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# Studying Scandinavia

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THERE is much agitation at the present time for the inclusion of more material on the Orient and Latin America in the school curriculum. Most of the reasons advanced are valid, based on the size and economic-political importance of these large areas of the world. Some stress is laid, too, on the cultural contributions of these nations to the world, contributions of which we have either been unaware or only partially aware. Such shifts in emphasis are needed and in many instances are long overdue. The writer is heartily in accord with plans to devote more time to the study of these areas. As we rebuild our curricula, however, we ought to consider the significance of the Scandinavian countries and the place they should occupy in the total school program.

Numerically they are relatively unimportant. Economically and politically they loom larger on the world horizon. In social significance they probably surpass any group of nations in the world. If the aim of education is to develop the highest type of healthy, intelligent, self-disciplined, well-integrated, alert citizens, who will serve their community, their nation, and the world to the highest degree of which they are capable, then we dare not overlook the lessons we can learn from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland.

They are not the utopias towards which we strive, nor are they the near-utopias which some writers and travellers led us to believe in the 'twenties and 'thirties. But they have accomplished much in solving for their part of the world problems similar to those which all nations face today. They have advanced as far as any group of nations towards three-dimensional democracy—economic, social, and political. They

have developed a healthy population. They have educated their people to a remarkable extent. They have pioneered in adult education. They have experimented successfully with the cooperative approach to economics.

Scandinavians have pioneered in modern architecture and housing, both urban and rural. They have produced much that is beautiful and utilitarian in the arts and crafts. They have composed some of the great music of the world and have brought forth some fine painting and sculpture. They have poured out an amazing amount of fine literature and have invented some of the world's most useful products. They have developed a spirit of independence, courage, a faith in God, in their nations, and in themselves which have been the envy of the rest of the world in these war years.

Scandinavians have developed a concern for others, whether they are farmers, laborers, or white-collar workers, which speaks well for their national maturity. They have passed through defeat more than once, only to arise stronger, more resourceful, more democratic.

## CURRICULUM SUGGESTIONS

EVEN if we recognize the importance of Scandinavia in the total world picture, the question still arises as to how we can include such a study in an already overcrowded curriculum. Two suggestions are advanced, both of them fairly obvious, yet often overlooked.

In the reorganization of social studies and social science programs in elementary schools, secondary schools, and colleges, many institutions are thinking in terms of areas or regions. If such is the pattern in a given school, the study of Scandinavia might well be included as one of the areas or regions to be covered. Its history, geography, family life, education, recreation, contributions to culture, religion, etc. would then be included as a part of a unit, semester, or year's program of intensive and comprehensive study.

Material relating to Scandinavia can also be studied in several different departments in a school or college, and assembly programs, exhibits, movies, and lectures on Scandinavia used

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The Scandinavian countries have long been noted for progress in democracy and cooperative enterprise. The former head of the social studies department in the Friends Central School, Overbrook-Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, states the case for more attention to Scandinavia in our teaching of modern history.

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to supplement the work covered in the regular course. If this latter practice is adopted, it might be well to survey some of the topics which could now be treated in widely established courses.

The Scandinavians have produced a wide range of high class literature, from the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen to the plays of Henrik Ibsen and the novels of Sigrid Undset, Selma Lagerlöf, and Johan Bojer. In biography and autobiography there are the thrilling stories of the explorers, principally Roald Amundsen, Fridtjof Nansen, and Vilhjálmur Stefánsson; the life of Mathilda Wrede, Finnish prison reformer; and Bishop Grundtvig, founder of the Folk School Movement, to mention but a few. This material and a great deal more like it might well be included in literature classes for the enjoyment and profit of American students.

There is no valid reason why much more emphasis should not be placed in world history courses on these Scandinavian countries. Perhaps we can press for such changes in new textbooks and new courses of study as they are prepared. The most pertinent place, however, for material on life in Scandinavia seems to the writer to be in the Problems of Democracy classes in the high schools and in economics and sociology courses in colleges. Their successful attempts at solving some of democracy's most pressing problems deserve careful scrutiny. And if we would develop in students the conviction that these problems can be solved, we must show them where they are at least on the way to solutions. Where better can we turn than to these four small nations of northern Europe? Units on conservation could well include the story of the Danish Heath Society and its founder, Enrico Dalgas; units on education might well consider the Folk School movement and its founders, Nikolai Grundtvig and Kristen Kold; units on distribution of income might rightly include accounts of the cooperative movement in "middle way" nations.

In addition to the music of Edvard Grieg and Jean Sibelius and other less famous composers, there is a wealth of folk music, much of it already translated into English, which should be included in music courses and sung by students in assemblies and elsewhere. Students should not only play and sing these compositions and songs, they should know that they were composed by Scandinavians as part of their contribution to the culture of the world.

In art classes emphasis could well be placed on the outstanding work of the Scandinavians in the

arts and crafts—in glass work, in silver, in tapestries and modern hand-made textiles, in ceramics, and in furniture. Students at the secondary school level and in colleges and universities should have an opportunity to see exhibits of the work of Carl Malmsten, Simon Gate, Edvard Hald, and Alvar Aalto, to mention but a few, or lacking this opportunity, to see some of the fine books illustrating their work. This would be in addition to their study of painters and sculptors like Edvard Munch, Carl Larsson, Bertel Thorvaldsen, and Christian Krohg. Likewise, considerable attention should be paid to their contribution in modern architecture through the work of men like the Saarinen, Ragnar Östberg, and Johan Sirén.

In science, too, the Scandinavians have given the world much, and their contributions might well be included in science classes at almost any age level. It was Karl von Linné who first classified plants so that they could be studied and referred to by scientists around the world. It was Gustaf de Laval who gave us the separator and other mechanical devices for farms, Sven Windquist who invented the ball-bearing, and Alfred Nobel, dynamite and smokeless powder. And in medicine and physics Niels Finsen and Niels Bohr stand at the top, the one as the discoverer of the violet and ultra violet ray treatments for smallpox, tuberculosis of the skin, and other diseases; and the other as the discoverer of the theoretical structure of matter and especially of electrons. In forestry, too, they have been outstanding.

Boys interested in physical education might well make a study of the contributions and effect of the Scandinavians on gymnastics and athletics, from the early work of Pehr Henrik Ling to the long-distance record shatterer Paavo Nurmi.

We have merely touched the surface in this "strip-mining" of Scandinavia; there is a wealth of material for the serious miner who would acquire some of the wealth hidden in a study of Scandinavia.

#### SOME SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Further information may be obtained from The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 116 East 64th Street, New York, and its publication, *The American-Scandinavian Review*; Albert Bonnier Publishing House (importers of Scandinavian literature of all kinds), 561 Third Avenue, New York; *The American-Swedish Monthly*, 45 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20; The Danish-American Association, 30 North Dearborn Street, Chicago; Friends of Denmark, 116 Broad Street, New York 4; Royal Norwegian Information Service, 3516 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington.