

**GROWTH
OF THE SOIL**



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Translated from the Norwegian of

KNUT HAMSUN

by W.W. WORSTER

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Knut Hamsun is now sixty. For years past he has been regarded as the greatest of living Norwegian writers, but he is still little known in England. One or two attempts have been made previously to introduce Hamsun's work into this country, but it was not until this year, with the publication of *Growth of the Soil*, that he achieved any real success, or became at all generally known, among English readers.

Growth of the Soil (Markens Grøde) is Hamsun's latest work. Its reception here was one of immediate and unstinted appreciation, such as is rarely accorded to a translated work by an alien author practically unknown even to the critics. A noticeable feature was the frankness with which experienced bookmen laid aside stock phrases, and dealt with this book as in response to a strong personal appeal. To the reviewer, aged with much knowledge, hardened by much handling of mediocrity, it is a relief to meet with a book that can and must be dealt with so.

Those readers are, perhaps, most fortunate who come upon such a book as this without foretaste or preparation. To the mind under spell of an aesthetic or emotional appeal, the steps that went to make it, the stages whereby the author passed, are as irrelevant as the logarithms that went to build an aeroplane. Yet it is only by knowledge of such steps that the achievement can be fully understood.

Growth of the Soil is very far indeed from Hamsun's earliest beginnings: far even from the books of his early middle period, which made his name. It is the life story of a man in the wilds, the genesis and gradual development of a homestead, the unit of humanity, in the untilled, uncleared tracts that still

remain in the Norwegian Highlands. It is an epic of earth; the history of a microcosm. Its dominant note is one of patient strength and simplicity; the mainstay of its working is the tacit, stern, yet loving alliance between Nature and the Man who faces her himself, trusting to himself and her for the physical means of life, and the spiritual contentment with life which she must grant if he be worthy. Modern man faces Nature only by proxy, or as proxy, through others or for others, and the intimacy is lost. In the wilds the contact is direct and immediate; it is the foothold upon earth, the touch of the soil itself, that gives strength.

The story is epic in its magnitude, in its calm, steady progress and unhurrying rhythm, in its vast and intimate humanity. The author looks upon his characters with a great, all-tolerant sympathy, aloof yet kindly, as a god. A more objective work of fiction it would be hard to find — certainly in what used to be called “the neurasthenic North.”

And this from the pen of the man who wrote *Sult*, *Mysterier*, and *Pan*.

Hamsun’s early work was subjective in the extreme; so much so, indeed, as almost to lie outside the limits of aesthetic composition. As a boy he wrote verse under difficulties — he was born in Gudbrandsdalen, but came as a child to Bodö in Lofoten, and worked with a shoemaker there for some years, saving up money for the publication of his juvenile efforts. He had little education to speak of, and after a period of varying casual occupations, mostly of the humblest sort, he came to Christiania with the object of studying there, but failed to hit way. Thrice he essayed his fortune in America, but without success. For three years he worked as a fisherman on the Newfoundland Banks.

His Nordland origin is in itself significant; it means an environment of month-long nights and concentrated summers, in which all feelings are intensified, and love and dread and gratitude and longing are nearer and deeper than in milder and more temperate regions, where elemental opposites are, as it were, reciprocally diluted.

In 1890, at the age of thirty, Hamsun attracted attention by the publication of

Sult (Hunger). Sult is a record of weeks of starvation in a city; the semi-delirious confession of a man whose physical and mental faculties have slipped beyond control. He speaks and acts irrationally, and knows it, watches himself at his mental antics and takes himself to task for the same. And he asks himself: Is it a sign of madness?

It might seem so. The extraordinary associations, the weird fancies and bizarre impulses that are here laid bare give an air of convincing verisimilitude to the supposed confessions of a starving journalist. But, as a matter of fact, Hamsun has no need of extraneous influences to invest his characters with originality. Starving or fed, they can be equally erratic. This is seen in his next book, *Mysterier*.

Here we have actions and reactions as fantastic as in *Sult*, though the hero has here no such excuse as in the former case. The “mysteries,” or mystifications, of Nagel, a stranger who comes, for no particular reason apparent, to stay in a little Norwegian town, arise entirely out of Nagel’s own personality.

Mysterier is one of the most exasperating books that a publisher’s reader, or a conscientious reviewer, could be given to deal with. An analysis of the principal character is a most baffling task. One is tempted to call him mad, and have done with it. But, as a matter of fact, he is uncompromisingly, unrestrainedly human; he goes about constantly saying and doing things that we, ordinary and respectable people, are trained and accustomed to refrain from saying or doing at all. He has the self-consciousness of a sensitive child; he is for ever thinking of what people think of him, and trying to create an impression. Then, with a paradoxical sincerity, he confesses that the motive of this or that action was simply to create an impression, and thereby destroys the impression. Sometimes he caps this by wilfully letting it appear that the double move was carefully designed to produce the reverse impression of the first — until the person concerned is utterly bewildered, and the reader likewise.

Mysterier appeared in 1893. In the following year Hamsun astonished his critics with two books, *Ny Jord* (New Ground) and *Redaktör Lyng*, both equally unlike his previous work. With these he passes at a bound from one-

man stories, portrait studies of eccentric characters a remote or restricted environment, to group objects, chosen from centres of life and culture in Christiania. Redaktör Lyngé — *redaktör*, of course, means “editor” — deals largely with political manoeuvres and intrigues, the bitter controversial politics of Norway prior to the dissolution of the Union with Sweden. Ny Jord gives an unflattering picture of the academic, literary, and artistic youth of the capital, idlers for the most part, arrogant, unscrupulous, self-important, and full of disdain for the mere citizens and merchants whose simple honesty and kindness are laughed at or exploited by the newly dominant representatives of culture.

Both these books are technically superior to the first two, inasmuch as they show mastery of a more difficult form. But their appeal is not so great; there is lacking a something that might be inspiration, personal sympathy — some indefinable essential that the author himself has taught us to expect. They are less *hamsunsk* than most of Hamsun’s work. Hamsun is at his best among the scenes and characters he loves; tenderness and sympathy make up so great a part of his charm that he is hardly recognizable in surroundings or society uncongenial to himself.

It would almost seem as if he realized something of this. For in his next work he turns from the capital to the Nordland coast, reverting also, in some degree, to the subjective, keenly sensitive manner of Sult, though now with more restraint and concentration.

Pan (1894) is probably Hamsun’s best-known work. It is a love-story, but of an extraordinary type, and is, moreover, important from the fact that we are here introduced to some of the characters and types that are destined to reappear again and again in his later works.

Nagel, the exasperating irresponsible of *Mysterier*, is at his maddest in his behaviour towards the woman he loves. It is natural that this should be so. When a man is intoxicated his essential qualities are emphasized. If he have wit, he will be witty; if a brutal nature, he will be a brute; if he be of a melancholy temper, he will be disposed to sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings.

We see this in *Pan*. The love-making of the hero is characterized by the same irrational impulses, the same extravagant actions, as in *Sult* and *Mysterier*. But they are now less frequent and less involved. The book as a whole is toned down, so to speak, from the bewildering tangle of unrestraint in the first two. There is quite sufficient of the erratic and unusual in the character of Glahn, the hero, but the tone is more subdued. The madcap youth of genius has realized that the world looks frigidly at its vagaries, and the secretly proud “*au mains je suis autre*” — more a boast than a confession — gives place to a wistful, apologetic admission of the difference as a fault. Here already we have something of that resignation which comes later to its fulness in the story of the Wanderer with the Mute.

The love-story in *Pan* takes the form of a conflict; it is one of those battles between the sexes, duels of wit and *esprit*, such as one finds in the plays of Marivaux. But Hamsun sets his battle in the sign of the heart, not of the head; it is a *marivaudage* of feeling, none the less deep for its erratic utterance. Moreover, the scene is laid, not in salons and ante-chambers, but in a landscape such as Hamsun loves, the forest-clad hills above a little fishing village, between the *höifjeld* and the sea. And interwoven with the story, like an eerie breathing from the dark of woods at dusk and dawn, is the haunting presence of Iselin, *la belle dame sans merci*.

Otto Weininger, the author of *Sex and Character*, said of *Pan* that it was “perhaps the most beautiful novel ever written.” Weininger, of course, was an extremist, and few would accept his judgment with out reserve. It is doubtful whether any writer nowadays would venture to make such a claim for any book at all.

Pan is a book that offends against all sorts of rules; as a literary product it is eminently calculated to elicit, especially in England, the Olympian “this will never do.” To begin with, it is not so much a novel as a *novella* — a form of art little cultivated in this country, but which lends itself excellently to delicate artistic handling, and the creation of that subtle influence which Hamsun’s countrymen call *stemning*, poorly rendered by the English “atmosphere.” The epilogue is disproportionately long; the portion written as by another hand is all too recognizably in the style of the rest. And with all

his chivalrous sacrifice and violent end, Glahn is at best a quixotic hero. Men, as men, would think him rather a fool, and women, as women, might flush at the thought of a cavalier so embarrassingly unrestrained. He is not to be idolized as a cinema star, or the literary gymnastic hero of a perennial Earl's Court Exhibition set to music on the stage. He could not be truthfully portrayed on a flamboyant wrapper as at all seductively masculine. In a word, he is neither a man's man nor a woman's man. But he is a human being, keenly susceptible to influence which most of us have felt in some degree.

Closely allied to Pan is Victoria, likewise a story of conflict between two lovers. The actual plot can only be described as hackneyed. Girl and boy, the rich man's daughter and the poor man's son, playmates in youth, then separated by the barriers of social standing — few but the most hardened of "best-sellers" catering for semi-detached suburbia would venture nowadays to handle such a theme. Yet Hamsun dares, and so insistently unlike all else is the impress of his personality that the mechanical structure of the story is forgotten. It is interspersed with irrelevant fancies, visions and imaginings, a chain of tied notes heard as an undertone through the action on the surface. The effect is that of something straining towards an impossible realization; abetting of wings in the void; a striving for utterance of things beyond speech.

Victoria is the swan-song of Hamsun's subjective period. Already, in the three plays which appeared during the years immediately following Pan, he faces the merciless law of change; the unrelenting "forward" which means leaving loved things behind. Kareno, student of life, begins his career in resolute opposition to the old men, the established authorities who stand for compromise and resignation. For twenty years he remains obstinately faithful to his creed, that the old men must step aside or be thrust aside, to make way for the youth that will be served. "What has age that youth has not? Experience. Experience, in all its poor and withered nakedness. And what use is their experience to us, who must make our own in every single happening of life? In *Aftenrøde*, the "Sunset" of the trilogy, Kareno himself deserts the cause of youth, and allies himself to the party in power. And the final scene shows him telling a story to a child: "There was once a man who never would give way. . . ."

The madness of Sult is excused as being delirium, due to physical suffering. Nagel, in *Mysterier*, is shown as a fool, an eccentric intolerable in ordinary society, though he is disconcertingly human, paradoxically sane. Glahn, in *Pan*, apologizes for his uncouth straightforwardness by confessing that he is more at home in the woods, where he can say and do what he pleases without offense. Johannes, in *Victoria*, is of humble birth, which counts in extenuation of his unmannerly frankness in early years. Later he becomes a poet, and as such is exempt in some degree from the conventional restraint imposed on those who aspire to polite society. All these well-chosen characters are made to serve the author's purpose as channels for poetic utterance that might otherwise seem irrelevant. The extent to which this is done may be seen from the way in which Hamsun lets a character in one book enter upon a theme which later becomes the subject of an independent work by the author himself. Thus Glahn is haunted by visions of Diderik and Iselin; Johannes writes fragments supposed to be spoken by one Vendt the Monk. Five years after *Victoria*, Hamsun gives us the romantic drama of *Munken Vendt*, in which Diderik and Iselin appear.

Throughout these early works, Hamsun is striving to find expression for his own sensitive personality; a form and degree of expression sufficient to relieve his own tension of feeling, without fusing the medium; adequate to his own needs, yet understandable and tolerable to ordinary human beings; to the readers of books. The process, in effect, is simply this: Hamsun is a poet, with a poet's deep and unusual feeling, and a poet's need of utterance. To gain a hearing, he chooses figures whom he can conveniently represent as fools. Secretly, he loves them, for they are himself. But to the world he can present them with a polite apology, a plea for kindly indulgence.

It is not infrequent in literature to find the wisest and most poignant utterances thus laid in the mouths of poor men clad in motley. Some of the most daring things in Shakespeare, the newest heresies of the Renaissance, are voiced by irresponsibles. Of all dramatic figures, that of the fool is most suited to the expression of concentrated feeling. There is an arresting question in a play of recent years, which runs something like this: "Do you think that the things people make fools of themselves about are any less real and true than the things they behave sensibly about?"

Most of us have at some time or another felt that uncomfortable, almost indecently denuding question which comes to us at rare moments from the stage where some great drama is being played: What is higher, what is more real: this, or the life we live? In that sudden flash, the matters of today's and tomorrow's reality in our minds appear as vulgar trifles, things of which we are ashamed. The feeling lasts but a moment; for a moment we have been something higher than ourselves, in the mere desire so to be. Then we fall back to ourselves once more, to the lower levels upon which alone we can exist. And yet it is by such potentials that we judge the highest art; by its power to give us, if only for a moment, something of that which the divinity of our aspiring minds finds wanting in the confines of reality.

The richness of this quality is one of the most endearing things in Hamsun's characters. Their sensitiveness is a thing we have been trained, for self-defence, to repress. It is well for us, no doubt, that this is so. But we are grateful for their showing that such things *are*, as we are grateful for Kensington Gardens who cannot live where trees are everywhere. The figures Hamsun sets before us as confessedly unsuited to the realities of life, his vagabonds, his failures, his fools, have power at times to make us question whether our world of comfort, luxury, success, is what we thought; if it were not well lost in exchange for the power to *feel* as they.

It has been said that life is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel. Humanly speaking, it is one of the greatest merits of Hamsun's work that he shows otherwise. His attitude towards life is throughout one of feeling, yet he makes of life no tragedy, but a beautiful story.

"I will be young until I die," says Kareno in *Aftenrøde*. The words are not so much a challenge to fate as a denial of fact; he is not fighting, only refusing to acknowledge the power that is already hard upon him.

Kareno is an *intellectual* character. He is a philosopher, a man whose perceptions and activity lie predominantly in the sphere of thought, not of feeling. His attempt to carry the fire of youth beyond the grave of youth ends in disaster; an unnecessary *débâcle* due to his gratuitously attempting the impossible.

Hamsun's poet-personality, the spirit we have seen striving for expression through the figures of Nagel, Glahn, Johannes, and the rest, is a creature of *feeling*. And here the development proceeds on altogether different lines. The emotion which fails to find adequate outlet, even in such works as *Sult*, *Mysterier*, *Victoria*, and *Pan*, might well seem more of a peril than the quixotic stubbornness of Kareno's philosophy. Such a flood, in its tempestuous unrest, might seem to threaten destruction, or at best the vain dispersal of its own power into chaos. But by some rare guidance it is led, after the storm of *Munken Vendt*, into channels of beneficent fertility.

In 1904, after an interval of short stories, letters of travel, and poems, came the story entitled *Sværmere*. The word means "Moths." It also stands for something else; something for which we English, as a sensible people, have no word. Some thing pleasantly futile, deliciously unprofitable — foolish lovers, hovering like moths about a lamp.

But there is more than this that is untranslatable in the title. *As* a title it suggests an attitude of gentleness, tenderness, sympathy, toward whomsoever it describes. It is a new note in Hamsun; the opening of a new *motif*.

The main thread of the story bears a certain similarity to that of *Mysterier*, *Victoria*, and *Pan*, being a love affair of mazy windings, a tangled skein of loves-me-loves-me-not. But it is pure comedy throughout. Rolandsen, the telegraph operator in love with Elsie Mack, is no poet; he has not even any pretensions to education or social standing. He is a cheerful, riotous "blade," who sports with the girls of the village, gets drunk at times, and serenades the parson's wife at night with his guitar. *Sværmere* is the slightest of little stories in itself, but full of delightful vagaries and the most winning humour.

The story of *Benoni*, with its continuation *Rosa*, is in like vein; a tenderly humorous portrayal of love below stairs, the principal characters being chosen from the class who appear as supers in *Pan*; subjects or retainers of the all-powerful Trader Mack. It is as if the sub-plots in one of Shakespeare's plays had been taken out for separate presentment, and the clown promoted to be hero in a play of his own. The cast is increased, the *milieu* lightly drawn in *Pan* is now shown more comprehensively and in detail, making us gradually

acquainted with a whole little community, a village world, knowing little of any world beyond, and forming a microcosm in itself.

Hamsun has returned, as it were, to the scene of his passionate youth, but in altered guise. He plays no part himself now, but is an onlooker, a stander-by, chronicling, as from a cloistered aloofness, yet I with kindly wisdom always, the little things that matter in the lives of those around him. Wisdom and kindness, sympathy and humour and understanding, these are the dominant notes of the new phase. *Sværmere* ends happily — for it is a story of other people's lives. So also with *Benoni* and *Rosa* at the last. And so surely has the author established his foothold on the new ground that he can even bring in *Edvarda*, the "Iselin" figure from *Pan*, once more, linking up his brave and lusty comedies of middle age with the romantic tragedies of his youth, making a comprehensive pageant-play of large-hearted humanity.

Meantime, the effect upon himself is seen — and avowed. Between *Sværmere* and *Benoni* comes the frankly first-personal narrative of a vagabond who describes himself, upon interrogation, as "Knut Pedersen" — which is two-thirds of Knut Pedersen Hamsund — and hailing from Nordland — which embraces Lofoten.

It does not need any showing of paper, however, to establish the identity of Knut Pedersen, vagabond, with the author of *Pan*. The opening words of the book ("Under Høststjærnen") are enough. "Indian summer, mild and warm . . . it is many years now since I knew such peace. Twenty or thirty years maybe — or maybe it was in another life. But I have felt it some time, surely, since I go about now humming a little tune; go about rejoicing, loving every straw and every stone, and feeling as if they cared for me in return. . . ."

This is the Hamsun of *Pan*. But Hamsun now is a greater soul than in the days when Glahn, the solitary dweller in the woods, picked up a broken twig from the ground and held it lovingly, because it looked poor and forsaken; or thanked the hillock of stone outside his hut because it stood there faithfully, as a friend that waited his return. He is stronger now, but no less delicate; he loves not Nature less, but the world more. He has learned to love his fellow-men. Knut Pedersen, vagabond, wanders about the country with his tramp-

companions, Grindhusen, the painter who can ditch and delve at a pinch, or Falkenberg, farm-labourer in harvest-time, and piano-tuner where pianos are. Here is brave comradeship, the sharing of adventures, the ready wit of jovial vagrants. The book is a harmless picaresque, a *geste* of innocent rogue errantry; its place is with *Lavengro* and *The Cloister and the Hearth*, in that ancient, endless order of tales which link up age with age and land with land in the unaltering, unfrontiered fellowship of the road that kept the spirit of poetry alive through the Dark Ages.

The vagabond from Nordland has his own adventures, his *bonnes fortunes*. There is a touch of Sterne about the book; not the exaggerated super-Sterne of *Tristram Shandy*, with eighteenth-century futurist blanks and marbled pages, but the fluent, casual, follow-your-fancy Sterne of the *Sentimental Journey*. Yet the vagabond himself is unobtrusive, ready to step back and be a chronicler the moment other figures enter into constellation. He moves among youth, himself no longer young, and among gentlefolk, as one making no claim to equal rank.

Both these features are accentuated further in the story of the Wanderer with the Mute. It is a continuation of *Under Høststjærnen*, and forms the culmination, the acquiescent close, of the self-expressional series that began with *Sult*. The discords of tortured loveliness are now resolved into an ultimate harmony of comeley resignation and rich content. "A Wanderer may come to fifty years he plays more softer then. Plays with muted strings." This is the keynote of the book. The Wanderer is no longer young; it is for youth to make the stories old men tell. Tragedy is reserved for those of high estate; a wanderer in corduroy, "such as labourers wear here in the south," can tell the story of his chatelaine and her lovers with the self-repression of a humbler Henry Esmond, winning nothing for himself even at the last, yet feeling he is still in Nature's debt.

Hamsun's next work is *Den Siste Glæde* (literally "The Last Joy"). The title as it stands is expressive. The substantive is "joy" — but it is so qualified by the preceding "last," a word of overwhelming influence in any combination, that the total effect is one of sadness. And the book itself is masterly presentment of gloom. Masterly — or most natural: it is often hard to say

how much of Hamsun's effect is due to superlative technique and how much to the inspired disregard of all technique. *Den Silts Glæde* is a diary of wearisome days, spent for the most part among unattractive, insignificant people at a holiday resort; the only "action" in it is an altogether pitiful love affair, in which the narrator is involved to the slightest possible degree. The writer is throughout despondent; he feels himself out of the race; his day is past. Solitude and quiet, Nature, and his own foolish feelings — these are the "last joys" left him now.

The book might have seemed a fitting, if pathetic, ending to the literary career of the author of *Pan*. Certainly it holds out no promise of further energy or interest in life or work. The closing words amount to a personal farewell.

Then, without warning, Hamsun enters upon a new phase of power. *Börn an Tilden* (*Children of the Age*) is an objective study, its main theme being the "marriage" conflict touched upon in the *Wanderer* stories, and here developed in a different setting and with fuller individuality. Hamsun has here moved up a step in the social scale, from villagers of the *Benoni* type to the land-owning class. There is the same conflict of temperaments that we have seen before, but less violent now; the poet's late-won calm of mind, and the level of culture from which his characters now are drawn — perhaps by instinctive selection — make for restraint. Still a romantic at heart, he becomes more classic in form.

Börn an Tilden is also the story of *Segelfoss*, in its passing from the tranquil dignity of a semi-feudal estate to the complex and ruthless modernity of an industrial centre. *Segelfoss By* (1915) treats of the fortunes of the succeeding generation, and the further development of *Segelfoss* into a township ("By").

Then, with *Growth of the Soil* Hamsun achieves his greatest triumph. Setting aside all that mattered most to himself, he turns, with the experience of a lifetime rich in conflict, to the things that matter to us all. Deliberately shorn of all that makes for mere effect, *Isak* stands out as an elemental figure, the symbol of Man at his best, face to face with Nature and life. There is no greater human character — reverently said — in the Bible itself.

These, then, are the steps of Hamsun's progress as an author, from the passionate chaos of *Sult* to the Miltonic, monumental calm of *Growth of the Soil*. The stages in themselves are full of beauty; the wistfulness of *Pan and Victoria*, the kindly humour of *Sværmere* and *Benoni*, the autumn tinted resignation of the *Wanderer with the Mute* — they follow as the seasons do, each with a charm of its own, yet all deriving from one source. His muse at first is *Iselin*, the embodiment of adolescent longing, the dream of those “whom delight flies because they give her chase.” The hopelessness of his own pursuit fills him with pity for mortals under the same spell, and he steps aside to be a brave, encouraging chorus, or a kindly chronicler of others' lives. And his reward is the love of a greater divinity, the goddess of field and homestead. No will-o'-the-wisp, but a presence of wisdom and calm.

The Growth of the Soil

Book One

Chapter I

The long, long road over the moors and up into the forest — who trod it into being first of all? Man, a human being, the first that came here. There was no path before he came. Afterward, some beast or other, following the faint tracks over marsh and moorland, wearing them deeper; after these again some Lapp gained scent of the path, and took that way from field to field, looking to his reindeer. Thus was made the road through the great Almenning — the common tracts without an owner; no-man's-land.

The man comes, walking toward the north. He bears a sack, the first sack, carrying food and some few implements. A strong, coarse fellow, with a red iron beard, and little scars on face and hands; sites of old wounds — were they gained in toil or fight? Maybe the man has been in prison, and is booking for a place to hide; or a philosopher, maybe, in search of peace. This or that, he comes; the figure of a man in this great solitude. He trudges on; bird and beast are silent all about him; now and again he utters a word or two; speaking to himself.

“Eyah — well, well . . .” — so he speaks to himself. Here and there, where the moors give place to a kindlier spot, an open space in the midst of the forest, he lays down the sack and goes exploring; after a while he returns, heaves the sack to his shoulder again, and trudges on. So through the day, noting time by the sun; night falls, and he throws himself down on the heather, resting on one arm.

A few hours' rest, and he is on the move again: “Eyah, well . . .” — moving northward again, noting time by the sun; a meal of barley cakes and goats' milk cheese, a drink of water from the stream, and on again. This day too he

journeys, for there are many kindly spots in the woods to be explored. What is he seeking? A place, a patch of ground? An emigrant, maybe, from the homestead tracts; he keeps his eyes alert, looking out; now and again he climbs to the top of a hill, looking out. The sun goes down once more.

He moves along the western side of a valley; wooded ground, with leafy trees among the spruce and pine, and grass beneath. Hours of this, and twilight is falling, but his ear catches the faint purl of running water, and it heartens him like the voice of a living thing. He climbs the slope, and sees the valley half in darkness below; beyond, the sky to the south. He lies down to rest.

The morning shows him a range of pasture and woodland. He moves down, and there is a green hillside; far below, a glimpse of the stream, and a hare bounding across. The man nods his head, as it were approvingly — the stream is not so broad but that a hare may cross it at a bound. A white grouse sitting close upon its nest starts up at his feet with an angry hiss, and he nods again: feathered game and fur — a good spot this. Heather, bilberry, and cloudberry cover the ground; there are tiny ferns, and the seven-pointed star flowers of the winter green. Here and there he stops to dig with an iron tool, and finds good mould, or peaty soil, manured with the rotted wood and fallen leaves of a thousand years. He nods, to say that he has found himself a place to stay and live: ay, he will stay here and live. Two days he goes exploring the country round, returning each evening to the hillside. He sleeps at night on a bed of stacked pine; already he feels at home here, with a bed of pine beneath an overhanging rock.

The worst of his task had been to find the place; this no-man's place, but his. Now, there was work to fill his days. He started at once, stripping birch bark in the woods farther off, while the sap was still in the trees. The bark he pressed and dried, and when he had gathered a heavy load, carried it all the miles back to the village, to be sold for building. Then back to the hillside, with new sacks of food and implements; flour and pork, a cooking-pot, a spade — out and back along the way he had come, carrying loads all the time. A born carrier of loads, a lumbering barge of a man in the forest — oh, as if he loved his calling, tramping long roads and carrying heavy burdens; as if life without a load upon one's shoulders were a miserable thing, no life for

him.

One day he came up with more than the load he bore; came leading three goats in a leash. He was proud of his goats as if they had been horned cattle, and tended them kindly. Then came the first stranger passing, a nomad Lapp; at sight of the goats, he knew that this was a man who had come to stay, and spoke to him.

“You going to live here for good?”

“Ay,” said the man.

“What’s your name?”

“Isak. You don’t know of a woman body any where’d come and help?”

“No. But I’ll say a word of it to all I meet.”

“Ay, do that. Say I’ve creatures here, and none to look to them.”

The Lapp went on his way. Isak — ay, he would say a word of that. The man on the hillside was no runaway; he had told his name. A runaway? He would have been found. Only a worker, and a hardy one. He set about cutting winter fodder for his goats, clearing the ground, digging a field, shifting stones, making a wall of stones. By the autumn he had built a house for himself, a hut of turf, sound and strong and warm; storms could not shake it, and nothing could burn it down. Here was a home; he could go inside and shut the door, and stay there; could stand outside on the door-slab, the owner of that house, if any should pass by. There were two rooms in the hut; for himself at the one end, and for his beasts at the other. Farthest in, against the wall of rock, was the hayloft. Everything was there.

Two more Lapps come by, father and son. They stand resting with both hands on their long staves, taking stock of the hut and the clearing, noting the sound of the goat-bells up on the hillside.

“*Goddag*,” say the Lapps. “And here’s fine folk come to live.” Lapps talk

that way, with flattering words.

“You don’t know of any woman hereabouts to help?” says Isak, thinking always of but one thing.

“Woman to help? No. But we’ll say a word of it.”

“Ay, if you’d be so good. That I’ve a house and a bit of ground here, and goats, but no woman to help. Say that.”

Oh, he had sought about for a woman to help each time he had been down to the village with his loads of bark, but there was none to be found. They would look at him, a widow or an old unmarried one or so, but all afraid to offer, whatever might be in their minds. Isak couldn’t tell why. Couldn’t tell why? Who would go as help to live with a man in the wilds, ever so many miles away — a whole day’s journey to the nearest neighbour? And the man himself was no way charming or pleasant by his looks, far from it; and when he spoke it was no tenor with eyes to heaven, but a coarse voice, something like a beast’s.

Well, he would have to manage alone.

In winter, he made great wooden troughs, and sold them in the village, carrying sacks of food and tools back through the snow; hard days when he was tied to a load. There were the goats, and none to look to them; he could not be away for long. And what did he do? Need made him wise; his brain was strong and little used; he trained it up to ever more and more. His first way was to let the goats loose before starting off himself, so that they could get a full feed among the undergrowth in the woods. But he found another plan. He took a bucket, a great vessel, and hung it up by the river so that a single drop fell in at a time, taking fourteen hours to fill it. When it was full to the brim, the weight was right; the bucket sank, and in doing so, pulled a line connected with the hayloft; a trap-door opened, and three bundles of fodder came through — the goats were fed.

That was his way.

A bright idea; an inspiration, maybe, sent from God. The man had none to help him but himself. It served his need until late in the autumn; then came the first snow, then rain, then snow again, snowing all the time. And his machine went wrong; the bucket was filled from above, opening the trap too soon. He fixed a cover over, and all went well again for a time; then came winter, the drop of water froze to an icicle, and stopped the machine for good.

The goats must do as their master — learn to do without.

Hard times — the man had need of help, and there was none, yet still he found a way. He worked and worked at his home; he made a window in the hut with two panes of real glass, and that was a bright and wonderful day in his life. No need of lighting fires to see; he could sit indoors and work at his wooden troughs by daylight. Better days, brighter days . . . eyah!

He read no books, but his thoughts were often with God; it was natural, coming of simplicity and awe. The stars in the sky, the wind in the trees, the solitude and the wide-spreading snow, the might of earth and over earth filled him many times a day with a deep earnestness. He was a sinner and feared God; on Sundays he washed himself out of reverence for the holy day, but worked none the less as through the week.

Spring came; he worked on his patch of ground, and planted potatoes. His livestock multiplied; the two she-goats had each had twins, making seven in all about the place. He made a bigger shed for them, ready for further increase, and put a couple of glass panes in there too. Ay, 'twas lighter and brighter now in every way.

And then at last came help; the woman he needed. She tacked about for a long time, this way and that across the hillside, before venturing near; it was evening before she could bring herself to come down. And then she came — a big, brown-eyed girl, full-built and coarse, with good, heavy hands, and rough hide brogues on her feet as if she had been a Lapp, and a calfskin bag slung from her shoulders. Not altogether young; speaking politely; somewhere nearing thirty.

There was nothing to fear; but she gave him greeting and said hastily, “I was

going cross the hills, and took this way, that was all.”

“Ho,” said the man. He could barely take her meaning, for she spoke in a slovenly way; also, she kept her face turned aside.

“Ay,” said she, “’tis a long way to come.”

“Ay, it’s that,” says the man. “Cross the hills, you said?”

“Yes.”

“And what for?”

“I’ve my people there.”

“Eh, so you’ve your people there? And what’s your name?”

“Inger. And what’s yours?”

“Isak.”

“Isak? H’m. D’you live here yourself, maybe?”

“Ay, here, such as it is.”

“Why, ’tis none so bad,” said she to please him.

Now he had grown something clever to think out the way of things, and it struck him then she’d come for that very business and no other; had started out two days back just to come here. Maybe she had heard of his wanting a woman to help.

“Go inside a bit and rest your feet,” said he.

They went into the hut and took a bit of the food she had brought, and some of his goats’ milk to drink; then they made coffee, that she had brought with her in a bladder. Settled down comfortably over their coffee until bedtime. And in the night, he lay wanting her, and she was willing.

She did not go away next morning; all that day she did not go, but helped about the place; milked the goats, and scoured pots and things with fine sand, and got them clean. She did not go away at all. Inger was her name. And Isak was his name.

And now it was another life for the solitary man. True, this wife of his had a curious slovenly way of speech, and always turning her face aside, by reason of a hare-lip that she had, but that was no matter. Save that her mouth was disfigured, she would hardly have come to him at all; he might well be grateful for that she was marked with a hare-lip. And as to that, he himself was no beauty. Isak with the iron beard and rugged body, a grim and surly figure of a man; ay; as a man seen through a flaw in the window-pane. His look was not a gentle one; as if Barabbas might break loose at any minute. It was a wonder Inger herself did not run away.

She did not run away. When he had been out, and came home again, there was Inger at the hut; the two were one, the woman and the hut.

It was another mouth for him to feed, but no loss in that; he had more freedom now, and could go and stay as he needed. And there were matters to be looked to away from home. There was the river; pleasant to look at, and deep and swift besides; a river not to be despised; it must come from some big water up in the hills. He got himself some fishing gear and went exploring; in the evening he came back with a basket of trout and char. This was a great thing to Inger, and a marvel; she was overwhelmed, being no way used to fine dishes. She clapped her hands and cried out: "Why! wherever . . ." And she was not slow to see how he was pleased at her surprise, and proud of it, for she said more in the same strain — oh, she had never seen the like, and how had he ever managed to find such things!

Inger was a blessing, too, in other ways. No clever head nor great in wit, maybe — but she had two lambing ewes with some of her kinsfolk, and brought them down. It was the best they could have wished for at the hut; sheep with wool and lambs, four new head to their stock about the place; it was growing, getting bigger; a wonder and a marvel how their stock was grown. And Inger brought more; clothes, and little trifles of her own, a

looking-glass, and a string of pretty glass beads, a spinning-wheel, and carding-combs. Why, if she went on that gait, the hut would soon be filled from floor to roof, and no room for more! Isak was astonished in his turn at all this wealth of goods, but being a silent man, and slow to speak, he said nothing, only shambled out to the door-slab and looked at the weather, and shambled in again. Ay, he had been lucky indeed; he felt himself more and more in love, or drawn towards her, or whatever it might be.

“You’ve no call to fetch along all such stuff,” said he. “’Tis more than’s needed.”

“I’ve more if I like to fetch it. And there’s Uncle Sivert besides — you’ve heard of him?”

“No.”

“Why, he’s a rich man, and district treasurer besides.”

Love makes a fool of the wise. Isak felt he must do something grand himself, and overdid it. “What I was going to say; you’ve no need to bother with hoeing potatoes. I’ll do it myself the evening, when I come home.”

And he took his ax and went off to the woods.

She heard him felling in the woods, not so far off; she could hear from the crash that he was felling big timber. She listened for a while, and then went out to the potato field and set to work hoeing. Love makes fools wise.

Isak came home in the evening, hauling a huge trunk by a rope. Oh, that simple and innocent Isak, he made all the noise he could with his tree-trunk, and coughed and hemmed, all for her to come out and wonder at him. And sure enough:

“Why, you’re out of your senses,” said Inger when she came out. “Is that work for a man single-handed?” He made no answer; wouldn’t have said a word for anything. To do a little more than was work for a man single-handed was nothing to speak of — nothing at all. A stick of timber huh! “And what

are you going to do with it?" she asked.

"Oh, we'll see," he answered carelessly, as if scarcely heeding she was there.

But when he saw that she had hoed the potatoes after all he was not pleased. It was as if she had done almost as much as he; and that was not to his liking. He slipped the rope from the tree-trunk and went off with it once more.

"What, haven't you done yet?"

"No," said he gruffly.

And he came back with another stick like the last, only with no noise nor sign of being out of breath; hauled it up to the hut like an ox, and left it there.

That summer he felled a mass of timber, and brought it to the hut.