

They Live for Revenge

Sigrid Undset describes the spirit of Norway, where R. A. F. blows are taken with 'Thank God!'

cooperation of the Norwegian Government in Exile in London and now being shown in the United States.

By Sigrid Undset

THE name of Sola may sound vaguely familiar to some Americans by now. It has been in the news, off and on, ever since the invasion of Norway. The airport of Sola, the biggest in Southern Norway, has been continually enlarged by the Germans, and it has been pounded several times by the R. A. F.

~~In the old days before the war the name~~
of Sola to ~~the~~ Norwegians was linked with the name of Erling Skjalgsson, the chieftain who lived on his manor of Sola about the year 1000 A. D. It was Erling who was too proud to accept the title of earl when he married the sister of a king—his father had been "a herse," chief of a countryside, and Erling preferred to remain the same as his father. In fact, the people called him King of Jaeren, the coastal plain of Southern Norway, and he ruled his Jaeren as a king.

But the thing about Erling that caught the fancy of Norwegian school children was the story in the Sagas about his dealings with his thralls, or serfs. Erling staked out the day's work for each man, who, on finishing it, was free to work on his own, breaking soil on the moors and raising grain and cattle. From the earnings of his spare-time labor he was ex-

pected to buy his liberty. Good workers could win their freedom in three years, and a man who had not achieved this goal in seven years was considered shiftless and worthless. We had to learn by heart

—at least I had, and my children afterward—a poem about Erling, and used to recite with emotion the lines about how the heather gave way to the fields of rye, and the ring of free men's homes grew around Sola. And

*Till the end of times shall Saga tell,
How he made men, and Norsemen, of
thralls.*

Though the vikings also owned their serfs, the institution of serfdom always seemed, in some obscure way, to be uncongenial to the Norwegians. Our oldest laws devote ample space to rules for emancipating a thrall. When the Norwegians were converted to Christianity, abandoning the human sacrifices of the old days, the farmers on certain occasions bought a thrall and made him free, "as a good deed pleasing to Christ." By the middle of the thirteenth century every trace of the institution of serfdom had

disappeared in Norway—one-half to one century earlier than anywhere else in the North.

Now Sola is the hands of the Germans, and they are trying to reverse all this development. They are trying to make thralls of men and Norsemen. Even the farms—about one hundred—which they have destroyed to enlarge the air-field, may very well, some of them, be the same that were won from the waste land by backbreaking toil through the long, light Nordic Summer nights by men working to become free. But the Germans are trying to reverse the whole trend of our cultural development of the last 900 years; they are trying to destroy the entire economic structure we have built up through centuries of immense and courageous toil on land and sea, in a country that consists mostly of barren mountains and storm-lashed shores and skerries, where, in some places, the climate grants us three months of Summer and nine months of Winter and cold weather. We, and no other people, have lived in Norway for at least 3,000 years; we did not take the country from another people, and no other people has ever tried to live and build homes for free men on our land.

BY looting Norway of everything—from the railways, factories, farms, food and cattle to the ski-pants of our youngsters and boots off their feet—by trying to force all and every section and class of Norwegians—the judiciary as well as the ~~medical profession, the farmers and fishermen,~~ the clergy and school teachers, workingmen and professional women, organized sportsmen and the children—to submit to lawlessness and injustice and ~~to help rivet the chains of slavery on~~ ourselves, by the shooting of hostages and torturing of prisoners, by committing crimes of a kind we had forgotten were ever committed except by human wrecks that belonged in asylums, not in prisons, the Germans are trying to reverse the whole trend of our history as far back as we know anything about our history. They are trying to kill the spirit of the Nordic people and inject into the carcass of an assassinated Nordic nation the synthetic poison they call “the Nordic spirit.”

It is a fact that the Germans, who used to whine about the colonies they lost under the Versailles treaty, never showed any interest in colonies until the colonization period of other European states was almost finished. They never were discoverers, adventurers, eager to touch shores untrodden by white men. They had no ambition to develop untouched riches of foreign continents. The exploitation of

the natural riches and possibilities of lands inhabited by non-Europeans through the white men's superior technique may have been a reprehensible thing in many ways, and the Germans might have deserved honorable mention for their abstention from the game. But the Germans have always been eager to plunder the lands of their next-door neighbors—lands that had already been turned from wilderness into cultivated areas.

Since their start in history, when they looted the Roman Empire, first by a series of attacks alternating with blackmail and finally by large-scale plundering, their heart's desire has always been the same. When the North Germans during the Middle Ages developed sea power, the fleet of the Hanseatic League was nothing but an auxiliary force that permitted merchant speculators to impose commercial treaties on their neighbors, securing for themselves the whole profit of the toil of other people. While England was busy in her colonial empire, the Germans sliced off parts of Poland. While other European powers were managing their affairs overseas, the Germans took two provinces from Denmark—as Bismarck once confessed, mainly to get the port of Kiel—and Alsace and Lorraine from France. Not till the resources of the world had been fairly thoroughly surveyed and developed by other nations, did the Germans expand their old dream of domination of all Europe into a dream of world domination. The Germans have never been a creative

people, but they have always had an immense faith—not entirely without justification—in their own capacity for “Bessermachen,” the art of improving on other people’s achievements and inventions.

They have improved on other people’s technical inventions—on the airplane first flown in the United States, on the tank invented by the British, on the exchange clearing system of the Swiss Federation, which the Nazis have turned into the supreme instrument for bleeding white the nations invaded by them. In the heyday of the belief in world salvation by technical progress and the materialistic evaluation of the possibilities of human happiness, the Norwegians also were great admirers of the German Empire of Bismarck and the Hohenzollerns. It was to Germany that our young men went to complete their education, business men, doctors and surgeons.

YET even then, very few Norwegians were whole-hearted admirers of the German state of mind. The Germans were jolly good fellows (as long as you did not contradict them); they had the best beer and the coziest beer gardens, they had good theatres, even if usually the plays made in Germany were rather bad. But their lack of civil courage and dignity, their fawning on people with titles and money, their love of regiments and regimentation, seemed comical to most of us. We did not foresee the tragedy brewing — that they would one

day covet the country we had developed through thousands of years, covet our merchant fleet, fourth largest in the world and the most modern and efficient, and try to impose upon us a state of mind that was natural to them, and to us once seemed so funny, but logically had developed into something utterly repulsive and obscene—a disgrace to any creature calling itself a man or a woman. When, therefore, they try their "Bessermachen" on our spiritual heritage, we feel only one thing—desire to avenge the insult.

FROM the morning of their treacherous attack on Norway, our hate for the Germans has grown by leaps and bounds. And yet, as one boy recently arrived in the United States on his way to our air force in Canada said to me: "We hate them like hell, ~~but we despise them a thousand times more than we hate them.~~" The young men in our reorganized army in Great Britain, our navy fighting in the North Atlantic, our airmen, envious of those of their comrades who have already been shooting down German planes over France and the Channel—all of them have just one desire, to avenge the wrongs their country has suffered and is suffering every day.

The news tells of the joy in Oslo when recently four British mosquito planes broke up a Quisling-cum-Nazi celebration, pounded German headquarters and killed between seventy and a hundred of the invaders. But even two years ago, before the thumb-screws had been turned full force on our people, a friend who had escaped from Norway told me about an acquaintance of ours in Norway—a sweet little old lady who lived in a pretty little house full of old English furniture and Chinese porcelain and American clocks and glass brought home by her sailor forefathers. She had a small shop on the ground floor where she used to sell rolls of thread and yards of calico and suchlike, as an excuse for keeping a kind of small-talk exchange for the women of the neighborhood. During a raid by the R. A. F. her house was smashed so thoroughly that nothing but chips and charred splinters was left of her beloved home. Returning to the site, she looked over the destruction and clasped her hands, exclaiming with a voice tremulous with emotion: "Thank God! We are not forgotten by our friends."

DO NOT FORGET
The Hundred Neediest.