

# NORWAY AND ITS POLITICAL SITUATION.

BY MARTIN NARBO.

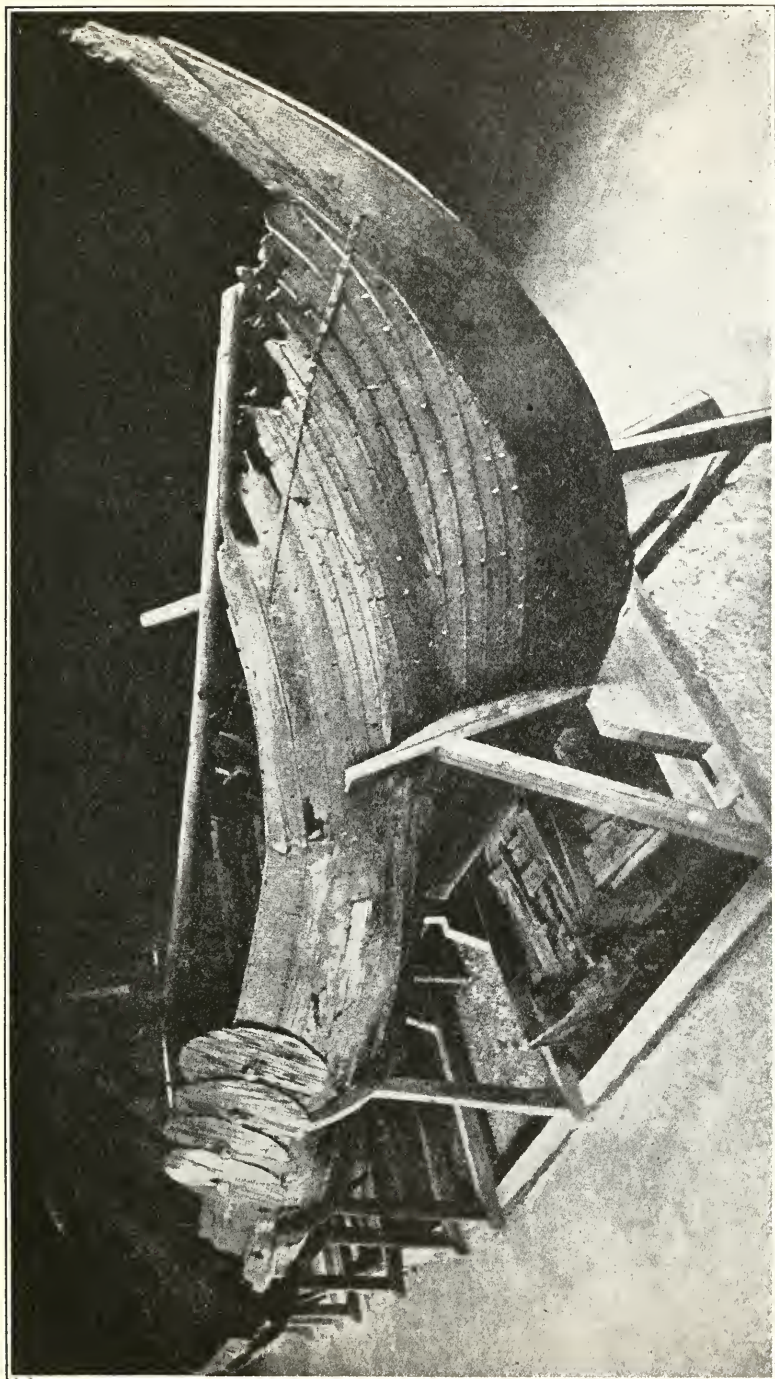
## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION.

NORWAY is a picturesque country. It is a relatively narrow strip of land sparsely inhabited on account of the rocky character of its territory. Its population counts little more than two millions. With the exception of 15,000 Laplanders and 7000 Finns and Gypsies, the people are of pure Germanic blood and in religion are mostly Lutherans. There are not more than 2000 Roman Catholics and only 700 Jews. Under American influence dissenters have left the established state church and there are now over 10,000 Methodists and 5000 Baptists.

The inhabitants of the country cultivated the soil at an early date, but it was as seafarers and bold conquerors that they gained their fame. Ships of theirs have been found in all parts of the northern seas; one lay buried in the sands of the Baltic, between Düppel and Alsen, and another was discovered in the Seine, not far below Paris. We here reproduce one now preserved in the University of Christiania, a staunch vessel in its time, and one which could easily have held from sixty to eighty armed men.

The habitable portions of the country are the valleys which are hardly accessible except from the sea through the fiords. As a result of this lack of connection, most of the people of Norway are leading a life of isolation which has impressed itself upon their character and prevented the formation of a definite Norwegian language. Almost every valley has a dialect of its own. The literary language had necessarily to come by way of the sea, and so it was but natural that at an early date, in the fourteenth century, Danish became the speech of the pulpit and of the hymns of the church.

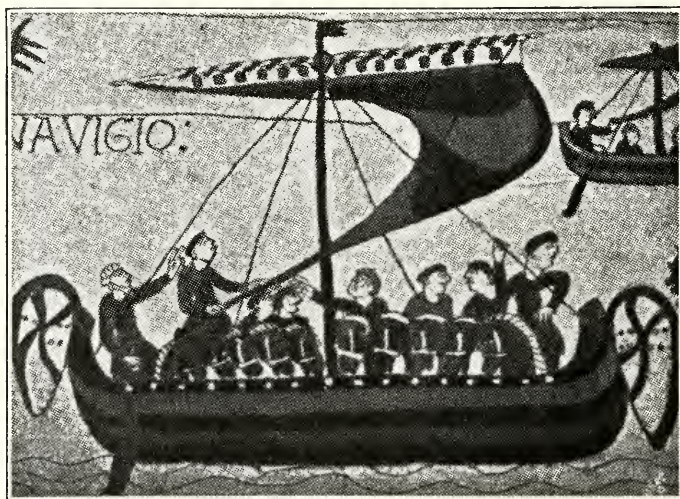
In recent times, however, especially after the severance of Norway from Denmark in 1814, Norway began to rebel against



VIKING SHIP PRESERVED IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CHRISTIANIA.

the Danification of its literature, and some of the leading men worked out plans to have Danish words translated into Norwegian. The spoken language assumed a Swedish pronunciation, and a new era brought out grand possibilities in the dramas of Bjornson, Ibsen and the composer of comedies, G. Heiberg.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century Russia tore away from Sweden the province of Finland, and Russia's aggressive policy is still feared by Sweden and also by Norway. With Denmark the case is different. The Danish royal family is related by marriage to the rulers of both Russia and England, and, in addi-



NORMAN SHIP. From the Bayeux tapestry.

tion, the Danes have a grudge against Prussia for the loss of Schleswig-Holstein.

It is true that the Danes have not yet forgotten England's raid on Copenhagen during the Napoleonic wars when Nelson bombarded the capital for several days and took the whole Danish navy captive for no other reason than that Denmark had proposed to remain neutral in the war between England and France. Further, the Danes claim that in 1864 their king had been abetted by England in refusing the traditional oath to keep the constitution of the duchies Schleswig and Holstein. They declare that they never would have allowed themselves to be confronted with a war against Prussia and Austria if they had not relied on England's promised assistance. And there are many who are willing



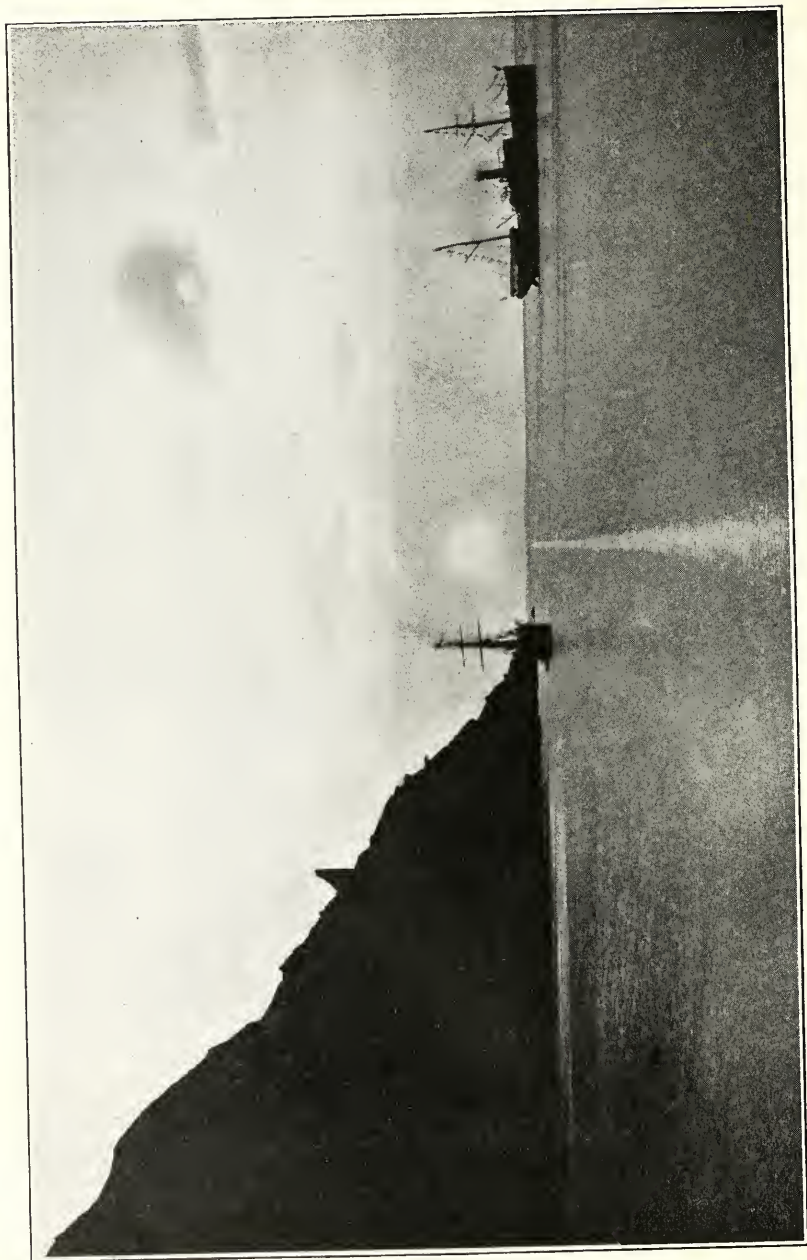
to forgive the Prussians for the conquest of the duchies, but are unable to forget that they were left in the lurch by Great Britain in the critical moment. As a result the Danes are not in favor of



LAATE FALLS NEAR ODDE, HARDANGER VALLEY.

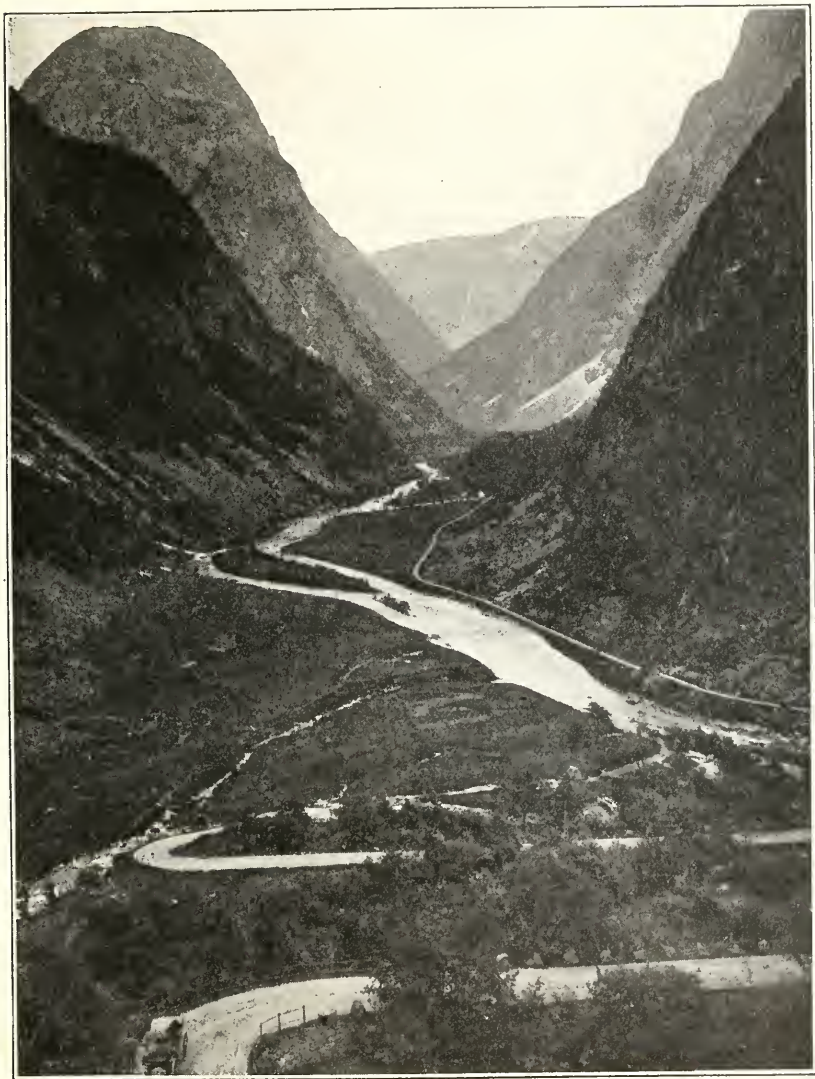
either Germany or England and do not share the fear of Russia as do the inhabitants of the Scandinavian peninsula.

There is a peculiar difference between Morway and Denmark



THE MIDNIGHT SUN AT NORTH CAPE.

which comes out in their national hymns. The Danish national hymn indicates that Prussia is their old enemy, and it preaches hostility to Germany, while the Ibsen poem of Norway to which



NAERDAL VALLEY FROM STALHEIM.

Mr. Narbo refers is strongly anti-British. Mr. Narbo writes of it in a personal letter: "I found in the public library a French and an English translation. The tempo of the western coast of Nor-



way which Ibsen so carefully put into it was lost in both translations, and it was just that which made it a masterpiece. Over the English version there was an explanation, stating that it was very unlike Ibsen, gently excusing it and belittling it, but admitting that it was a 'story well told.' The translator omitted and changed materially its strongest expressions, but what is most important is that the French translator did not go to any such trouble."

Our illustrations will serve to give some idea of Norwegian scenery. They show the character of the valleys and glaciers, North Cape, the wonderful midnight sun, a characteristic group of Norwegian laborers in the fields, also a group of Laplanders.



RAFTSUND, LOFODEN, NORWAY.

The author of the present article, Mr. Martin Narbo, of San Francisco, was born in Norway and is the son of a Norwegian schoolmaster. He came to this country as a youth and is proud of having made his living by the work of his hands. He considers himself a laboring man, but the pride he takes in making his living by manual labor did not prevent him from acquiring a fair knowledge of languages. He has traveled extensively on the continent of Europe and gained a wide acquaintance with the characteristics of the common people in different countries. In America he worked as a cowboy and also as a farmer, but after having acquired a homestead sold it again and attended the University of Wisconsin in Madison, where I happened to meet him, and I will say that he

is as singular and interesting as all the Peer Gynts hailing from the rocky land of the midnight sun.

I have had some correspondence with another Norwegian, a graduate of the University of Christiania now living in Minnesota, and he informed me that ninety per cent of the Norwegians are anti-German and pro-British. In order to find out more about Norway, I wrote to Mr. Narbo requesting him to state his view of the situation and this article is his answer.

These two Norwegian correspondents may represent two extreme factions. We leave the final decision to our readers and



DETAIL OF SVARTISEN GLACIER.

abstain from expressing any opinion. It would probably be difficult to state the proportion in definite percentages of those who share either view.

#### MR. NARBO'S STATEMENT.

It is a comparatively easy matter to express one's views to those who have a clear conception of how Norwegians must naturally stand on questions regarding this world issue, but what are we going to do with such people as the Minnesota man who lumps the Norwegian anti-Germanism at 90%? We cannot disregard them, and it is true that those who know are responsible for those



who do not know. The uninformed have been too great a factor in all wars, and they are too great a factor in this war, to be neglected. It is against such as these we must battle, and indeed I am battling every day the best I know how. Thanks to my workingman's experience, and the facts I have gotten from German sources, I have been able to vanquish them by the dozen.

Just to give you an illustration of how impossible it is to generalize a national feeling at a certain per cent without any reservations, I will state my experience in forming an estimate of French national feeling during the two and a half years I was in France, from the point of view of the great mass in society to



NORWEGIANS MAKING HAY.

which I belong, and prior to 1905. Ever since I was a boy I have always been able to feel what another person thought of me, and I consider this as my rarest gift.

Owing to my light complexion I was often taken for an Englishman when I came to France, and equally often taken for a German. I noticed that I excited a certain amount of antipathy in both cases, but with a distinct difference. When they took me for a German, although they tried to hide their feelings, the circuit of thought was very short: it was Sedan, Siege of Paris, an enemy, but accompanied at the same time with a certain amount of self-reproach. When I was taken for an Englishman the circuit of thought was longer. They went over a long list of offenses

they had been taught in school while studying their history. There was robbery, intrigue, unfairness, treachery and sacrilege. With the Germans they were ready to have another bout; but with the English there was not much to be done, or there was a feeling of reluctance to soil their swords with English blood. When they took me for an Englishman they looked at me with contempt and disdain. I could give a hundred specific instances that furnished opportunity to test this feeling, and many of them were very interesting. In some cases I risked my face in making the test. It always brought me a certain amount of relief to tell them that I



FISHING LAPPS OF FINMARK, NORWAY.

was a Norwegian, but there remained the fact that I was a light-complexioned Teuton and resembled an Englishman or a German.

Now how could I be able to estimate these feelings at a certain per cent? The percentage that might be true today probably would be wrong tomorrow. A sociologist would diagnose the anti-English feeling as being dormant, with a chronic character that would prove fatal whenever the conditions happened to be right. There would be a percentage who would at any moment flare up for this reason. The anti-English feeling is of a religious fibre and is not easily done away with. It will act like soot in the chimney whenever English and French will build a fire together. The

quality has everything to do with national feelings and it can only be defined, not counted.

Now in considering the Norwegians, it must not be forgotten that we are just coming out of five hundred years of national misfortunes. I believe one can find in the history of our last five hundred years the reason why I found the Norwegian to be German in Germany, Swiss in Switzerland, French in France and English in England. As soon as they become split up and isolated they lose their identity too quickly. Norway was never conquered, but we became entangled with Denmark through royal intermarriage. Royal love-making left us under the dominion of the royal house of Denmark. The Norwegian officials became Danish. They manipulated with the Danish merchants and sold out the forests of Norway and other natural resources. But the worst of all was that these official parasites insisted that it was not respectable for us Norwegians to talk the language that was so strong and poetic in the mouths of our Viking forefathers. They used their official prestige, and little by little we lost our self-reliance. They taught us to have contempt for our mother tongue and to admire what was foreign to a degree that came close to ending our spiritual existence. Denmark never suffered from the hands of Germany one per cent of what we suffered from the hands of Denmark, but we are trying to forget as fast as we can because Denmark is our Teuton brother. It would be well for Denmark to do likewise and not nourish her grudge against Germany at the risk of her own existence.

Through international complications we became united to Sweden, and for another hundred years the Swedes tried to trick away our liberty. But all that must be forgotten, although the sore is fresh. Now we are just straightening up as an independent country, and some day, if nothing happens again, our Teutonic brothers will be proud of us. But just what can we do in the present case? If we declare ourselves openly on the side of Germany, against Russia and England, England can come along with her navy and destroy our coast cities, and we are more coast than anything else. Russia will have a fine excuse for carrying out her old intentions against Norway. If she could only extend her arms on both sides and make the Baltic a nice little Russian port, how fine! Our five hundred years of outside influence have made us Norwegians timid. We are afraid to make the present situation clear to ourselves, and this timidity is interpreted as pro this and pro that, even pro-Russian. We Norwegians should not deceive



ourselves. For us, disastrous as it looks, we should see that we have only one side to choose.

We are a small nationality, and we have been shifted about; we naturally look for some big brother to protect us. Can we Norwegians look to Russia? Can we trust her word? Do we expect any mercy? Do we expect any fair treatment? Do we look to Russia as a civilizing country? No! England and France may have such illusions, but not the Norwegians; we have been too close neighbors. We have heard directly, without any translation, from the mouths of our brother Finns what Russia is as a master. Do Norwegians forget the sensation of having Russian spies in their midst as they have had at regular intervals? What about the program of the Russification of northern Norway so typical of Slavism? I do not believe in hasty generalizations, but it is safe to lump the Norwegian anti-Russianism at 98%. Yet we are afraid to say so for we must put a plaster on the Russian sore because we are afraid of it. But let us not think for a minute that we can deceive Russia, for Russia expects no good will from the Scandinavians, and that is why she took military precautions against us. Why should we expect anything from her? We are conscious of the fact that she is our natural enemy. When she comes, do we expect that England will skate her navy up over the Norwegian mountains and take a stand in our behalf? No, we are not that foolish. Do we expect the Latin race to protect us? The Latin race had better unite for its own protection. Germany cannot afford to let Norway and Sweden be taken by Russia; it would weaken the effectiveness of the Kiel canal. The Norwegian cause is naturally the German cause, and the German cause is naturally the Norwegian. I would to God the Norwegians would get some of the old Viking daring in themselves and be brave enough to announce that, sink or swim, they would stand by the German cause even at the risk of another disastrous five hundred years—even at the risk of eternal Slav slavery. But there is no danger, says that man who reasons only for his own selfish period of existence. There is only one big brother to whom we can naturally look for effective protection—and that is Germany; if he should be weakened Norway would have no big brother. But there is more at stake than the existence of Norway.

There are two main influences which determine the real feeling in choosing between our Teutonic brothers, England and Germany. One is the spirit of the German Reformation, the other the foreign spirit of emigrants returning with English culture. Perhaps the

only outside influence from which we Norwegians have gained great benefit is the influence of the German Reformation and philosophy. When I was a boy the pictures of Luther and Gustavus Adolphus could be seen on the walls of every peasant home. The deeply religious spirit embodied in the vigorous German hymns, so powerfully sung by Norwegian worshipers, has been a wonderful tonic to Norwegian spiritual life. If it were not for this spirit Norway would not have accomplished her splendid humanitarian results, she would not have her small percentage of criminality, of illiteracy, of divorce, of child mortality, school mortality, and pauperism. In all the years I have been away from Norway I have never felt as much at home in any church as I did in the German Lutheran church when I was in Germany. The closeness of this religious tie between Norway and Germany is immeasurable. In the last few years, this spirit has been opposed by an English spirit coming from Baptistism and Methodism and other isms emanating from the United States. These returned emigrants have started an agitation against the state church with the purpose of ridding Norway of what they call German atheism. They object to the systematic teaching of religion in schools and to the government having a German Lutheran church department as well as a school department.

Intelligent Norwegians realize that one good church is enough—a systematic teaching of morality is just as necessary as a systematic teaching of mentality. This class has been contending against the English-American invasion. I have three cousins in this country who are Lutheran ministers, and one cousin married to a man who was an American Lutheran missionary to China. They are all prating about the German atheistic tendency in Norway. They want to go home and harvest some of the respect that well-brought-up Norwegians are ready to pay the servants of God. Now they are not qualified by the Norwegian church department and so when they come home they have to go about like ordinary mortals, and that is not a pleasant experience to many a one who went out in the world as a little boy expecting to become great. The returning emigrant comes home with the idea that what he has learned while away from home is the only thing the world has to teach, and so he becomes more one-sided than the man who has been staying home taking an interest in other countries as well as England and America. The result is a natural clash, and anyone who knows how every parish in Norway has been visited by returned emigrants will realize that that clash is great. English culture has been mainly represented in Norway by these emigrants who to a

great extent have forgotten their mother tongue and have learned none in its place. Thus English and American culture have not had a good representation in Norway, and in intelligent minds and among religious circles there has grown an aversion to this bragging culture.

It is also an important fact that Norwegians are very loyal to those of their own people who give evidence of superior knowledge. In 1905 the people expected and hoped for a republic; but when those who were their leaders, although in the minority, presented their reasons the public silently acquiesced and chose a kingdom. This same leading class in Norway is today with Germany, but they control their tongues and we do not hear much from them. They are wise; I am sure they know just what they can do, and it is possible they have on a diplomatic cloak, but there is no doubt as to where their hearts are.

In our school readers there is a long poem covering two or three pages which is one of Ibsen's masterpieces. The name is *Terje Viken* and in it he breathes a contempt for the English that never leaves any Norwegian who is worth calling a Norwegian. England has taken active steps in Norway to discourage literature that deals with English misdeeds. One poem about St. Clair in the same reader states that the English burned and slaughtered wherever they went, and that the child was killed in the arms of the mother even while a smile was on its face. We have raised a statue where St. Clair fell, and the poem says *Wæh* to every Norwegian who does not get hot when he sees this statue. Both of these poems use such strong language that 95% of the Norwegians in this country as well as in Norway will not forget it. This Norwegian feeling is dormant, but England will feel its effect if ever anything comes along to stir it up. England starved us once, too, with a blockade, and a real Norwegian remembers it. Those who are not Norwegians, those who have lost their identity, are governed by the conditions prevalent in the country where they live, but I venture to predict that in the future politics of this country Germans and Scandinavians will fuse together more and more, and I hope their influence will be felt.

The Catholic church, of course, has caused some dissension where Teutonism is concerned. The Scandinavian press is not vigorous, but rather moderate in its expression—except the Danish which is particularly venomous. The Danish press is often quoted as the Scandinavian press, but this is very misleading. If I had plenty of money I would start a pro-German campaign in the Nor-



wegian language; it would be a relief to do something. Still, with the experience I have gained, I will come along later on when another great issue appears, and it is surely coming. It will be the second chapter of this war.

I believe that the only people who has a right to call upon the God of the Christian for help is the people that has endeavored systematically to do the most for the widows and fatherless. I have had plenty of proof from actual experience that Germany is that country. I looked into the eyes of the German emperor Wilhelm II; he did not avoid my eyes but answered that look only as a good man can, and all the bad that I had heard about him vanished. I lifted my hat and bowed with respect and devotion; he bowed in return and gave me personally a smile that I shall never forget—not because he was the emperor, but because he was a man with tremendous influence for the good. May the God he has a right to call his, be with him!

There are a few things that I see absolutely beyond the slightest doubt. The most ignorant and premature term used today is the term "militarism." Until we agree on an international government backed by an international force strong enough to enforce the will of this government we will have militarism—unless the spirit of the golden rule controls every individual, and then we must all want to be done unto in the same way. Another thing that I think is ridiculous is to be looking for precedents in a war where submarines play an important new rôle. The rules of blockade will never be the same in the future. Neutrals should realize that this is a war of the biggest nations, the rule of catch as catch can. Here in San Francisco there is a mixture of sentiment, also a good collection of foreign papers, and to see how different nationalities treat the same fact is sickening. For instance, *The Toronto World* to-night prints this three column headline: "United States Threatens Germany with Reprisals if Vessels are Attacked." I always enjoy the excitement in *Le Temps*. There is where I get my only laugh. I also find in *The Toronto World*: "United States very mild in note to England. Germany is ordered to respect American rights on seas."

I have one argument, illustrated with much personal experience and studded with German facts, with which I am very successful in my class. I give it as a reason for this war, that years ago the German government with their splendid system took care of the producers of capital by making capital responsible. The effect was the same as when a man takes care of his horse, for that is

better for the man and better for the horse. Both will do better and they will like each other better. The result was that they produced things made in Germany at a lower cost, and this threatened to outclass the irresponsible capitalism of England, France and Russia. I tell them of the barbarism of this capitalism, and I present specific cases that appeal to my class, and I defy them to show me what else Russia, France and the rest have in common except this slovenly, lazy, blood-thirsty, free capitalism. I tell them these countries are too far behind to catch up with the same system and they are doomed, and that is why they fight. I tell them that this is why the press of the United States takes the stand that it does, and they believe me. As to the outcome, I believe in the might that comes from living in the right.

There have not been any incidents of importation of arms to Russia where the government has stepped in. There is no such importation I am pretty sure. From a commercial point of view, Norway is interested in the welfare of her merchant navy. She has felt English competition keenly, but she has also met England in many parts of the world as a brother sailor. The feeling from this point of view can be argued on both sides. I have often seen in Germans a distrust and suspicion of the Norwegians, and I would like something to occur that would show our loyalty to Germany. Some of the Danish dislike may have crept into a certain class of Norwegians, but not many.