetry ought to be: "The purpose of the Danish literature is to entertain. It is a sofa-literature. - - Amusement has never been the sole purpose of poetry since Horace set forth as the real purpose 'to benefit.' In olden times our poets perhaps sang at the festivals; but at the Battle of Stiklestad Thormod sang the old "Bjarkemaal" - - The true poets had a definite end in view; they did not shut themselves off from the world, but they made themselves a place in the world. Formerly they were the teachers of warriors and kings; now they teach the people and lead them with their ideas. They understood and interpreted the world-moral, they formed the van-guard of their time, they lived in a sphere which their time had not yet pene-

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Knut Gjerset: History of the Norwegian People, Vol. II, p. 470.

trated; their songs were prophecies or were like beautiful mirages ahead of their time. - - We don't want poets that live in heaven to look down on the earth, or are intoxicated by a dream of the barbaric past or labor under the impression that the dust of the past in which they root around will benefit the present or make it better; but we want poets who understand their time, participate in its needs, enlighten the people about them, and encourage their enterprises and hopes. We want poets who idealize, not <sup>1</sup> for its own sake, but to realize or hope to see the ideas realized!

The Wergeland-Welhaven controversy was at first merely a struggle about literary views and tastes; but it soon took on a political and social nature. The controversy took its name from the leaders, who soon collected their friends about themselves into two opposing camps, which made the cleavage in Norwegian society still more marked. Welhaven, the son of a Bergen clergyman, belonged in every way to the upper classes, while Wergeland by training and sympathies became closely identified with the common people. The parties thus formed were at first only student factions, but they were the first distinct parties in modern Norwegian history, and the two great political parties, which were formed thirty years later, can be traced directly to them.

Welhaven's party was called the "Intelligence Party" as they assumed to be the bearers of the higher intellectual culture and refined tastes, such as were imported from Denmark.

<sup>1</sup> Samlede Skrifter, Vol. VII, p. 454-456.

Wergeland and his friends were called patriots, for their program was strictly national and democratic in its character. The most heated clashes between these parties took place in the Students' Union; but the situation soon became unbearable for Welhaven and his friends, who withdrew in 1832 to form a new student society. Besides Welhaven many of the most talented leaders belonged to this faction - for instance, Schweigaard, P. A. Munck, F. Stang, and Bernhard Dunker. Both camps had their party organs in which the battle was waged in satires and stinging epigrams.

As already stated it was Wergeland's work "Creation" which was the first cause for contention; but in 1834 Welhaven published his critical poem "Norges Dæmring". In this he finds fault with everything that was Norwegian; he attributes semi-culture and narrow mindedness to his opponents; he found their patriotism blind and boisterous. The charge was violent, full of personal animosity and bitterness. It was, of course, an attack on Wergeland; but the Patriots took it as an insult to the national honor, and the controversy flamed forth with renewed violence. At first this was almost confined to the student organization, but now it became a struggle of nationwide dimensions. It has been merely literary and intellectual in its scope; but now it took a clear-cut political and social aspect, and it developed into the bitter feud, "Dæmringsfeiden" which lasted for years and was fought in the party organs and in the

press in general. The public was thus made acquainted with the issue, which in the final analysis was whether the dominating political and social tendencies were to be autocratic or democratic, whether the new advancement should come from without and be based on Danish influence or ought to come from within and issue from the life and individuality of the people themselves. Wergeland's ultimate aim was to awaken the common people and make them conscious of their right to assert themselves in their own affairs. He knew that this could not be done as long as the traditional Danish influence was permitted to hold sway, for that would only strengthen the upper classes and widen the cleavage in society.

Welhaven's poem brought him no glory; many of the most prominent men took offence and criticised him severely. Wergeland's father wrote a most scathing criticism in his booklet "Defense for the Norwegian people and thoro criticism on the ill reputed poem 'Norges Dæmring.'" This is a keen analysis of the poem and leaves nothing for the author but shame and dishonor. "We hope," he writes in part, "that we have given sufficient proof to show that the ill reputed poem, "Norges Dæmring", is a disgrace to the country, a dishonor to its author, and an outrageous scandal.----- Let it be an agreement between us that everyone, who loves his country and has his own honor at heart, throws his copy on the fire; and if it is possible, let it be done on the same day, on the next Seventeenth of May."<sup>1</sup> Welhaven became very unpopular and for a time it was not entirely safe for him to walk the streets

<sup>1</sup> Nicolai Wergeland: Forsvar for det norske folk og utførlig kritik over det berygtede skrift, "Norges Dæmring."

of Christiania. When he came home from a journey in 1836, a group of students met him and followed him thru the streets. They were so menacing that Welhaven had to seek refuge with a friend.

The Wergeland - Welhaven controversy reached a dramatic climax in the so called "Campbeller Battle" in 1837. The new theater in Christiania had offered a prize for the best play written for its dedication. Wergeland submitted "Campbellerne", which was placed second in the twelve plays submitted in the contest. The directors of the theater, however, decided that Wergeland's play also would be staged. When Welhaven's friends heard of this they decided to appear and hoot it off the stage, for they would not permit Wergeland or anything written by an ultra-Norwegian to gain that much recognition. But Wergeland's friends were there to applaud the play, and they were the more numerous and the more sturdy. When the curtain rose, the hooters overwhelmed the players completely; but when they showed no sign of permitting the play to proceed, Wergeland's friends ejected them from the theater. The poet himself watched the hand-to-hand struggle from the balcony, and he speaks of it as the proudest moment in his life.

It may seem that the episode was unimportant, but it was of some significance at the time, for it was a clear-cut victory for Wergeland and the patriots, who now were more determined than ever to push their national program to the front. It gave Wergeland prestige; he secured the confidence of the common



people more than ever. The event showed the utter lack of tact in the conduct of the "Intelligence Party." Their behavior was inconsistent with their avowed principles. "The episode taught them that whatever they might think of aesthetic theories, there existed a young and robust Norway, which was determined to solve its cultural problems without foreign interference either directly or indirectly."<sup>1</sup>

It is particularly in his humorous farce, "Selskapet Kringla," that Wergeland lays bare the superficiality in the society circles of the city. It is the desire for show, the mimicry of foreign tastes and usages in clothes, manner, conversation and interests that he flays in bitter satire. It was empty elegance and superficial refinement, entirely unwarranted on Norwegian soil. Underneath this quasi-refinement was the "bear-nature," which was shown too well by the incident at the theater.

Wergeland was the first to lift his voice for a truly national theater in Christiania. Hitherto everything that pertained to the theater had been Danish to the core; the music, scenery, plays, and actors were imported from Denmark. It had been the consensus of opinion that the Norwegians did not possess the temperament that made for successful actors, and for that reason it was hopeless for a Norwegian to apply for a position at the theater. Furthermore, "the directors had an agreement between themselves that no Norwegian should be accepted." Wergeland

1 History of the Norwegian People, Vol. II, p. 473.

believed that a national theater, which employed native actors and played Norwegian plays, would assist materially in awakening the national consciousness. He wanted to arouse a degree of pride in all those things which were of national character. In 1837 he wrote an article in "The Citizen," in which he plainly states his view.<sup>1</sup> "Is there a Norwegian who at all considers the needs of the nation, who does not believe in the need of a national stage? The Norwegian people is very particular when its national honor is at stake. Even if a great deal cannot be done at first, a beginning should be made towards the nationalization of the public stage in the capital. No Norwegian outside of the capital believes that it does not concern him! Our political union with another country and Denmark's arrogant intellectual supremacy weakens our national peculiarities and our independence so much that we cannot for any length of time maintain our national traits without the assistance of a national theater. Against this movement no provincial egoism must assert itself. A national scene in the capital does not concern that city more or the whole country less than the Bank of Norway concerns Thronhjelm. The whole country shares the benefit; but since the capital will have the pleasure, it is fair that it does something to give the country the honor of a national theater! In connection with this theater a school should be established whose primary purpose was to be to train talented young people

1 Samlede Skrifter, Vol VII, p. 262-266.

as actors.<sup>1</sup> The new theater, which opened in 1837 was only a partial fulfillment of Wergeland's hopes; but twenty years later Björnson took up the fight, where it had been left off, with the result that the Danish influence was finally banished.

On the whole the Wergeland-Welhaven controversy had a beneficial influence in Norway. It gave the people a more harmonious development than the rather one-sided program of Wergeland would have done. The ideas of the two factions really supplemented each other, even though they at first seemed to be irreconcilable. It must be remembered, however, that it was Wergeland's activity as a poet, journalist, and agitator that precipitated the struggle, outlined its course, and gave it color.

We should be greatly mistaken, however, if we thought that Wergeland's national program meant exclusion of outside influences. Welhaven would thus interpret the national movement, for he says in his first criticism: "The plan in this policy seems in the final analysis to be to isolate our country's spiritual development from all foreign culture," and in several sonnets in "Norges Dämring" he endeavors to show and to warn of the detrimental results that this isolation system would lead to.<sup>2</sup> Such criticism was unjust, for Wergeland's interest in western European civilization was much keener than his opponents', and his knowledge of it was greater. Especially was he enthusiastic about the advancement in England and France. When he was in France, he

1 Samlede Skrifter, Vol. VII, p. 264.

2 Quoted from: Henrik Jæger's Norsk Lit. History, Vol. II.

studied the conditions thoroly, and <sup>he</sup> took his knowledge into his activity that it might modify conditions at home. He perceived plainly that a new era was approaching, and he saw it as his duty to bring the thots and ideas, that had awakened western Europe into harmony with the national movement at home. He said in his speech at the dedication of Krogh's statue, "we should be Norwegian to the very core," but he also says in the same speech that it was their duty "to look free and far out into the world."<sup>1</sup> It was the wholesome and upbuilding factors in the civilization of western Europe that he would transplant to Norwegian soil. In reality Wergeland was more cosmopolitan than Welhaven and his followers.

Wergeland's lifework was to build the new Norway on the old foundation. To realize this more or less well defined aim would make the people free both in reality and in the eyes of the world. At first he thot that it would be necessary to lay a new foundation, for he was of the impression that the independent history of Norway was discontinued at the time of the union with Denmark. "The New Norway and Norway of the Viking Age seem like two semicircles that fit closely together; the middle period is like an unreal connecting link, which we can break away to unite the two solid parts."<sup>2</sup> For this reason he thot the national restoration had to be a new creation, not only a development of that Norway which already existed. He did, however,

1 Samlede Skrifter, Vol. VII, p. 382.

2 Samlede Skrifter, Vol. VII, p. 393.

give up this view, and in his Constitutional History of Norway he shows the inner connection in Norwegian history from the earliest time and thru the union period. He showed that the same circumstances, which led to the downfall of the old nobility and resulted in Norway's weakness during the union period, enabled the bönder to preserve their liberty, and created conditions favorable to a new national development, which would as a matter of course lead to the events of 1814. The free constitutional government can only be explained on the basis of this gradual development, which gave the constitution "strong historical roots that penetrated far into the previous centuries." "It is false," he said in his Seventeenth of May address in 1835, "if we say that liberty spread out its glory suddenly as a meteor that penetrates the dark night with its ball of flame. - - Certainly it is a gift from heaven and the best of all gifts - for all good things proceed from it - but it does not fall down on the sleeping. It is put as a prize at the <sup>2</sup>end of a course where men must exert themselves and compete."

Wergeland was the first to present this view, and for a long time he was the only one who believed in this continuity, which is of fundamental importance in Norwegian history, both for history itself and for the correct understanding of the constitution and the other national institutions. All later Norwegian historians have adopted this evolutionary view of history,

1 As quoted by Koht in Festskrift to Sars, p. 133.

2 Samlede Skrifter, Vol. VII, p. 133.

and Wergeland's work is thus very significant. Especially has Dr. J. E. Sars developed this idea in his monumental work, "Utsigt over Norges Historie." The historical studies were also of great benefit to himself. He began to use method in his work, and he got a clearer understanding of the importance of the national element in the reconstruction of a New Norway.

In still another field we shall find Wergeland a pioneer, for with him and his time a new epoch began in the development of the language. He understood clearly that a truly national culture could not develop or exist side by side with the Danish literary language, and he tried to find a foundation for a truly national language in the dialects of the Eastern districts. He voiced the longing of the patriots for a literary standard that lay closer to the spoken idiom; but he lacked the scientific and linguistic prerequisites for any far reaching or well planned reform. It was his aim to give his people linguistic independence, and it is towards this goal that the continuous language movement has pointed ever since.

With Wergeland the Danish language, which had been used as the standard literary language in Norway ever since the Reformation, came under strong influence of the spoken idiom, which abounded in pure Norse terms. He wanted to "call forth a few courageous voices, that would employ the spoken idiom in such a way as to modify the Danish literary language and thus save whatever could be saved." These voices came and the mixture of Danish and the spoken language developed into the Dano-Norwegian,

which is sharply differentiated from the Danish. It was his work to establish this norm that gave Wergeland the name "the Pioneer of Norwegian Language Reform."<sup>1</sup> But, his departure from the established idiom was not allowed to pass unchallenged, and he was severely criticised for his "barbarisms" and colloquial usages. Wergeland defended his departure in 1835 in a lengthy essay on "The Norwegian Language Reform,"<sup>2</sup> which has been an important factor in the movement ever since. In this he justifies the practice of replacing Danish words with Norwegian, and he points out that "there is a law of nature that will force the Norse element" to the front. "Just as surely as the Norwegians are an independent people they will in time have a literary language of their own. Authors of individuality, and poets especially, are by desire for freedom in expression forced to approach the spoken language." He also points out that the people in general did not know that their dialects were remnants of the old Norse, which had nearly been rooted out during the long union with Denmark. It was especially Ivar Aasen, the most prominent man in the language movement, who took up this idea; with his scholarly works he established that the dialects were based directly on the Old Norse.

There are particularly two arguments upon which Wergeland bases his appeal in his essay. Norway's progress as an independent nation requires that it have a language of its own. Speak-

1 D. A. Seip: Norskhet i Sproget hos Henrik Wergeland.

2 Samlede Verker, Vol. VII, pp. 468-490.

ing of the Danish influence he says: "Shall Norway still be kept as a province of Denmark? It is so in fact, and for that reason the Norwegians are imbued with contempt for their own language, literature and art, and they are taught to doubt their own possibilities. If this movement succeeds - well, then Norway will not long be able to boast of political independence."<sup>1</sup> In the second place the Norwegian terms should be used for onomatopoeic reasons. He was too much of a poet to overlook this point. The Norwegian word gave him a much better concept than the corresponding Danish, and it would set his imagination into activity. Then only is a word alive when it has the power to stir the imagination. "It is a law of nature," he says, "that environment places its stamp on the people; and the people in turn give certain peculiarities to the language," which, therefore, is well suited to give expression to the finest shades of meaning. Danish is for this reason "not satisfactory as a literary language in Norway."

That reform was urgent is evident when we consider the statement made by the historian P. A. Munch in a letter to George Stephans: "We Norwegians are compelled to learn the literary language almost as a new tongue. - - Most of the Danes, that undertake to do any writing, think in the terms as they are written, while we Norwegians think in the spoken dialects; and when we write our thots down, we must translate them into the standard

1 Samlede Skrifter, Vol. VII, p. 420.



literary idiom from the terms and usages peculiar to the spoken language.<sup>1</sup> Wergeland's work was the first of constructive nature. "He came before Ivar Aasen and Knud Knudson both in time and in sound judgment in regard to the gradual "Reformation" of the language by incorporating Norse elements. - - It will remain his unwaning glory that he was the first to point out this course. The authors of the succeeding period followed in his footsteps."<sup>1</sup>

After Wergeland's time it was generally conceded that a change was necessary and consistent with the national development, but there was a parting of the ways. Wergeland had started the "reformatory" movement; but his work was after all only patchwork, and he did not consistently carry out his theory in practice. He was no philologist, and he found very little support among his contemporaries. His work was continued particularly by Knud Knudson, and the greatest literary men after his time have followed this course. P. Chr. Asbjørnson and Jørgen Moe were the first to acquire a style that was almost identical with the idiomatic usage in the eastern districts. The decisive move in this direction was, however, taken by Ibsen and by Bjørnson in particular. He not only used Norse terms but he acquired a style, which closely approaches the style of the sagas. This movement which has resulted in the so called Dano-Norwegian is still progressing and it won recognition by statute

<sup>1</sup> As quoted by D. A. Seip: *Norskhet i sproget hos Henrik Wergeland*, p. 12.

in 1907.

There had also been an aggressive movement on foot to revolutionize the language entirely. The adherents of this movement do not recognize Danish as the basis on which to build; their plan is to reconstruct the Old Norse on the basis of the best and purest dialects. This reconstructed language is the "landsmaal," and there is no doubt but that Wergeland also gave the impetus to this movement. In a conversation with Jørgen Moe he bursts out in his peculiar style: "No - reconstruction, old forms, old inflections, everything that does not sound too ridiculous! Every means we must use! Every pen we must win!" The "landsmaal" has gained much support and at present it is recognized as being on par with the Dano-Norwegian. The adherents of the "landsmaal" claim that this language is truly Norwegian, and altho it is not yet a "kultursprache," they declare they will make it the standard idiom. The struggle between the two camps has been long and bitter and no one can foretell the final outcome. Both languages will no doubt continue to be in use, and in time a solution satisfactory to both sides may be reached.

### Wergeland's Activity in Behalf of the Common People.

Henrik Wergeland was a commoner in the broadest sense of the term. The main burden of his life as a citizen was to educate the people for citizenship, to bring about moral uplift and to better the economic conditions of the poorer classes. He would make the common people fit for participation in public life. The constitution granted the bønder two thirds of the representatives in the Storting; but they were slow to take advantage of this, and they had a majority for the first time in 1833; and even then it was too obvious that they were not ready to assume political leadership. It was all too evident that most of them lacked the fundamental knowledge to undertake such duties. A broader foundation had to be laid on which to build the democracy, and that foundation was an enlightened public. The so called cultured classes had taken an aristocratic attitude towards the common people. Wergeland and others with him, who had the welfare of the nation at heart, saw in the existing conditions an inherent danger to liberty, and they would erase this class difference by elevating the lower classes to a higher social plane, before the antagonism became too intense. Wergeland began to realize more and more that all lasting growth had to come from within and not from without as many of his opponents would have it. The process was necessarily a very slow one, and it took years before any decided change could be noticed. His work was, however, just as posi-

itive in its results here as in other fields; it was particularly Wergeland's work to launch the campaigns, which others took up and carried to a successful end.

The school system in Norway at this time was very deficient and the circulation of books, newspapers, and periodicals was very scanty. Wergeland tried to remedy this evil, and in 1830 he began to publish a series of pamphlets, "For the Common People," in which he discussed topics of interest to the farmers and the working class. In the first of these pamphlets<sup>1</sup> he urges the establishment of libraries in the country districts. His plan was on the order of a clearing house, as he had to consider the limited resources available for that purpose. Books should be bought, donated or lent by people of the community for free circulation by the library. He further planned to establish a central library in Christiania, of which these others were to be branches.

He argues in his paper that the educated farmer is the best farmer, and for that reason the "leisure hours should be used for reading and not be passed in idleness." It is the duty of every one to care for his education, for "the fatherland needs citizens with insight; liberty requires thinking men." He knows that in every man there is possibility for development if the opportunity is given. "Fellow citizen," he says, "you shall be given opportunity to satisfy this want, opportunity to reach the privileges of education, to make use of and appreciate your citi-

1. Samlede Skrifter, Vol. VII, p. 3 ff.

zenship, which only the enlightened one can, to rejoice in your spiritual freedom, and to break the fetters of darkness and doubt. You shall have opportunity to learn to know nature, humanity, and yourselves, to have reasonable pleasures, in short to be men in a nobler sense than mere laborers. This opportunity is given you by the circulation of good books, the fruits of learned men's work for man. By all cultured people the reading of good books is considered the most natural means to ennoble and enlighten man. Such employment of your leisure hours will not only make you better educated, but you will become more industrious, more productive, more prosperous, and finally happier as you become more respected citizens.<sup>1</sup> From this and similar articles it is evident that Wergeland had inherited his father's and the previous generation's firm belief in the value of enlightenment, but he also had a keen eye for the practical sides as well, for education was not the end in itself; it was a means towards the end - "A Greater Norway."

Wergeland traveled extensively thru the districts around Christiania and his home, and he studied the social conditions of the people by associating with them. This is the main reason why he could write for the common people, gain their sympathy and arouse their desire for learning as no one else could at the time. He belonged to that class of people which puts theory into practice whenever possible. He not only wrote about public

<sup>1</sup> Samlede Skrifter, Vol. VII, p. 9.

libraries but he also helped to establish these in many districts thru which he traveled, and everywhere he was received with enthusiasm and trust for he was known as the devoted friend of the people. Hartvig Lassen says of his work in this field: "He realized his idea in his own circle and he had in a short time a public library in full operation at Eidsvold, which he himself took care of. This example was followed in the neighboring districts; many of the pastors thruout the country followed out the idea, which was supported by the government. Thus it took only a few years before nearly every parish in the country had a public library of its own."

From one of his journeys "The Citizen" reports: "Everywhere the public wanted to see Wergeland and speak with him, and at one place where he stopped, he was asked to make his home. In short, he was received with honor and trust to such a degree that it was plain that his work in those districts was highly appreciated. A high government official with his splendid retinue would not have attracted more attention than did the simple but richly endowed young man, even tho he traveled on foot with his knapsack on his back."

Wergeland was not a tourist who traveled only to enjoy himself; he was of some use to the community thru which he traveled. It is said of him that at one time of his life he carried with him seeds of useful trees, which he scattered in

1 Hartvig Lassen: Henrik Wergeland, p. 142.

2 As quoted by Halvdan Koht: Henrik Wergeland, p. 74.

barren places. He would have his comrades do the same, "for," he says, "no one can tell what might grow here." This is indeed a striking and poetic expression of the love of country which always prompted him to action. As he scattered the seeds and hoped to see a rich and verdant vegetation, so he strewed the spiritual seeds in order that his fellow countrymen might progress and be happy.

When he had settled definitely in Christiania, he established a library in his own home. He gathered a large collection of books, which, together with his own, was open for circulation on Sundays. He took a keen interest in the boys of the street, who learned to love him as a close friend. He encouraged them to read, he lent them books, and he examined them on the contents, when they returned them. He also helped many of these boys to find employment as errand boys, as apprentices, or in other positions. In this way Wergeland gave to Christiania many a useful citizen, who otherwise would have been a burden to society. The friendship that these boys developed for Wergeland verged on idolatry. When they saw him they cheered for him, and when they saw him on a Seventeenth of May, the cheer was: "Hurrah! for the Seventeenth of May and for Henrik Wergeland, who established the day!"

Skavlan relates an incident that shows what he did for the boys: "One midsummernight's eve he had gathered a group of boys at his home. First he told them about the significance of the day. Then he mounted his little bay horse and

rode at the head of the procession to "St Hanshaugen," where at that time a public celebration was held in the evening. Wergeland led his troop to the bonfires and the fireworks. He treated his boys to soft drinks and cake, and his joy was to see them happy. He then took his company to a quiet corner in the park and encouraged them to be kind and true, and grow up useful and enlightened men."<sup>1</sup>

The work in the interest of public libraries was followed up by a whole series of popular writing, which he often distributed at his own expense. He wrote and published textbooks in reading, naturestudy, and History of Norway. These and other writings were intended for instruction, and in the same spirit he published in 1834 a plan for the organization of schools, whose purpose it would be to assist the young people of the rural communities in further study. This plan was realized in a much more practical form seventeen years later, but Wergeland did at least organize, and he conducted for some time, such a school in his home community. This was at the time when the enthusiasm for liberal ideas was at high tide, and imbued with these ideas he based his plan on the experiences that he had gathered on his travels thru the country. His conclusions in regard to the need of schools for the young people are found in an article in "Morgenbladet" in 1834. "A knowledge of politics, spread among common people, who have not sufficient train-

<sup>1</sup> Olaf Skavlan: Henrik Wergeland, p. 254-255.



ing in those branches which ought to be a foundation in all education, is not as beneficial as it otherwise would be. It is also fresh in our minds that the country districts were denied local self-government, because the people were not able to undertake the responsibilities connected therewith. The bönder themselves realize that the instruction which they receive in the public schools is not sufficient in real life. - - They long for an opportunity to gain insight in government affairs. This is to their credit, and the help ought to come from their better situated fellow citizen.<sup>1</sup>"

This thought of educating for citizenship and political leadership was also the central idea in the second booklet of "For the Common People."<sup>2</sup> This was also published in 1830. It contains an encouragement to organize clubs in connection with "The Society for Norway's Welfare." It was no more or less than an attempt to organize farmers' clubs. One purpose of these clubs would be to encourage the development of the natural resources, agriculture and industries; his plan met with success in that many such clubs were organized thruout the country. The central idea of political significance set forth in this booklet is that "liberty is only a fleeting gift from heaven, which disappears from the nation, if it is not grasped firmly by local organization." Seven years later the Storting passed the law

1 As quoted by Hartvig Lassen: Henrik Wergeland, p. 146.

2 Samlede Skrifter, Vol. VII, pp. 16-29.

that granted the people local self-government. The organization of the farmers' clubs soon brought telling effect, for these societies brought their influence to bear on this measure, which had been defeated in the previous Stortings. It is at least certain that these local societies awakened the desire of the people to manage their local affairs.

To Wergeland the interests of the individual were subordinate to the interests of the nation. It was not sufficient that a few prominent men had organized a "Society for Norway's Welfare;" He proposed to organize the entire people into a society that would have the welfare of the country at heart. By organizing branch societies throught the country he thought it would be possible to create a "spirit of unity" so that the individual should not lose sight of community interests. This wholesome unity would dethrone those who lorded over the mass of the people and "break the bonds of tradition," which hamper progress along so many lines. The community ought to emancipate itself and the people would feel no restraint on reasonable enterprise. "The laws and whims of the lord will not be felt, but the laws of the country will encourage the citizen to do everything in the interests of the state. In such a state everything encourages loyalty to the slogan of this spirit of unity; Think of your country in all your deeds; make the nation synonymous with a 'Society for Norway's Welfare.'"

According to Wergeland's plan it was particularly the duty of the local organizations to improve the economic conditions of the community. This could be done by introducing new methods in agriculture and industries. "We all consider every occupation honorable," he says. "Our natural resources are indispensable and must be developed to capacity with care and judgment. The implements and the machinery that our forefathers used and regarded beyond improvement must not be retained for the sake of their traditions. We should use improved methods in our enterprises. We admit that the care of our country is in capable hands and under watchful eyes. As yet it is only in the making, but we have splendid resources from which to make a happy and wealthy nation." <sup>1</sup> In this manner he continues in a lengthy article to urge cooperation in community enterprises.

If any skeptics had asked Wergeland what such clubs could undertake to do or would accomplish, he would have drowned all doubt in a multitude of proposals; he gives nearly fifty suggestions pointing out what these clubs could busy themselves with; they could conduct experiments with new or neglected grains; they could study improved implements and machinery, marketing, prices, labor problems, church and school problems, issues of elections, communication, drainage, health and sanitation, forestry, etc. These are only a few of "the innumerable activities of importance to the alert observer, and the whole community?"

1 Samlede Skrifter, Vol. VII, p. 20 ff.

Great things could be accomplished "if only the residents of a community found it worth while to think and act together."

It may not be easy to show that all his suggestions were carried out in practice, but we can not overestimate the value of the actual organization of the farmers that resulted from Wergeland's invitation. His suggestions did at least give the people an idea of what there was to be done and what could be done if they would put their shoulders to the wheel. The most important thing at the time was to give impulses and arouse the interest of a few leaders, who would carry out the idea in the various districts. Wergeland was not a specialist in the field of agriculture, but he was a well known leader whose suggestions had a great deal of weight with the common people.

The trend of that in the writings "For the Common People" was of political and instructive nature, but the popular writings of Wergeland's later life were more philanthropic in their character. His sorrows had given his character greater repose, and his diction became more direct and refined. His greatest sorrows and disappointments came after he had accepted the gratuity of the king. The gift was looked upon as a bribe. Even some of his admirers and close friends turned their backs on him, for they thought that he had forsaken his principles. This was a hard shock for Wergeland, the feeling that he was forsaken filled his life with sadness, "against which he sought solace in the most intense work." In 1839 he began the publication of the paper

"For the Working Class," which he continued until his death. "As years went on he trained himself and became an expert in the art of writing for the common people. Even if his diction in his poetical works continued to be heavy and hard to understand, it was clear-cut in his <sup>1</sup>prose. He was understood by all and attained his purpose."

Not in any of his writings addressed directly to the common people does Wergeland try to arouse indignation or disloyalty to authorities, nor does he give them compliments to gain their good will; he tells them the truth straight from the shoulder. "What would it benefit," he says, "if I told you anything but the truth, which is the only remedy for evil." The purpose of his writings for the working class is to better their economic and social conditions. He wrote on all questions of everyday interest. He fights intemperance, laziness, indecency, superstition, dishonesty, uncleanness, and unsanitary conditions in general. He urges the worker to guard against these enemies, which "are not only worse than poverty itself but often the cause of poverty." In daring phrases he pictures the drunkard's moral and physical deterioration.

In some articles it is his purpose to awaken a sense of beauty in surroundings, and he tells how even the poorest hut can be made cozy by a little varnish and a few flowers in

1 Henrik Jäger: Norsk Literatur Historie, Vol. II, p. 235.

the window. He also discussed the problems of how to make a better living and he gives many suggestions for branching out in the old fields or entering into new fields of labor. His sphere of influence was thus very wide, and his activity in this field was also in harmony with his national program, that of building his country and awakening the national consciousness in his people.

Wergeland was interested in helping the working class raise its standard of living, and he considered this an essential part of his activity. It was not communism he advocated, nor did he attempt to arouse dissatisfaction and class hatred, which so often prompt the modern workers to raise their banners. He considered such motives enemies to his cause. He advocated tolerance: "To be satisfied with that which one is given and thank the Lord for it is fitting and proper." On the whole he believed in organization of labor, but improved conditions ought to come thru a closer relation between the employee and the employer. "When the rich become charitable, then the poor become happy and honorable." Wergeland did not thoroly understand the labor question and effected no actual labor organization; but "when Marcus Thrane in 1848 started the real labor movement, that effected social strife and organization in Norway, he could point back to Wergeland as a pioneer in the movement."<sup>1</sup>

The main reason why Wergeland's work for the common people carried weight and brought results was that he had won their

<sup>1</sup> Halvdan Koht: Henrik Wergeland, p. 168.

love and unquestioned confidence. The people may not have understood many of his poems and other literary productions; but they understood the purpose of his efforts in their behalf. When he appeared as their teacher and adviser, he had no reason to fear that they would meet him with suspicion. The greater part of the people gathered about him as the type of the true Norwegian and the one that gave them their best thoughts and highest ideals. It was his association with the people and his sacrifice for them that made him their idol.

There was nothing in Wergeland's nature that was more marked than his love of humanity. All life was sacred to him, and he responded freely to all suffering whether in man or beast. His father characterizes him thus: "He possesses a deep seated morality which is of the higher nature - - because it is positive and active. - - His morality is of that sort that most people do not understand, just as many do not understand much of his poetry. It consists in carrying out to the letter the commandment of the Gospel: 'If you have two coats, give the one to him who has none;' it consists in being a 'friend in deed, a friend in need;' it consists in courage to appear before the public attired in homespun, if need be; - - it consists in the warm love for the mother country that will make great sacrifices and in spite of misunderstanding do everything possible to foster and spread love and loyalty for the state and the government. His morality consists further, in sympathy with the ignorant, desire

to enlighten them, sacrificing comfort, means, and energy in writing for them and spreading literature among them. This work, which he did without compensation, has already brought good results. His morality is not only passive pity; it is sympathy with the poor and lowly, which does, that he, without considering his own peace and happiness, takes the part of the unjustly treated as if their cause was his own.<sup>1</sup>

In 1825 his father deposited one hundred specie dalers for him; but he earnestly begged that he might be permitted to give his poor uncle fifty specie dalers of this sum. "If we saw," he said, "a good mill standing idle for want of water, would we not open the mill race? Give me the pleasure of starting this mill." He divided his bread with the poor. He once wrote to his father: "I gave what I had, two specie dalers and a new shirt. - - The food grows bitter in my mouth when I think of all the misery. It seems as if I have no right to satisfy my hunger."

He did not always have money to help with; but if he could help in no other way, he would write a poem, a farce or something, which he had printed and sold for the benefit of the needy. Farmers, too, would come great distances to ask his advice about all sorts of problems that puzzle the farmer, and being a botanist by training and a naturalist by instinct he could always be of some help. "When the people learned," writes his

1 As quoted in: Nordmand i det 19de aarhundrede, Vol I, p. 260-1.



father, "that Henrik Wergeland was their honest, fearless and unselfish friend, all who were in need or considered themselves wronged or oppressed came to him to seek help, counsel and protection. This increased more and more after the year 1830. Not only from Eidsvold, but from other parts people sought<sup>1</sup> him, and still (1843) they come from far off on such errands." The people had found a friend and a leader whose name became their battle cry and the banner by which they were destined to conquer.

It has been said that Wergeland's name appears on almost every page of that part of Norwegian History which deals with the "Wergeland Period." This may not be true literally; but it is true that he made his influence felt along nearly all lines of progress and in all national issues of that time. He was the central figure in that stormy period which marks the real beginning of the New Norway. His personality and his activity so permeated Norwegian life and letters as to change the physiognomy of public life and social condition. He gave to society the best there was in him, and his efforts and accomplishments served as a foundation and as impulses for the progressive movements in the later half of the nineteenth century. It was particularly Björnstjerne Björnson who followed in Wergeland's footsteps as the masterbuilder of his country. Björnson possessed

1 As quoted by Gjerset: History of the Norwegian People, Vol. II, p. 469.

his patriotism and his living faith in the ultimate triumph of the good and noble qualities in man.

The opening chapter in Björnson's novel "Arne," which tells how the trees and heather by a slow and laborious process covered the naked mountain side, is said to be symbolic of Björnson's own life and work. It can be said just as truly that this figure is a symbol of Wergeland's lifework. By his untiring effort applied to the needs of the hour he built his country stronger and made his people happier. He did not tire of his work, for he knew that the life-principle was in the ideas he scattered; and if no immediate results were shown, he knew that the harvest period would come at some time. Wergeland said on his deathbed, "I was nothing but a poet." He may have been discouraged when he said this; but the statement is true when we consider it in the light of his own definition of a poet's calling; for he was a poet "that understood his time and participated in its needs;" he was a great "teacher and leader," and as such he was a great force in the making of the New Norway. His name stands for everything that tends towards growth on national lines, for every effort to elevate and ennoble mankind.

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