

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Driven to the Wall:  
A Northern Interlude

Plockstrasse 8  
Giessen, Germany  
October 24, 1957

Mr. Walter S. Rogers  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
522 Fifth Avenue  
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Some 19 centuries ago, the Romans built walls along their German borders to keep out alien hordes of Goths, Teutons, and other invaders. The Germans were slow to imitate this wall habit. But once started, they walled up everything in sight. The habit persists today. There are walls around houses, schools, churches, gardens, garages, and some chickens.

Sooner or later, an American in Germany comes to Robert Frost's conclusion: "Something there is that doesn't love a wall." Thus, with a hysterical snicker of gratitude, I welcomed the chance to head for some wall-less territory late last month. The following paragraphs are some impressions from a 1,700-mile jaunt to Scandanavia and back.

GERMANY--September 24: Simpering gaily, I unlocked and locked the three doors which stand between my apartment and the street (house rules). I patted the pocket containing driver's license, auto insurance card, auto tax card, auto registration card, auto radio tax card, and international triptych - all of which are obligatory for crossing frontiers. It was cold and drizzling as I genuflected into the small car and aimed north. Destination for the night was the village of Müden on the Oertze, 200 miles from here on the Lüneburg Heath.

Germany's vaunted Autobahns are an experience every driver should miss. There is no speed limit; so the high-powered cars go like rockets, while the ponderous trucks go like turtles. This disparity in speeds may seem thrilling; it is also dangerous. Though the Autobahns may have been designed for speed, the road-beds are often in such poor shape that anything over 50 miles an hour is hazardous. German authorities are working hard to repair the worst stretches and to extend the Autobahn network. But it's a losing battle against the expanding traffic load. Mounting highway fatalities are an indication. Meanwhile, the Autobahns remain, a sort of double-tracked rollercoaster with switches.

The heath country stretches 50 miles across the broad sandy plain between Hannover and Hamburg. It seems flat, but in fact it has the soft undulations of an ancient floor. Heather carpets the open spaces between the pine forests. And from August through September, the heather blooms, a lake of magenta flame blazing against the deep green of the firs; odorless, yet seeming to recharge the atmosphere with freshness. The village of Müden is sunk in the heart of the heath.

My host was Heinrich Cassier, who lives in the snug brick house his great-grandfather built. The night was chilly and we sipped cognac while Herr Cassier asked about the riots at Little Rock. "We Germans have no right to criticize race-prejudice," he said.

Then he asked whether I believed in the "Yellow Peril", which Kaiser Wilhelm II warned against about the time Herr Cassier was born. Frau Cassier changed the subject, and we chatted about traveling. Their son, Siegfried, a classmate of mine in college, had driven across the United States in 1953. Proudly, Frau Cassier traced Siegfried's route from Massachusetts to California on a tattered map. It seemed somehow curious and pleasant in the quiet isolation of the heath to be talking about Hayes, Kansas and Elko, Nevada with a Hausfrau who has never been in Berlin, let alone a foreign country.

Next day the coppery leaves of the elm trees reflected morning sunlight into the bedroom. Outside, a veil of frost covered the heath. Herr Cassier took me to the factory where he is foreman, an open pit diatomaceous earth mine. Forty men are employed there, digging and processing this valuable fossil substance - at 40 cents an hour. It is hard, dusty work.

Like most big cities, Hamburg begins twenty miles out. It begins with the smoky haze that blankets the plain of the Elbe River, Mother Elbe, the Germans call it. Smoke from factories, smoke from the huge shipyards, smoke from the freighters and tugboats in the great harbor, the smoke of rebuilding a city half-destroyed by bombs.

North of the great Hanseatic city, the first signs of Scandanavia begin in the town names around Schleswig - Fleckeby, Schaalby, Tarp - the area where some philologists believe English was born, where Viking raiders fought the pagan Wends. Today, young Bundeswehr recruits are marching single-file along the roads, singing de-nationalized songs. They are taking basic training in the shadow of Flensburg, the last home of the Third Reich in 1945.

DENMARK--September 26-29: The Danish frontier runs a few miles north of Flensburg. Despite the sameness of landscape here, there are striking contrasts between Germany and Denmark. Rough cobblestone streets give way to smooth asphalt. The long, low brick farmhouses of Northern Germany vanish in favor of the white, thatched Danish homes. Traffic diminishes. And there seem to be fewer and fewer walls. Aabenraa, Haderslev, Kolding, the fjord cities facing the Little Belt opposite the island of Fyn; they are quiet ports with few vestiges of their great Viking past.

In Copenhagen I went to visit Jørgen Sinding-Jensen, a young scholar who is finishing a doctoral dissertation on Herman Melville. His wife, Franey, a native of Bombay, India, is a schoolteacher. They have spent several years in America. Jørgen is skinny; he has a long solemn head and compelling eyes. He talks in measured cadences, making sardonic deadpan remarks, which he sometimes concludes with a snaredrum burst of laughter. Occasionally this riles his sleek and handsome wife, who responds, "Oh, stop it, Jon." They both enjoy it.

We talked about Little Rock. Franey was indignant over a Copenhagen newspaper which featured a slanted interview with American tourists. The tourists had expressed indifference towards the riots, and the reporter had gloated.

Jørgen said he was glad Adenauer had won the German election. "I was worried that the Socialists might take Germany out of NATO," he said. "That would be very dangerous for us."

The Danes feel no affection for the Germans since World War II, but they appear to accept the Bundesrepublik as necessary to western security. Khrushchev's recent threats of nuclear destruction for Denmark in the event of a war plus the expansion of Soviet naval movements in the Baltic have strengthened this feeling of acceptance.

I asked the Jensens about Denmark's suicide rate, one of the highest in the world. Jørgen pulled on his pipe. "Some say it's because we can't stand all the tourists." Franey said: "No one is quite sure. But lots of suicides are young people. They come to the big city from the farms, get a room and a job; they feel lost and lonely. Life is very regulated in Denmark and maybe it makes things seem hopeless..."

It must be tempting for tourists to read Hamlet-like qualities into Danish character - the melancholia, the sarcastic wit, the death-wish. (I have before me an essay comparing Shakespeare's invented hero to the 19th century Danish philosopher, Kierkegaard.) Or perhaps the Danes see themselves as a nation of Hamlets.

This occurred to me while I was with Jørgen Jensen. But then I noticed that he likes regular meals with plenty of potatoes, movies with juicy starlets, and old dance tunes with a schmaltzy bounce. I can't picture Hamlet relishing a plate of spuds.

From Copenhagen, you go north 30 miles to the town of Helsingør to catch the ferry across to Sweden. The narrow sound is dominated by the Dutch Renaissance castle called Kronborg, which rises gracefully above massive moats and battlements. This is the Hamlet Castle of Elsinore, a great tourist attraction. Actually it was built about the time Hamlet was written. The only Shakespearian touch is a small bas-relief of the bard on an obscure wall. Yet lack of historical connection does not negate the magic of the Hamlet legend here. And to gaze from Kronborg's tower at gray clouds and mists scudding across the sound is to evoke an air of moody drama.

SWEDEN--September 30: Land of enchantment, social democracy, dynamic industry, modern architecture and \$9 hotelrooms; I drove from the ferry landing at Helsingborg to the big coastal city of Göteborg. A neon sign flashed in the night: "Park Avenue Hotel". The blonde at the desk was so alluring that I failed to notice the "Hello Sucker" glint of her teeth. They don't clip you at the Park Avenue, they shave you. My bill was printed on cardboard, possibly a hint to save it like old ticket stubs from an expensive play.

To return to the subject of Swedish women: they cause one to overlook a lot of things - social democracy, dynamic industry, and modern architecture among other things. I also overlooked a couple of road signs and suddenly found myself in Norway.

NORWAY--October 1-6: The boy hitch-hiking with me said he was 17 years old. He had gray eyes, dark blond hair, a downy moustache, and a wiry physique. His clothes gave off the odor of old sweat that comes from a long journey. He was carrying a tiny rucksack. His journey had been from his home in Bergen to the French Riviera - 1,400 miles - and back. "I was on holiday," he said. He is a seaman in the Norwegian merchant marine, like his brother, father, and grandfather. With a few kroner jingling in his pocket last month, he decided to go south and lie on a beach. Alone? "You go faster alone." When he ran out of money he would go to a farm and ask for work.

The morning I picked him up he had just left a small Swedish farm where he had worked for 10 days. "I slept in the kitchen," he said, "they payed me 2 kroner a day (25 cents) and took me to movies four times a week." Now he was going home to sign on another freighter and work towards his engineer's license.

We were passing along the shore of Oslofjord, whence his forebears launched their longships to explore the world. Apparently, the voyaging blood still runs strong here. "I was born to travel," he said. And, "Before I was born, I knew I would go to sea." Like his Viking ancestors, Harald the Stern and Sigurd the Pilgrim, this young Norse seaman expects to sail to Byzantium - and back.

Oslo commands the head of the great southern fjord. It seems to hop skip and jump over a series of jutting ridges. Despite a sprinkling of modernistic post-war buildings, the dominant impression is one of quaintness, amost homeliness. Yet the night I arrived, Oslo had assumed a royal character. The national flag fluttered from a thousand poles. Garlands of white flowers festooned the lampposts. The streets were jammed with pedestrians.

The occasion was the funeral of King Haakon VII, scheduled for the next day. He had died a week before at the age of 85, after ruling Norway for more than half a century.

There was a grand procession from the palace to the cathedral; the royal guard, the horse troop, the caisson decked in royal purple, the royal orchestra playing Chopin's funeral march, five kings treading after the casket, generals, admirals, the diplomatic corps. The sun shone and the air was crisp. Some 400,000 people lined the broad Karl Johansgate to watch the cortege. A deep hush, seemingly of respect, not of awe, fell over the crowd as it passed. Perhaps some were thinking of the words of one of Norway's greatest scalds, written 1,000 years ago about another king named Haakon:

"The king's voice waked the silent host  
Who slept beside the wild sea-coast,  
And bade the song of spear and sword  
Over the battle plain be heard..."

For this was what Haakon VII did in Norway's dark hour, April 1940. The Germans had landed, driving the little British expeditionary force and the Norwegian army to the sea. Vidkun Quisling and his traitor colleagues called upon Haakon to legitimize the newly created Nazi puppet government. Haakon replied with a resounding "no", which woke his people from confusion and lethargy to bold resistance. From his exile in Britain, Haakon became the symbol of that resistance.

Every Norwegian I met spoke with personal affection for the king. They talked of his simplicity, of his accessibility, of his humor, and of his instinctive grasp of the principles of democracy. They spoke of Haakon's insistence that the king be elected by the people, in 1905. They spoke of his subsequent success in ending Norway's bitter class war. But above all, they spoke of his courageous leadership during World War II.

In the back streets of Oslo, one saw black-framed pictures of Haakon at every shop; set in the windows beside furniture, cosmetics, sausages, and hardware. Candles burned in many homes. This was in 1957 that the anomalous figure of a king could elicit such a genuine

Is the Viking spirit dead in this calm welfare state of hardworking farmers, fishermen, and seamen? One afternoon, I was given evidence that it is not dead in at least one realm - literature. For daring and adventure, few can match the case of 42-year-old Agnar Mykle.

One year ago, a modest edition of Mykle's "Song of the Red Ruby" was published. During the subsequent 12 months this book has been placed on the State Index, cursed by bishops, praised by psychiatrists, reprinted to the tune of 130,000 copies, and two weeks ago banished from the bookstores and the printing press.

The Red Ruby is the second volume in Mykle's planned trilogy about love. His hero is a university student named Ask Burlefot. In the first volume, "Lasso Around Mrs. Luna", Ask seeks his northern nirvana in adultery. In the Red Ruby, he continues this pursuit in a series of affairs with coeds, conceiving a couple of children along the way.

Presumably, no one objected to Mr. Mykle's aesthetic goals. But sizeable elements of the Norwegian State Church and the Government took strong exception to the 10 remarkably detailed copulation scenes of the Red Ruby.

Following the lead of a north-coast newspaper critic, the State's Attorney charged Mykle and his publisher with writing and distributing pornographic literature. That was last March. Scandanavia's press responded with an almost unanimous roar of anguish. "Censorship!" they cried. That battle was on. Meanwhile, book sales skyrocketed, making the Red Ruby a record-smashing best seller.

The argument raged throughout the summer. Housewives wrote letters blessing Mykle for "liberating" their sex, and for telling "the truth about men." The spouse of a high school principal thanked the novelist for saving her "from suicide." Ministers damned the book from the pulpit. School children picked up extra kroner by marking the lurid passages and renting out copies to their classmates.

State's Attorney Andreas Aulie opened the case against Mykle late last month. On hand for the defense were most of Norway's best-known writers. Also on hand were scores of reporters, photographers, television and newsreel crews. As a friend commented: "No writer ever had a better agent than the State's Attorney."

The trial was a sensation, the likes of which Norway hadn't experienced since the days of Henrik Ibsen. Mykle himself read the whole 329 pages of the Red Ruby to the court. The prosecutor took over when the skinny author's voice broke, but Mykle insisted on reading the questionable scenes himself. Said a bystander: "The way he read them, it was just nice." The reading took three days. When it was over, Mykle laid down the book and wept.

Then came the defense witnesses. Said Norway's poet laureate, Arnulf Overland: "Every poet can bear a year or two in jail; but none can bear to cease writing." Said the eminent literary historian, Francis Bull: "A poet cannot command poetry. To the contrary, it is the muse that rules the poet. In my opinion, Mykle is so much of a poet that he could not hold the reins on Ask Burlefot." Several prominent psychiatrists, one of them originally scheduled as a prosecution witness, mounted the stand to testify that the Red Ruby was "healthy."

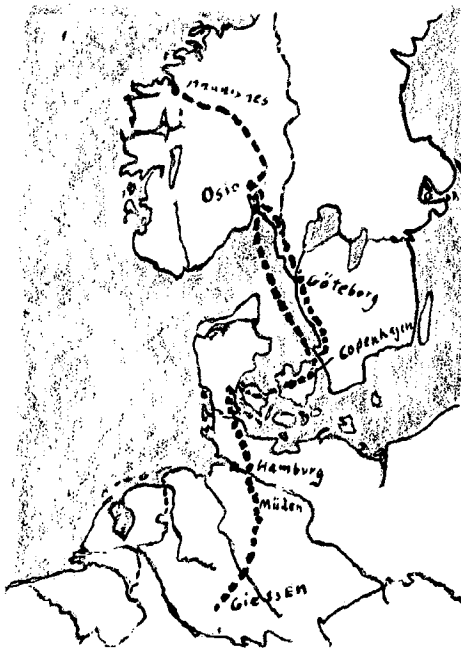
The prosecution had to content itself with churchly pronouncements of immorality and pale legal definitions of obscenity. The newspapers had a field day.

After 10 days of deliberation, the court issued a curious verdict. Mykle and his publisher were acquitted of the pornography charges. But the court confiscated all copies of the Red Ruby still in the bookstores and banned future editions. At this moment, however, Danish and Swedish editions are selling nicely. Meanwhile, the State's Attorney is preparing for another go at pornography. Next up is Henry Miller's "Rose of the Crucifixion". In the interim, Mykle has appealed his case to the supreme court. He is also dickering with a United States publisher for an American edition of the Red Ruby.

Mykle's literary idol is Thomas Wolfe, who wrote something like a million words of prose. Judging from this worship, we can expect to hear more from Mr. Mykle.

In the preface to the Red Ruby, the author writes that the book should be read twice, because it has "a mission." Without being certain what Mykle's mission is, it is nevertheless clear that the Mykle Case demarks a kind of social change in Norway.

It is not that the Red Ruby preaches a new morality (or amorality), but rather that the majority of its readers have accepted it as a frank study of contemporary mores - accepted it and praised it. A sex tabu has fallen. On this assumption, one might compare the effect of Mykle's book on Norway to that of the Kinsey Report on America. From a literary aspect, the case is of course reminiscent of the U.S. Supreme Court decision on James Joyce's Ulysses. But I feel ill-equipped to discuss the Red Ruby's literary merits.



From Oslo, I drove 287 miles northwest up the Gudbrandsdal and down the Romsdal to Andalsnes. Gudbrands' Valley has been the main communication link between Southern and Northern Norway since ancient times. Throughout the sagas recorded by Snorre Sturlason, one reads of kings like the ninth century Halfdan the Black and Harald the Fairhaired chasing their enemies up these dales in order to consolidate their realms. It was also the route of conquest taken by the German paratrooper army of 1940, which shot and burned its way to the sea in a month. I saw no walls in this beautiful valley; just a few fences to keep sheep and snow off the road.

Most Norwegian highways are not paved in the conventional sense. This provides an initial shock for the unwary driver, who brakes to a snail's pace. However, one soon discovers that the roads are well-graded and that hard-packed macadam allows safety at good speeds. The real compensation is in the scenery - breath-taking vistas of the long dales and fjords. Norway's autumn dress is a lambent one. The yellow leaves of birches and larches glow incandescently amid the green conifers. From a distance, these yellows play shimmering highlights over the verdant mountains. Up above the timber-

A 1700-mile interlude

line, new snow mantles the sugar-cone peaks, sending a thousand torrents

Lyrical? Heck, I nearly went off the road three times.

The resort town of Andalsnes perches at the head of the Romsdalsfjord; or, to put it another way, at the mouth of the swift Rauma River. It is surrounded by the sheer rock faces of two dozen mountains, which shoot up more than 5,000 feet above the fjord. Andalsnes, with its population of several thousand, subsists largely on a booming year-around tourist trade - hikers, swimmers, anglers, skiers, climbers, and loungers. Those who don't tend the vacationers keep sheep.

Rain, mist, fog, and snow soused this idyllic spot during the next three days. So, with the exception of a fervid drive up icy hairpin curves on the "Troll's Path" 3,000 feet above Andalsnes, I spent most of the time lounging in the town. Perhaps the most interesting character in the village is a man named Arne Randers Heen; traveling salesman, local historian, leader of the district's war-time resistance group, and non pareil mountaineer.

Heen is a slight, sandy-haired fellow who looks about 38. Actually, he is 53. He has climbed everything higher than a church steeple for miles around - and in all seasons. His cairns atop many a local peak attest that he was often the first to ascend a lot of the mountains, although climbing has been a popular sport here since the 1880's. Heen even planted a garden on top of one peak. During recent holidays, he has climbed in the Himalayas and the mountains of southern Greenland. And in his spare time at Andalsnes, he guides tourist climbing-parties.

Arne Heen has a wealth of stories ready for cold nights. He tells them in a soft voice with a faint smile. Here is one:

"During the war, a German army engineer came to me and asked me to guide him to the top of the Romsdalshorn. My equipment was all burned up during the air raid in 1940 (which razed Andalsnes), so I told him he would have to provide the gear. Before we left, we had a long talk about the war. He told me Germany had to have Lebensraum.

"Half way up the Horn there is a narrow ledge. My partner and I led the way to it. There was just room enough for the two of us to stand. The German was coming up after us. As he got his hands on the ledge I said: "Now shall we continue our discussion of Lebensraum?"

And another, involving a judgement of Solomon:

"When the war ended, the German garrison was stuck here for a month. As resistance commander, I told them to stay in their barracks and avoid the townspeople. One day, some peasants called and said I must go up the valley and arrest some Germans who had stolen their strawberries. I told them to come to me with the soldiers and the strawberries. There were three liters. The peasants said the Germans had taken the strawberries from their fields. The soldiers said the fields belonged to the German compound. The peasants said maybe the fields did, but not the strawberries. I told them they would have a decision in an hour and sent them away. Then I called in my two assistants. We ate the evidence. The case was settled."

Nearly every Norwegian I encountered recalled something about the German Occupation. It would come up in the most casual conversation; the memory of a friend arrested, a house burned as retaliation, a relative shot as a hostage, a Gestapo raid, a colleague who perished in a concentration camp.

When the recollection came out, it always concerned "the Germans", not "the Nazis". I did not sense passionate hatred or undying bitterness in these remarks, rather the enduring memory of an old wound; a wound that had closed, but which still throbs once in awhile.

If it is true that Americans abroad "need to be liked", then Norway is an excellent place for us to go. Even with the newspapers headlining the sorry events of Little Rock, my Norwegian acquaintances sought to excuse the crisis as an isolated instance.

They seem to like our music, our films, our writers, our cars (they call them "Dollar Grins" in reference to the toothy front grills), and Franklin D. Roosevelt (a statue of F.D.R. overlooks Oslo Harbor).

Among the Americans who needed to be liked abroad was an unusual group of amateur ambassadors at Oslo - a dozen members of the American Legion and wives. They claimed to be on a mission called the "Pilgrimage For Peace". I encountered them on the overnight ship to Copenhagen.

The time, 11 p.m. The place, the cocktail lounge of the S. S. Prinsesse Margrethe. I am sitting talking about the sputnik with a Norwegian engineer. Replete in a legionnaire's cap jangling with medals and insignia, a small man rushes up to our table. He sits down and explains his pacific mission:

"Hiyah fellas howbouts drink. I'm Harry Patterson of St. Paul, Minnesota. Say are you foreigners? I'm part of the Pilgrimage For Peace. We're authorized by Congress y'know. We come here to get to know you foreigners - ask 'em how they feel. Say, how do you feel? Well, anyway, we stand on the streets and just say hello to the folks, try and meet 'em.

"Goddammit bartender let's have a drink here. Whuddya mean? Closed? Geez, not even midnight. (Drooling slightly, Harry consoled himself by grabbing my pack of cigarettes with his wet hand and extracting the last one) Thanks.

"Y'know this Pilgrimage is a great thing. I mean we don't just go up to anybody. Girls like, y'know what I mean. 'Course if a girl come up to me I'm not gonna tell her to scram. I mean I don't mind a piece of tail now and then..."

The Norwegian, who appeared to have an excellent command of American slang, interrupted Mr. Patterson, U.S.A. to ask: "Tell me, is your pilgrimage for p-e-a-c-e or for p-i-e-c-e?"

\* \* \* \* \*

A few days later, I arrived back in the land of walls, climbed the six flights of stairs to my apartment and locked myself behind my three doors. Sniffing and coughing, I mumbled my one Scandanavian phrase: "Jeg har so helvetes forkjølelse", which means, "I have a helluva cold."

Sincerely,

*David Binder*

David Binder