

# **SØREN KIERKEGAARD - Life and Work**

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## **A Critical Epoch for Denmark**

The time of Napoleon's grandeur and fall were to be fateful years for the Kingdom of Denmark, which had hitherto been the leading power in Scandinavia. When the wars finally died away, the Danish state went bankrupt in 1813. In 1814 Norway, which had been in personal union with Denmark, was separated from the dual monarchy and entered a union with Sweden under the Swedish King. In those very years Denmark was passing through an unparalleled flowering of science, art, and literature, which continued until mid century. What was lost economically and politically was gained in intellectual vigour and renown. For half a century Denmark was a glowing forge of the spirit. The State supported the Muses, for as Crown Prince Christian Frederik said, "Because we are poor, we need not make ourselves stupid." The physicist H.C.Ørsted (1777-1851) discovered electromagnetism in 1820; Rasmus Rask (1787-1832) became one of the founders of comparative linguistics; N.F.S.Grundtvig (1783-1872) laid the groundwork for the Folk High Schools, a seedbed of adult education; in Rome Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844) won worldwide renown as a sculptor. With Adam Oehlenschläger (1779-1850) Nordic antiquity was reborn in Danish poetry and drama. J.L.Heiberg (1790-1861) was a sovereign arbiter of taste, and his wife, Johanne Luise Heiberg (1812-90) became one of Denmark's greatest acting talents. It was in this classical milieu that the writer of fairy tales Hans Christian Andersen (1805-75) and the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55) manifested their genius. The location was Copenhagen, with around 120,000 inhabitants, a bourgeois capital city in an absolute monarchy with lively cultural links with the rest of Scandinavia and Europe. All the men mentioned above spent long periods abroad, except Kierkegaard, who went only to Berlin, four times. Even livelier was the polemical relationship that pertained among the leading cultural figures, who in brilliant written duels by no means spared one another. Sparks flew from the forge when sword and spear were being hammered out.

## **A West Jutland Family**

In western Denmark, a notable Jutish clergyman, Steen Steensen Blicher (1782-1848) made his mark with his tragic tales. When, in the eighteenth century, strict Pietism spread from northern Germany to Denmark, it was on the tempestuous western coast of Jutland and on the meagre heathlands that it gained its most lasting allegiance and still lives on there in the Home Mission movement. This was the area from which the Kierkegaard family sprang. The village of Sædding lies south of the town of Skjern, some 20 km from the sea. By the small mediaeval church, now vanished, lay two copyhold farms called "Kierkegaardene" (the church farms), because the revenues from them went to support the local benefice. As a copyholder, Søren Kierkegaard's greatgrandfather took his surname from the farm, as did his son Peder, into whose poor home nine children were born. The fourth of these was Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard (1756-1838). According to a tradition to which Søren Kierkegaard refers in his journal, Michael when a little boy was keeping sheep on the heath, and was hungry and forlorn. Standing up on a hill he cursed God, something he was unable to forget even at the age of 82 (Pap. VII 1 A 5; 1846). Anyone who could, moved away from Sædding. Michael's maternal uncle, Niels Andersen Sedding, had set up as a hosier in Copenhagen. Michael joined him in 1768, was trained in the trade, and in 1780 became a burgess himself. He expanded the business, and in 1796 became his uncle's heir. Michael Kierkegaard was twice married, to women from the heathlands. The first time was in 1794 to a sister of his business partner, M.N.Røyen; she died in 1796 leaving no children. His second marriage was to Ane Sørensdatter Lund, a domestic servant of Kierkegaard's, whom he made pregnant and then married in 1797. They had seven children, the youngest of them Søren Aabye

Kierkegaard, born on 5 May 1813 and named after Søren Aabye, a kinsman who had died in 1812.

These merchants from west Jutland were thrifty and pious. In the Moravian Brethren congregation in Copenhagen they found again the strict idea of sin they knew from their homeland - as well as the corresponding fervent hope of grace. Michael Kierkegaard had made a lot of money when, as early as February 1797, during an illness, he had made over his flourishing business to others. The illness was overcome, and for forty years Kierkegaard lived as a wealthy rentier continuously followed by economic good fortune; in the State bankruptcy of 1813 he escaped any serious losses. In this way was preserved the fortune that was to bring Søren Kierkegaard a way of life independent of money.

### **Childhood and Youth**

Søren's birthplace was a building, now demolished, in the distinguished square called Nytorv. His parents were contrasts. The dominant, powerful father, slightly stooping, and his mother with her round face, rather plump figure and her mild and merry solicitude for her children and grandchildren. She could read after a fashion, but never learnt to write. She understood the facility, the need for freedom, that pervaded the quite young Søren, whose quick repartee and teasing nature manifested itself to teachers and pupils at the Borgerdyd School, which he attended in 1821-30. It is hardly possible to make out the mother's importance to her son, whereas the father's became charged with destiny. He laid his gloomy Christianity upon Søren, who was to love the crucified Christ, at whom many spat (Pap. IX A 68 and X 1 A 272, 180). The wellread father delighted in carrying on philosophizing conversation with his two highly gifted sons, Peter Christian, born 1805, and Søren.

P.C.Kierkegaard took his degree in theology in 1826 and in 1829 gained a doctorate in theology. He became a theological writer and a clergyman, then in 1856 a bishop, and in 1867 a government minister. But melancholy and the dread of responsibility gained the upper hand, and during his final years before his death in 1888 he was insane. During the 1830s the two sons, with their father, felt that their kin were under God's wrath, a guilt rested upon it, so that none of them would live beyond 34 and the father would outlive them all. Two brothers had died in 1819 and 1833, three sisters in 1822, 1832, and 1834; the latter two leaving underage children. In 1834 the mother also died. It puzzled Søren that in 1839 his brother reached 34 and he himself 35 in 1848 (Breve 16667; cf. Pap. II A 805). The father's sin was his cursing of God and it was felt that the punishment would be that none of his children would live beyond the age of Christ. In Denmark the 1830s were the period in which European nihilism made its way into literature. There was the incestuous accidie of Chateaubriand and Byron, the dark point that finds expression in mental gloom. There was the challenging of the philistine bourgeois, the searing irony of Heine's satire. In our best authors, an ebullience of living was combined with a desperate feeling of decline. Suicide looms in the verse novel of Frederik Paludan Müller, *The Danceuse* (1833) and in Carl Bagger's novel, *The Life of My Brother* (1834). It is also found in Kierkegaard's journal, for instance in April 1836: "I have just come from a party, where I was the life and soul. Jokes flowed from my mouth; everyone laughed, admired me - but I went, yes the dash ought be as long as the radii of the earth's orbit - - - - - away and wanted to shoot myself" (Pap I A 156, 158, 161)

Kierkegaard was in the midst of the crisis of gifted youth, a victim of Weltschmerz, spleen, le mal du siècle. In 1830 he had begun the philosophical preliminary study of psychology and philosophy and from 1831, at his father's wish, preparations for a degree in theology. But in 1834 his life was torn apart. His faith crumbled, he could not find "the idea I will live and die for" (Pap I A 75), as he wrote on 1 August 1835. The following

spring Kierkegaard's amusements assumed the character of a debauch, for which he himself thought in 1839 he would have to spend the rest of his life atoning (Pap. II A 520). It is possible that Mozart's Don Juan had such a powerfully obsessive erotic effect upon him that once "in an exalted state he allowed himself to be reduced to visiting a prostitute" (Pap. IV A 65). On 1 September 1837 Kierkegaard moved from his home and the same year his father paid his son's debts of 121300 rixdollars and promised him 500 rdl per year. In 1838 Kierkegaard was spiritually restored. "On 19 May, at 10 1/2 in the morning," he experienced "*an indescribable joy*" (Pap. II A 228), a Christian breakthrough. On 9 August he was shaken by his father's death, but realized that he "has *died for me*, so that, if possible, something might still be made of me" (Pap. II A 243), i.e. a good bourgeois citizen. In September he published anonymously a short work, *From the Papers of One Still Living*, in which he reproached Hans Christian Andersen that in his novel *Only a Fiddler* he "completely lacks any philosophy of life". After preparing industriously, he took his degree examination on 3 July 1840; on 10 September he proposed marriage to Regine Olsen, whom he had known since May 1837. As a betrothed man he was preparing for ministry as a clergyman and on 12 January 1841 he preached a trial sermon in Holmens Church. At the same time he had been considering a scholarly career and a dissertation of his, *On the Concept of Irony*, was accepted and defended on 29 September 1841 for the philosophical master's degree, which corresponded to a doctorate in other faculties. During his years of study Kierkegaard had carried on wideranging literary and philosophical studies. He was now familiar with the great German philosopher of the age, Hegel. Kierkegaard interpreted the irony of Socrates as a critical method clearing the way for the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle; like Hegel he attacked German Romantic irony, whose morally dissolute effects he had recently felt in his own soul and body. Thus *The Concept of Irony* is the expression of ideals that were to inspire Part Two of the coming major work, *EitherOr*\*<sup>1</sup> (1843).

**<sup>1</sup> \* This and other titles of SK's works are rendered according to Hong & Hong's translations.**

### **The Drama of the Betrothal**

Autumn 1840 to autumn 1841 was an enigmatic year. Even while Kierkegaard was preparing a normal way of life, "realizing the universal", as he called it, he was positioning himself to blow the hope apart and thus open up conflicts that were to turn him into a creative artist and thinker. When he betrothed himself, in love, he knew that a marriage was impossible, this connection between the natural wellbred daughter of a burgess and his painfilled gloom. Probably another factor was an infirmity about which no one was intended to find any information, although it "explains everything" (Pap. IV A 85). There are arguments for believing that Kierkegaard, like Dostoyevsky, may have suffered from temporal epilepsy. Under the Danish legal code, provisions 3, 16, 14, the "falling sickness", like leprosy, was reckoned a "contaminating and repulsive disease". During the betrothal, which did have its times of sweetness, Kierkegaard tried to make Regine break it off. In vain. On 11 August 1841 he returned her ring. She implored him to abandon the breach; he agreed, but on 11 October he finally broke off the engagement. His behaviour incensed the family of state councillor Olsen and attracted attention in wider circles. On 25 October Kierkegaard travelled to Berlin, where he attended lectures by the philosopher Schelling, who disappointed him. The ferment of inspiration dispelled the anguish he had felt at his behaviour. He had already begun to write at home in Denmark, and he continued in Berlin. By the time he returned to Copenhagen on 6 March 1842, he had written *Part Two of EitherOr*, the very part that had been anticipated in his dissertation *On the Concept of Irony*.

### **EitherOr**

*EitherOr* appeared on 20 February 1843, published by the pseudonym Victor Eremita, i.e. the victorious hermit or the lonely victor. He has chanced upon some papers, written in two hands, and he divides them into the two parts of the novel as A's and B's papers. The book's title faces the reader with two options for living. Here Kierkegaard is already the philosopher of choice. It turns out that A, who writes on quality quarto paper, is of a refined exclusive nature, but is fragmented among disjointed manifestations of life, a ship without sail or rudder. B uses foolscap, like a civil servant; he is a judge, and presents himself as a man whose life is orderly and whose opinions are ethically grounded in an untroubled faith in God, marriage, and the society he serves. Kierkegaard has created for himself two types of human being; he calls them aesthetic man and ethical man, and he sets them to reveal themselves in various situations and by developing ideas, and also by making them good friends.

A's papers are chaotically incoherent, for it is impossible to set forth a coherent aesthetical (i.e. godless and amoral) view of life. A's life proceeds in moments without coherence, because his soul possesses no firmness or fixed point: "My soul is like the Dead Sea," he writes, "above which no bird can fly; when it has reached midway, it sinks down in death and destruction." Although in his contempt for the philistines of everyday life he seeks entertainment in arbitrary "crop rotation", his life remains monotonously sterile. He employs his great mental powers in making an acute analysis of literary figures, and of women who were let down by their men, like Gretchen in Goethe's *Faust* or Elvira in Mozart's *Don Juan*. But is it certain that it was man's treachery that turned them into tragic victims? A has an intuitive understanding of the opera *Don Juan*. He sees *Don Juan* as the incarnation of the primitive power of music, the irresistible seduction of animal appetite. The last element in Part One is *The Diary of the Seducer*. The author of this is not identical with A, who claims to have copied the diary from a friend's manuscript. Victor Eremita is not convinced. We have to take note that *Don Juan*, as the embodiment of music, comes, sees, and seduces, whereas Johannes adopts a seductive strategy; it is this premeditated seduction that is his delight; possession is but a fleeting element.

B's papers are letters to A. The judge tries to persuade A to take stock of his life, despair over it, and to choose an ethical approach to life. B diagnoses A's unhealthy isolation, his gloom, as the sickness of the century, under which Germany and France are labouring. To this diagnosis belongs Judge William's dazzling depiction of the Emperor Nero; he was an aestheticist on the world throne; deep in this tyrant's soul lay melancholy. Nero was a child who never grew up; his inner man, the spirit, never broke through; it gathered within him as anger, dread, anxiety [angst]. Although Emperor of Rome, he fears a bold look from a human being and has this person destroyed. "Nero has no murder on his conscience, but his spirit has a fresh anxiety." Anxietyfilled himself, he seeks to make others anxious. A riddle to himself, he wants to be a riddle to others and to delight in their anxiety. In the judge's great portrait of Nero, Kierkegaard has captured many traits which also apply to dictators of recent times.

At the close of his preface to *EitherOr*, Victor Eremita envisages that A's and B's papers derive from one person, who in his life had passed through or at least considered both movements. The editor maintained his supposition when, on the titlepage, he gave *EitherOr* the subtitle "A Fragment of Life".

### **Stages on Life's Way**

To this fragment were added others, in *Stages on Life's Way*, which appeared on 30 April 1845. The fictional editor, Hilarius Bogbinder, prints as "*Studies by Various Persons*" three manuscripts, that had been left with him by a now dead literatus. The three parts are clearly separated in form. The first is modelled upon Plato's *Symposium*, the second is a moral treatise, the third a journal. The banquet described in *In Vino Veritas* is

attended by five aestheticians who have committed themselves, according to the title of the dialogue, to seek truth in wine: not until they feel its effects may they make their speeches about erotic love. Thus this drinkingparty has the same topic as Plato's dialogue. The first speaker, The Young inexperienced Man, finds people in love to be ridiculous. Constantin Constantius maintains that woman is a jest. He recounts that a man in the street met his "late departed" sweetheart, for when their relationship broke up, she had declared, "I am dying", and yet she had found another man. Victor Eremita, the editor of *EitherOr*, wishes to pay homage to woman, who arouses ideality in man, if he does *not* get her. Many a man has become a genius or hero or poet through the girl he did not get, for with the one he got he became only a state councillor or a general or a father. Then the fashion designer speaks, who cherishes a tyrannical *hatred* of those women whose servant he is: "My soul rages when I think of my job; she shall yet find herself wearing a ring in her nose." But then Seducer Johannes takes his fellow drinkers to task. For he is the one who enjoys woman. He relates the Greek myth of man, who was originally of one sex, the male. So gloriously endowed that the gods grew afraid of being deposed. Then they created woman, the marvellous, who entraps the male so that he forgets himself in the prolixities of finitude. All males do this, except the eroticist, for he sees the bait, enjoys it, and does not bite the hook. Woman knows this, therefore there is a secret understanding between her and the true seducer.

Judge William is the author of *Some Reflections on Marriage in Answer to Objections*. "Being in love is the God's gift, but in the decision of marriage the lovers make themselves worthy to receive." The ethicist is woman's knight. The aesthetician believes that woman's beauty has only one age, first youth. The ethicist knows better, "As a bride, woman is lovelier than as a young girl; as a mother lovelier than as a bride; as wife and mother she is a good word in season, and she grows lovelier with the years."

The judge is normality. But he has an inkling that there are attitudes to life which he is not capable of encompassing. Therefore in *EitherOr* he rounded off his despatches to A with a sermon that had been preached by a village clergyman about the edification to be found in the thought that, over against God, we are always in the wrong. In *Stages on Life's Way*, too, he encounters his limit. He can envisage a human being whom circumstances of life force not to be married; an exception can be imagined who has broken the sacred bond, but perhaps never discovers whether this breach was an order from God, whether he is guilty or not guilty: "all this surpasses my understanding." Without knowing it, the judge thus prepares for the final part of *Stages on Life's Way*, which is called "*Guilty?*" - "*Not Guilty?*" *A Story of Suffering*.

In a postscript the author makes himself known as Frater Taciturnus, the silent friar, explaining that the story is a "psychological experiment". "I have placed two heterogeneous individualities together, one male and one female." The man is defined as passionately preoccupied with his spiritual, i.e. eternal, nature and destiny, and the woman is "kept altogether ordinary", i.e. natural, lovable, without religious presuppositions, a trifle naive. He is given the name of Quidam, a certain man, she Quaedam, a certain woman. For these two unlike persons the experimenter establishes a point of unity: they love each other. What happened then is told in Quidam's journal, which is composed in a particular way. The journal spreads over half a year. A year ago, he writes on the morning of 3 January, he resolved to propose to Quaedam and was accepted by her. In a series of subsequent morning entries he recalls the course of the betrothal, his vain efforts to influence her towards the religious earnestness that invests him. The gulf between them only grows wider; they have nothing to share. He provokes a breach, but he responds to her imploring prayer and resumes the engagement. Under the guise of scurrilous behaviour, he tries to make her break it off herself, but in vain, and on 7 July he notes, coldly and decisively, that it is over. These notes are "Recollection's Work in the Morning Hours." With them there is born within him a wild hope that, in spite of all, they can be united, and this is the subject matter of "The Rescue Attempt at Midnight". At midnight on 7 July he concludes, "The time of

hibernation is beginning; on 3 January the unrest will begin again." Will he ever get free, will he get an answer to his question? Quidam is of a religious turn of mind, but he lacks the conviction of sin that will lead him to repentance and make him a Christian in the true sense. It is Quidam's deepest problem whether God, "Governance", has brought him into this painful situation so that, through it, he will experience repentance and become, in a Christian sense, free. *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life's Way* together form a major work of art of many elements, like Goethe's *Faust* or *Wilhelm Meister*. Within all the parts of it there is a display of linguistic virtuosity without parallel in literature and a demonstration of psychological perception that corresponds to the philosophical definitions of terms which Kierkegaard was concurrently developing in five, also pseudonymous, works.

## Basic Concepts

But the poet in Kierkegaard remains present when in these works he endows his concepts with a fullness and pregnancy that for ever ensures their place in the history of thought. This means that we can envisage and remember *Repetition* when we think of Job; *Fear and Trembling* is Abraham and Isaac; *The Concept of Anxiety* is Adam and Eve; *Philosophical Fragments* is Socrates and Jesus. In the huge *Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments* all four of these are bound in with the major poetic works. *Repetition* appeared on 16 October 1843 under the pseudonym of the aestheticist Constantin Constantius, who is fascinated by the idea of repetition, which in his short book appears in three senses. Once in Berlin Constantin experienced a brilliant performance of a farce. He returns there to repeat the experience, but in vain; an *aesthetic* repetition is not possible. He knows that the concept has *ethical* validity: to those who dare to encounter everyday life, repetition is like a beloved wife or daily bread, "actuality and the earnestness of existence". But now comes the story. Constantin is acquainted with a young man, gifted and melancholy. When he is with his beloved, his thoughts are elsewhere and he poetizes the experience. To give him and her a fresh and realistic beginning to their love affair, Constantin advises his young friend to leave her with the impression that he has been unfaithful to her; she will then break off the relationship and reconciliation will heal him of his poet's malady. But the young man flees from the experiment, goes to Stockholm, and from there writes to Constantin that Job, who lost everything but then took everything again [a play on the Danish word for repetition, "gentagelse", which suggests "retaking"], has given him the hope that he too will be able to experience a retaking [repetition] and, by God's intervention, will take or receive his beloved again. But then he learns that the girl has got married. The impossible lover is freed from responsibility: "It is over, my skiff is afloat", he is free, he has obtained himself as a poet.

As a poet, the young man forms an exception, who is a transition to the aristocratic "religious exceptions" who "with religious fear and trembling", but also with unshakeable faith in God's promise, do as Abraham did when he prepared himself to sacrifice his only son, the pledge of a rich posterity, in full assurance that he would receive him again. This is the theme of *Fear and Trembling*, which appeared on the same day as *Repetition*. In this work it is maintained that Abraham, who is willing to sacrifice his own son, must appear to those around him to be a murderer, and by this cruelty that is incomprehensible to others he is bound to a horrific silence. Believing in the absurd, Abraham has performed the "double movement of infinity", but is at the same time sentenced to the martyrdom of silence. The pseudonymous author of the work, *Johannes de Silentio*, i.e. of Silence, does indeed bear the knowledge of an act of sacrifice which he has carried out and whose vindicating motives he is unable to reveal - as is the case with Kierkegaard's breach with Regine.

In June 1844 appeared *The Concept of Anxiety*, by Vigilius Haufnensis, the alert Copenhagener. It is Kierkegaard's fundamental discovery that anxiety is a primal element in man, the very sign of being human. At man's creation, God-given anxiety became a precondition for the Fall, and it is repeated in every human life. Before Christianity, it

manifested itself in the Greeks as their belief in *fate*, and in the Jews in the concept of *guilt* over against the moral law. The spirit's emergence by virtue of anxiety is bound up with the awakening realization of being male or female. Anxiety is "an expression of the perfection of human nature." When a woman gives birth, anxiety culminates in her. We may therefore conclude that the woman who gives birth stands higher than the male. It is Kierkegaard's thesis that anxiety is a positive force in man, a doctrine that modern psychotherapists, whether religiously inclined or not, have adopted as a scientific advance.

With *Philosophical Fragments* by Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard intervened in the fierce contemporary battle about the authenticity of the text of Scripture. He makes a detour by way of Socrates, who like his pupil Plato thought that, by virtue of metempsychosis, each human being bears memories from his earliest existence in the divine world of ideas. To the Greeks, truth was in man; to know oneself is to find God. Let us now suppose, says Climacus, that Socrates is wrong. Man, created by God, was given the faculty for understanding truth (otherwise he would be only a beast), but he has lost this faculty through the freedom man has also been given, that is to say through his own guilt, i.e. *sin*. To obtain the truth, a communicator must bring the faculty for understanding it. The communicator must then mediate the connection between God and man, through the deity's assumption of the form of a human being. Then there exists a historical event that cannot be known by science but only by faith. In relation to the absurd, the contemporaries of Jesus have no advantages over those who experience *revelation* only as a historical record.

These thoughts are carried further, still by Johannes Climacus, in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, which appeared on 26 February 1846. The Greek word "klimax" means a ladder; Climacus is the ascender who aspires upward to gain a relationship to Christianity. He must then discover that nobody can do this in fellowship with others, only through his own existential effort. The German philosopher Lessing wrote that even though someone admitted historically that Christ rose from the dead, he has not thereby confessed that this very Christ was the Son of God. Only by a *leap* can the believer move from the first avowal to the second. Faith is a singlehanded operation. The great Hegel saw world development as an outworking of the world spirit, a course of events in which each individual had his necessary place. But that gives no answer to the question of truth. That is attained only - and Climacus admits that he does not get as far as this - when the individual, passionately believing in the paradox of God in time, the GodMan, and exploded as a thinking personality, ventures upon "the martyrdom of believing against the understanding, the peril of lying on those 70,000 fathoms of water and not until there finding God."

### **Upbuilding Discourses**

Running parallel to the pseudonymous works, Kierkegaard was publishing under his own name a series of six collections of edifying or upbuilding discourses in 1843-44, which he brought together in *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, 1845. There were also *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* (Confession, Marriage, Burial) in 1845. These discourses are mildly persuasive. If we come from the tensionfilled situations in the pseudonymous writings - Adam's Fall, the trials of Abraham and Job, also Quidam's painful initiation - it is hard to connect them with the supple delivery of these discourses which seek to persuade. It is as if Kierkegaard is assuming a role as he employs the range of his language to create moods of Christian solace, hope, wellbeing. It is as if "S. Kierkegaard" is yet another pseudonym. Perhaps a role of his choice.

We know of six occasions in 1841-51 when, after thorough preparation, he preached in Copenhagen churches. A number of interpreters of Kierkegaard regard his religious discourses as the kernel of his authorship.

Kierkegaard knew that, after the immense discharges of 1843/46, he had come to a point of rest. He called the Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments "concluding". He realized that the fertile controversial material provided by his betrothal had been used up. He was thinking of applying for a church living in the country. Nevertheless, in a deeper layer of his mind, he had been preparing a conflict that was to call forth a fresh avalanche of productivity. For without writing he cannot live: "Only when I am producing do I feel well. Then I forget all life's unpleasantnesses, all sufferings, then I am with my thought and am happy." So runs his journal in 1847, when the wealth of thoughts are flowing as before. What had happened, when Kierkegaard, after the manner of geniuses, again took his destiny in his own hand?

## The Corsair

Meir Aron Goldschmidt (1819-1877), a twenty-year-old student later to be an outstanding prose-writer, had in 1840 started up a weekly called *The Corsair*, in which, with fearless wit, he teased the absolute monarchy, the nobility, the civil servants, and the whole bourgeoisie. The periodical was admired and feared. At one point it had 3000 buyers. All contributions were anonymous. The editorial board was a secret, though no secret to some people. Goldschmidt admired Kierkegaard and called Victor Eremita immortal. But on 22 December 1845 the literatus P.L.Møller published *Gæa, Aesthetic Yearbook 1846*, in which he flippantly discoursed upon Stages upon Life's Way. The pseudonym of this book, Frater Taciturnus, sharply criticized the article in the daily *Fædrelandet* on 27 December, and went on: "If only I might soon be mentioned in *The Corsair*. It is really hard for a poor author to be thus marked out in Danish literature in that he (assuming that we pseudonyms are One) is the only person who is not lambasted there." His wish was fulfilled. From January to July 1846 *The Corsair* published articles and caricatures that spitefully ridiculed the philosopher. The journals show that Kierkegaard groaned inwardly as if under a whip; but the pain made him productive. On 24 January 1847 he praised God that "all the attacks of vulgarity" descended upon him; he had learnt that he was not to live in a vicarage and do penance: "Now I am on the spot in quite a different way." The years 1847 and 1848 were to be incredibly fertile ones. In 1847 came *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, including *Christian Discourses*, which proclaim that suffering is a privilege through which we are shaped for eternity. In 1847 came *Works of Love*, which drives home our absolute duty to love God and, with God as intermediary, to love our neighbour. This is Kierkegaard's Christian ethic. He achieves a high point of edifying rhetoric with *Christian Discourses 1848*. Instead of the ingratiating persuasiveness of the first discourses, there comes the surprise, the paradox, for instance the evidence that "All things work together for good - when we love God."

During 1848 Kierkegaard composed two works (though they did not appear until 1849 and 1850) under the pseudonym AntiClimacus. *The Sickness until Death and Practice in Christianity*. Whereas Climacus did not venture to claim for himself the faith that surpasses reason, AntiClimacus considers himself to be a Christian on an exceedingly high level. Kierkegaard set himself higher than Johannes Climacus, lower than AntiClimacus.

In 1848 Kierkegaard had also taken stock of his life and work hitherto. *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* was not published until 1859, after its author's death. But in 1851 he did himself publish an inadequate summary, an article called *On My Work as an Author*. The main work stresses that the author has constantly worked both aesthetically, as a poet, and religiously, as an edifying writer. Therefore, in 1848, he published an article on Johanne Luise Heiberg as an artist, *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*. This brilliant study of the art of acting seeks to show that the born actor has in himself "an elasticity" which makes him anxious and uneasy before he stands on the stage, but which finds its balance when the pressure from within has found its counter-pressure from the audience.



The main idea in Point of View is that in various ways Kierkegaard has wished to educate his contemporaries into Christianity, and that God, through "Governance", has educated him, so that the things to be used in his continued activity, in the way of experiences and incentives, have always been at hand at the right moment.

Thus everything was in the light of religion. Under the watchful eye of AntiClimacus. *The Sickness unto Death* (1849) depicts sin as a sickness in a person's self. But this sickness is not unto death if the patient recognizes his condition and discovers the way to healing, i.e. to the overcoming of the offence of the object of faith. The opposite of sin is not virtue but faith, faith in the GodMan, God in the form of a lowly human being. Hereby AntiClimacus points to his *Practice in Christianity*, which was published in September 1850. This was shaped with a missionizing shock technique. The first section is called *The Invitation*: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). All are invited: the sick, the sorrowful, the sinful - but then follows *The Halt*. Harshly and soberly it is announced that the inviter is a poor and contemptible man who lived 1800 years ago in the company of beggars and lepers, and that the invitation is a call to make oneself contemporary with this wandering phantasist without being offended, indeed to believe that he is God. But nowadays clergy and congregations officially and privately compromise with these conditions: "Christendom has abolished Christianity, without properly knowing it," therefore "one must attempt again to introduce Christianity into Christendom."

### **The Struggle against the Church**

**While** Kierkegaard was awaiting his answer to this hard challenge, he was writing new religious discourses of an ever more assertive character. He wanted to shape a popular preaching style and uses a lyrical suggestive intonation for *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air*, in Three Godly Discourses (1849) or he composes new powerful parables in *For SelfExamination. Commended to the Present Age* (1851). The tone is coarsened to roughness in *Judge for Yourselves*, written in 1851, printed 1876.

The admission from the clergy and church folk did not come: that the Danish national church did not practise New Testament Christianity. Kierkegaard knew deep down that if this admission was not forthcoming, his own further development would be marked by his resorting to direct attacks on the church, which he found personified in J.P.Mynster, the Bishop of Zealand. On 30 January 1854 Mynster died, and the explosion occurred. On the following Sunday, the professor of theology H.L.Martensen delivered a memorial sermon for Mynster and had it published immediately. In it he called the late bishop one of the truthwitnesses of the Christian church. But in previous writings the term truth-witness had become Kierkegaard's expression for the true Christian, the *martyr*. When he saw it applied to the opposite of a blood witness, to the urbane, humanistically cultivated Bishop Mynster, it was like receiving orders for battle. He at once wrote down a protest article, but put it aside until Martensen, as expected, had succeeded Mynster as the primate of the Danish church. When it appeared in *Fædrelandet* on 18 December 1854, this article provoked replies from Martensen and others. Twentyone articles by Kierkegaard appeared in *Fædrelandet*, and he wrote one small booklet before he started his own periodical *The Moment*, nine issues of which appeared from 24 May to 24 September 1855; issue 10 was ready edited when Kierkegaard fell mortally ill. For the third time Kierkegaard had determined his destiny, so he felt the bliss of productivity, for he had to "clarify people's concepts ... prod them alive through the wasp stings of irony, mockery, sarcasm." *The Moment* is a Christian Corsair which uses mocking headlines, paradoxical aphorisms; the poet flourishes amid cutting ironic satires. The goal of all this is found in an article in *Fædrelandet*: "What do I wish? Quite simply: I want honesty." And the result in issue 5 of *The Moment*: "Christianity has not truly entered the world; it got no further than its exemplar and, at most, the apostles."

## Death and Reputation

Between issues 7 and 8 on 3 September 1855 Kierkegaard published a discourse, *God's Unchangeableness*, on James 1:17. The discourse describes a traveller in the desert finding a spring, unchangeable in its delightful coolness. He will say: "God be praised!" And "he found only a spring; how must the person speak who found God! and yet he too must say 'God be praised!' I found God!"

According to the latest analysis of his hospital records by Dr Ib Søgaard, Kierkegaard suffered from progressive spinal paralysis (acute ascending polyradiculitis). He fell down at home and in the street. On 2 October 1855 he was taken into Frederiks Hospital (now the Museum of Decorative Art). By his sickbed sat his boyhood friend, the clergyman Emil Boesen. But he would not receive Holy Communion from a clergyman, nor would he permit clerical involvement at his funeral. When his funeral was held at Frue Church and his brother, P.C. Kierkegaard did speak in spite of this wish, with Dean E.C. Tryde performing the graveside ceremony, the young physician Henrik Lund intervened and protested on behalf of his maternal uncle.

Many have testified to the lustre that shone out from Søren Kierkegaard's eyes. One of the last people to see him was a 14-year-old nephew, who was allowed to visit him in hospital. He later became the well-known historian Troels Lund, who in his memoirs (*Et Liv*, 1924, p238) recounts that, in farewell, Kierkegaard took the boy's hand in both his "and said only, 'Thank you for coming to me, Troels! and fare well!' But these natural words were accompanied by a look of which I have never seen the like. It shone with a sublime, transfigured, blessed radiance, so that it seemed to me to make the whole ward bright. Everything was gathered into the flood of light of these eyes: Fervent love, blessedly dissolved melancholy, penetrating clarity, and a pawky smile."

In the years after his death, Kierkegaard's message sounded out strongly in Denmark and Norway, where Henrik Ibsen seized it and, with his demands for honesty and personal commitment, the appeal to follow words with deeds, made it known in Europe. By 1861 German translations began to appear and, in wave after wave, the need for information about Kierkegaard spread to France and the USA, so that Kierkegaard long ago made a circuit of the earth. So strong has the interest been, that it may seem that Kierkegaard is better known outside his native land than within it. However, it should be remembered that Danes, unwittingly, have a special inheritance from Kierkegaard.

Our great critic Georg Brandes (1842-1927) recounted that on New Year's Night 1871 he visited the poet Holger Drachmann. When he entered the room, a young man in the circle present began to speak. He spoke emotionally, saying that on that night when the historical year 1871 was ebbing away, he wanted to recall the man to whom we owed everything, who had taught us to love the despised and lowly, and who had given us ideals to which we would remain true: Søren Kierkegaard. This enthusiast was Viggo Hørup, the Danish politician who, through his many years of struggle against the threat of rightwing power, caused the parliamentary system to triumph in Denmark in 1901. Hørup was an atheist, but Kierkegaard's infinite care for the salvation of souls in the next world was transferred by Hørup to thisworldly political and economic conditions. In speeches and articles he consciously employed Kierkegaard's caustic irony from *The Moment*. Thanks to Viggo Hørup, in our democratic respect for the individual human being, we have a legacy from Kierkegaard as well as from his ecclesiastical opposite, N.F.S. Grundtvig.