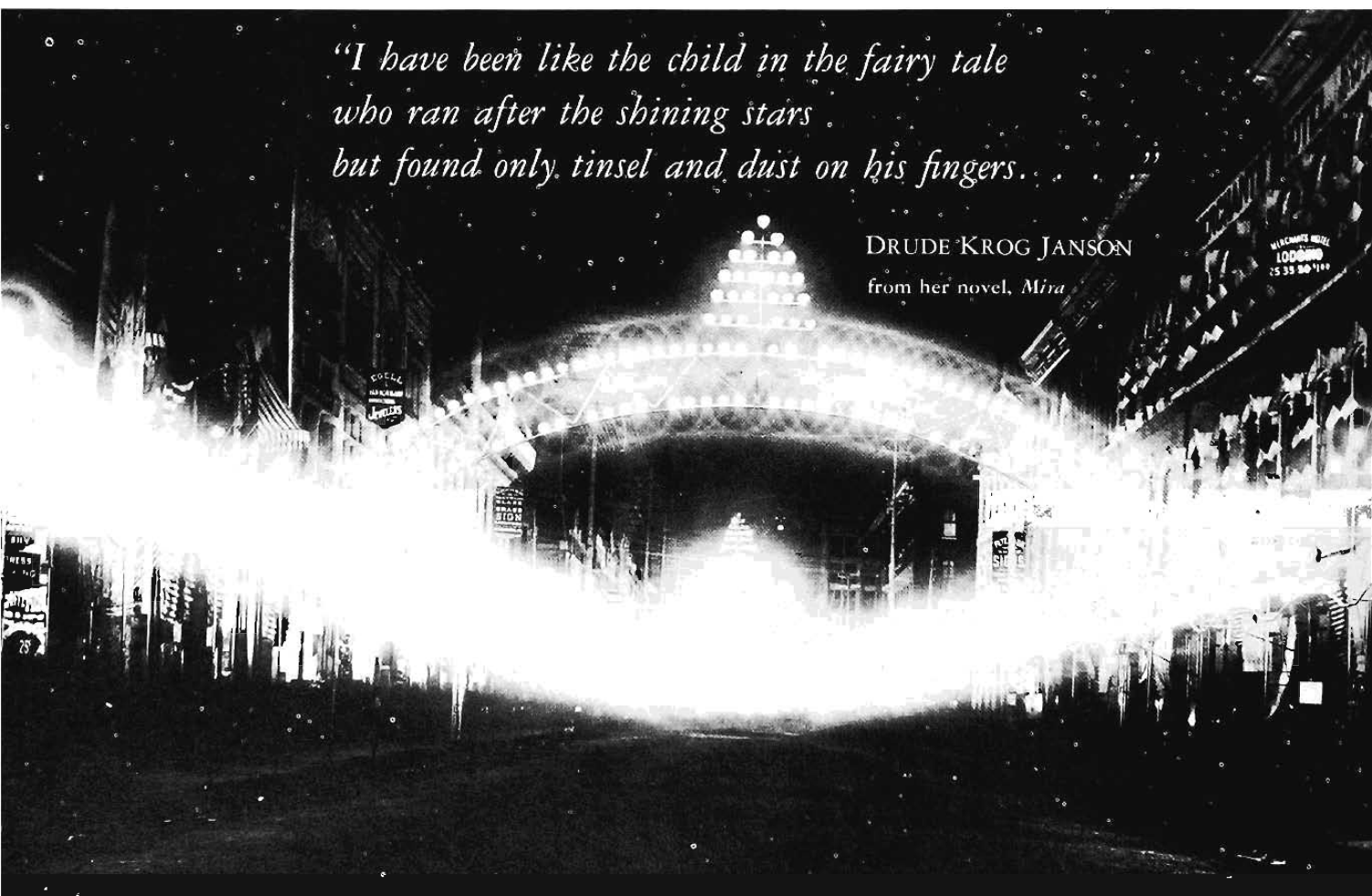


*"I have been like the child in the fairy tale
who ran after the shining stars
but found only tinsel and dust on his fingers..."*

DRUDE KROG JANSON
from her novel, *Mira*



Disenchantment in Two Minneapolis Novels from the 1880s

TINSEL AND DUST

Gerald Thorson

MINNEAPOLIS in the 1880s was an apt setting for a new romance — perhaps even worthy of celebration by a young Walt Whitman. Progress and prosperity were evident everywhere, with the skyline and landscape constantly changing as the city pushed out from its center of activity, the Gateway section near the Falls of St. Anthony. As the brick and mortar were transformed into engineering and architectural triumphs, such as the Metropolitan Building or the fabulous residences of Charles A. Pillsbury and Senator William D. Washburn that arose on Stevens Avenue, certainly the poet in the city would be sufficiently stirred to compose his paeans in honor of the new metropolis.

On Bridge Square stood the Pence Opera House, a monument to the city's cultural aspirations. A block up, on Washington Avenue, was the Nicollet House, a sym-

bol of wealth. Not far away, on Hennepin and Fifth, was the eight-story West Hotel that for decades continued to be a showpiece to which all new arrivals and visitors were taken — a building acclaimed by one early historian as "one of the most palatial and best appointed hotels in the United States — which is to say, in the world." During the decade a new public library was erected, plans were under way for a new city hall and courthouse, and the city's park system was extended. It was indeed a period of change and expansion: Between 1880 and 1890, the population of the leading flour-milling city in the United States quadrupled, reaching a total of almost 165,000.¹

New wealth poured into the city as the milling industry, among others, shared in this expansion. As merchants and professional men became increasingly wealthy, those standard symbols of prosperity became more numerous — as if to impress upon all that Minneapolis was a veritable oasis for financial opportunity and cultural activity.

By all odds, as the Horatio Alger heroes of real life multiplied, a work of fiction that reflected Minneapolis in this decade should have been a romance, a success story. And when that work was the product of an immigrant writer who had himself benefited from the city's development, and whose fellow immigrants were just then busily engaged in producing little treatises on the rise of immigrants from cotters' sons to men of wealth and position, the likelihood was even greater. But literature is not always concerned with the obvious, and ap-

¹Isaac Atwater, ed., *History of the City of Minneapolis*, 1:322 (quote) (New York, 1893); *United States Census*, 1890, *Population*, 1:370.

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GASLIGHTS ILLUMINATE Nicollet Avenue in the photograph at left, taken in the 1880s about the time the Jansons lived in Minneapolis.

pearances have a way of confusing, if not distorting, reality. It is for the artist to penetrate the surface, to discover the hidden pulse of experience.

Two such artists arrived in the city early in the decade and set about to chronicle life in Minneapolis in the 1880s. They were Norwegian immigrants, both of whom had novels published in Minneapolis in 1889. One writer, Kristofer Janson, had already achieved prominence as an author in Norway. The other, his wife, Drude Krog Janson, was attempting her first work of fiction.

Mrs. Janson's book, *A saloonkeeper's daughter*, is basically a romance; yet, modified as it is by the conventions of the novel, it becomes in part a novel of manners fused with elements of the confession or autobiography. Richard Chase has written that "more than likely the observation of manners and the painting of the social scene will be a by-product of the romance that really engages the author's mind."² This is the case here, where Mrs. Janson's depiction of manners seems almost incidental to the Cinderella story that has captivated her.

Kristofer Janson's *Behind the curtain*, a novel of social protest, contains elements of romance and is modified by what Northrop Frye has labeled the anatomy — that extroverted and intellectualized form of fiction stemming from the satire. Though there are aspects of romance in both novels, neither is an ode to the city: Minneapolis, its people and its activities, is rather a cause for lamentation. For when the curtains are pushed aside and the life of the city is faced squarely, enchantment frequently gives way to loneliness, despair, and grief. This the Jansons, too, discovered. If any one word can be used to describe the reaction of the two authors to Minneapolis, it would have to be "disenchantment."³

The Jansons' disillusionment was not the result of unfulfilled promise nor of the ungracious attitude of the old tradition in American life to which Howard Mumford Jones attributes the immigrant writers' complaints about the New World. When these novels appeared on the Norwegian bookstands in Minneapolis, Kristofer Janson was forty-eight years old. He, his wife, and their six children had lived in Minneapolis for seven years. They had achieved a place of prominence in the city not only in the Norwegian community but also in American circles. Janson was by no means the only Norwegian immigrant to enter into activities in the city. Several had assumed positions of prominence in city government and social and cultural organizations. As a poet, an intellectual, a liberal, and a non-Lutheran, however, Janson was more readily accepted by the native Americans than were most Norwegians. Acquainted as he was with some of the leading writers and personalities in the East as well as in Europe, he enjoyed an entry into American life frequently denied the foreigner. His name was often mentioned as a candidate for the new professorship of Scandinavian languages and literature established in 1884 at the University of Minnesota, and when Rasmus B. Anderson left his position as professor of Scandinavian at the University of Wisconsin in 1883, President John Bascom of Wisconsin offered the post to Janson, who refused it.⁴

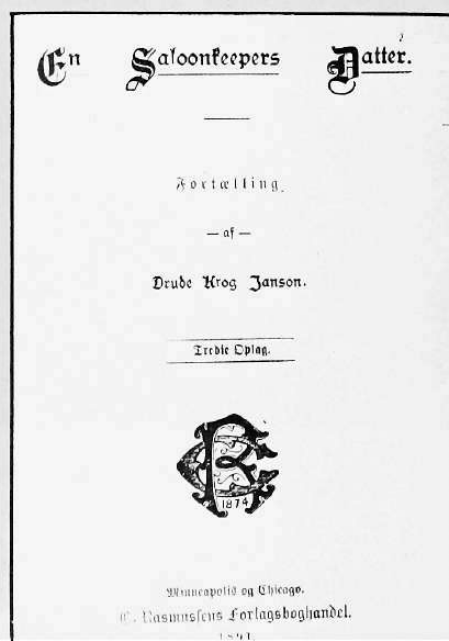
By 1889 Janson was well known among both the

²Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, 160 (Garden City, N.Y., 1957).

³Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, 308-312 (Princeton, N.J., 1957).

⁴Howard Mumford Jones, *Ideas in America*, 203 (Cambridge, Mass., 1944); Kristofer Janson, *Hvad jeg har oplevet*:

THE TITLE PAGE of the 1891 edition of Drude Janson's novel is shown here, along with a sketch of the novelist. The drawing, made from a photograph, is by Philip J. Thompson, chairman of the Art Department, Augsburg College, Minneapolis.



Scandinavians and the native Americans. The Minneapolis editor, Carl G. O. Hansen, has written: "It would be safe to say that no single individual created such a stir among the city's Norwegians as did Kristofer Janson. . . . He impressed all with his genial ways as well as with his physique. He was tall, lithe, and erect, and with his auburn hair and long flowing beard he looked like a prophet of old in his Sunday best."⁵

Janson was still very much a man of position, a recognized leader, in the city in 1889. He had his enemies, to be sure, and they were frequently downright vociferous in their opposition to him. "Are you the antichrist who is to come, or shall we wait for another?" one person is reported to have asked Janson. "It is safest to wait for another," was his reply. Janson tells of one letter he

received: "Ignorant people think and say that you are a good speaker, and in your ignorance you apparently think so too. I have read some of your speeches and some poems, but it seems to me that a ninety-year-old lady could do it much better than you. It would have been better for you and for others if you had traveled to Siberia than that you remain here in America. Once I saw your portrait, but ugh! You were ugly, ugly. It was as if a devilish disgusting gloom weighed on you. Kristofer, travel around no more to poison people with your filthy talk. Throw the nasty *Saamanden* [Janson's magazine] in the fire. Dear Kristofer, do what I tell you."⁶

But Janson had his enthusiastic followers, too. One of the characters in *Immigrant Scenes*, a novel by Johannes B. Wist, says of Janson: "He is terribly well versed both in history and literature. And the best of all is that he is so extremely entertaining. You should just hear him tear apart the old gods. It is a real picnic. I would rather go to hear him than go to the Theater Comique."⁷

The source of Janson's disenchantment with Minneapolis lay in his basic temperament. He was an idealist with a positive set of beliefs, including a strong faith in man, a reliance upon spiritual forces, and an earnest desire to help others. His ideals, perhaps best expressed in the magazine he edited in Minneapolis, *Saamanden* (*The Sower*), were those of a man whose mission in life was to create happiness and peace:

"What shall we sow, what shall we sow?
All that can teach us higher to go:
A kindly word and a merry tune.
A heart that longs for a cheerful boon."⁸

His philosophy of life was basically a cheerful one, and this optimism permeates his life work and his writings. Like the character modeled after him, Bjørnstjerne

livscrindringer (*What I have experienced: reminiscences*), 228 (Oslo and Copenhagen, 1913). Anderson resigned his post at the University of Wisconsin. The following year he was appointed United States minister to Denmark.

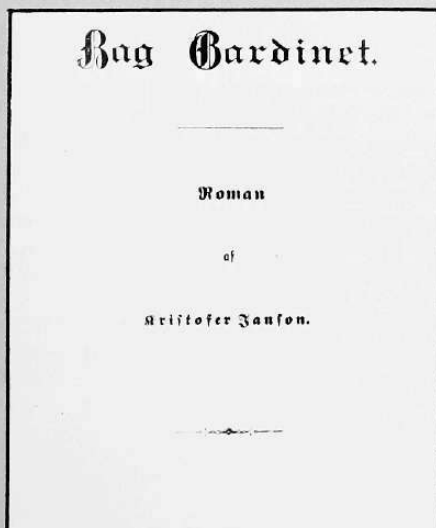
⁵Carl G. O. Hansen, *My Minneapolis*, 99 (Minneapolis, 1956). Other sources of biographical information on the Jansons include Dumas Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography*, 9:612 (New York, 1932); Kristofer Janson, *Hvad jeg har oplevet*, 205-239; Edvard Bull, Anders Krogvig, and Gerhard Gran, eds., *Norsk biografisk leksikon*, 6:593-598 (Oslo, 1934); Amandus Norman, *Kristofer Janson: As Man, Poet, and Religious Reformer*, 1-20 (n.p., 1931.) Since this article was written, Nina Draxten's biography, *Kristofer Janson in America* (Boston, 1976) has been published (see p. 251 of this issue for a review).

⁶Janson, *Hvad jeg har oplevet*, 250-251. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this article are the author's.

⁷Arnljot [Johannes B. Wist], *Nykommerbilleder: Jonas Olsens første Aar i Amerika* (*Immigrant scenes: Jonas Olsen's first year in America*), 70 (Decorah, Iowa, 1920).

⁸Kristofer Janson, "Saamanden," in *Saamanden*, 1:1 (September, 1887). This is only the first stanza of the poem.

TWO PORTRAITS of Kristofer Janson are shown at right: the photograph from the frontispiece of his book, *What I have experienced*, the other a sketch by Philip J. Thompson from a photograph taken later in Janson's life. Also shown is the title page from the 1889 edition of his Minneapolis novel.



Bjørnson's Pastor Sang, Janson was somewhat naïve and unrealistic in his insistence upon an ideal — trying always to reach the impossible, never quite satisfied with his achievements. He was the reformer, always looking for new fields to conquer."

AS A REFORMER Janson had found much to occupy him back in Norway. After completing his studies in theology at the University of Oslo, Janson, who had become interested in the folk high school movement in Denmark, became an active promoter of the movement in Norway. He taught school in Gausdal, in Gudbrandsdalen, during the 1870s, where he became a good friend of the popular writer, Bjørnson. Together they championed the nationalist movement in Norway and the cause of the liberal. During these years Janson also pursued his literary interests, publishing fiction, drama, and poetry which achieved for him recognition that led in 1876 to a stipend from the government — an honor he shared with Henrik Ibsen, Jonas Lie, and Bjørnson.¹⁰

These were the years of the great successes of Bjørnson, Ibsen, and Alexander Kielland, forerunners in the new literary movement of social protest. Janson had not yet written any problem novels, and the *landsmaal* (a new literary language founded in mid-nineteenth century from Norwegian dialects and popularized by some Norwegian authors) in which he was writing was beginning to appear outdated alongside the Dano-Norwegian of the other writers. It is significant, therefore, that when Janson began his writing in Minneapolis he switched to Dano-Norwegian and turned his attention to social criticism. This, then, is another reason for the tone of Janson's Minneapolis novel: Even though by 1889 the literature of social protest had already reached its crest in Norway, it was in this movement that Janson was working.

The disenchantment in Drude Janson's novel, on the other hand, was primarily the result of her own personal life in Minneapolis. Although she shared many of her husband's enthusiasms, their views were not always in agreement and, as the years went by, the two grew further and further apart. Moreover, Drude seems to have been constantly dissatisfied with her life in Minneapolis — in part because of what she failed to find there, but more because of her basic homesickness, her longing to return to Norway and her native culture. "Here was no beauty, no enthusiasm for life," she later wrote in *Mira*, a fictional autobiography, "only the stark, raw reality, where men fought a violent struggle for existence. Often the most sensitive ones were defeated in the struggle." Everywhere she looked, she wrote, she found only immigrants — and they were saloonkeepers, laborers, journalists (an interesting juxtaposition) — lonely people, and "among these she was supposed to live!" She wrote: "Lonely she went among all these people like a

strange foreign bird." Then, becoming interested in social reform, and to compensate for her loneliness, she decided to speak and to write "about all the sadness she saw around her — how life was, and how it should be." She went on: "I have been like the child in the fairy tale who ran after the shining stars but found only tinsel and dust on his fingers. If only I could wash it off — the dust — that has covered the soul." Yet Drude Janson was no recluse. The Janson home was a center of activity, and the very nature of her husband's work in Minneapolis made its demands also upon her.¹¹

KRISTOFER JANSON decided to emigrate to the United States in 1881. He had made a successful lecture tour of the Scandinavian settlements in the Midwest in the winter of 1879–80, and this gave him some knowledge of life in Minneapolis. Furthermore, when Bjørnson made his well-publicized tour of the Midwest the following year (1880–81) he apparently heard frequent reports of Janson's lectures. Bjørnson wrote his wife from Willmar: "Tell Janson that everywhere respectable people speak well of him." Policeman Nygaard in St. Paul said that the days Janson was with him were the best days he had spent in America. Everywhere people ask me to greet him." When Bjørnson returned to Norway in the spring of 1881, he undoubtedly encouraged his good friend and neighbor, Janson, to return to America. The result was that the next October Janson arrived in New York. After spending about a month in the East, he went to the Midwest to lecture, arriving in Minneapolis in early December as a Unitarian pastor, supported in part by the Unitarian church as a missionary to the Scandinavians in the city.¹²

When Janson scheduled a meeting in Harrison Hall to explain his program of activity in Minneapolis, 1,500 Scandinavians were reported to have attended. Finding the success of this first meeting quite overwhelming, he looked forward to the future with optimism. To Rasmus B. Anderson in Madison, Wisconsin, he wrote: "I have just delivered my program — a splendid meeting. . . . When I protested the tyranny of the clergy and abolished the eternal hell, there was a perfect joy and applause. Friday evening I had my lecture

¹⁰ Harald Bever (Einar Haugen, translator), *A History of Norwegian Literature*, 224 (New York, 1956).

¹¹ *Head jeg har oplevet*, 89–130, 152–178; Malone, *Dictionary of American Biography*, 9:612; *Norsk biografisk leksikon*, 6:593–598; Hansen, *My Minneapolis*, 99–101.

¹² Judith Keller [Drude Krog Janson], *Mira: et livsløb* (*Mira: a life*) 25, 26, 27, 36, 39, 95 (quotes) (Copenhagen, 1897); Andreas Ueland, *Recollections of an Immigrant*, 63 (New York, 1929).

¹³ Bjørnson to Caroline Bjørnson, January 20, 1881, in Halvdan Koht, ed., *Brev: kamp-liv* (*Letters: Years of Struggle*), 1:239 (Oslo, 1932).

about the Synod — 244 paid tickets. They applauded and seemed to enjoy my threshing the Synod very much." Although the response to Janson's proposal to organize a Unitarian congregation in Minneapolis was not great, large numbers of people continued to come to hear him speak. In February he wrote to Anderson: "My fixed number of members here in Minneapolis is now 34, but my audience on Sundays is usually 300-400 and on Monday evenings about 6-700."¹³

That year, 1882, Janson went back to Norway, and in September he returned with his family. Eventually he built Nazareth Church in south Minneapolis and established congregations in St. Paul, Hanska, and Underwood, Minnesota, and in Hudson, Wisconsin. Down in Brown County, he built a summer home beside the Nora Free Christian Church, the only one of the five still in existence. In that home he did much of his writing.¹⁴

The Janson home and church in Minneapolis became a cultural center for the educated immigrants. On Sunday evenings Janson gave dramatic readings. After the arrival of a new drama or novel by such writers as Ibsen, Bjørnson, Kielland, or Lie, Janson would give a public reading of it, bringing the Scandinavians in Minneapolis in touch with the literary works of Norway almost before they were known anywhere else. Janson himself wrote many small tableaux and dramas for presentation. The Janson home also became a gathering place for intellectuals in the city — both Norwegian and American. Interesting people were guests at the home, sometimes for long periods of time. The best known of these was Knut Hamsun, a Norwegian novelist who later became a Nobel prize winner in literature. He lived with the Jansons and assisted them in their work in the Unitarian church. Many lively discussions of politics, religion, women's rights, temperance, the growing industrialization, and other current issues must have taken place there. Minneapolis, which in the 1880s was beginning to attract the young intellectual and artistic immigrants

who had previously tended to gather in Chicago, was not lacking in educated Norwegians. Many of these at one time or another found their way to the Janson home.¹⁵

DRUDE JANSON shared in these activities. A gifted and intelligent woman, she was an active participant in current affairs. When the magazine *Nylænde* (*New ground*), which was devoted to women's suffrage, was founded in Norway in 1887, Drude became a frequent contributor from her home in Minneapolis. She wrote about the development of women's rights in America, translated articles from American magazines, and reviewed such books as Helen Campbell's *Prisoners of Poverty*, an exposé of working conditions in Chicago which Kristofer Janson used for source material for his final American novel, *Sara*. Against the background of agitation for women's rights and her own interest in the movement, Mrs. Janson related the narrative of her heroine.¹⁶

A saloonkeeper's daughter was first published in Copenhagen in 1887 under the title, *A young girl*. It went through at least seven editions. When the book was reissued in Minneapolis in 1889, it was given the more precise title. Kristofer Janson wrote an introduction for the first edition in which he stressed the realism of the book, especially the natural psychological development of the heroine and the photographic accuracy with which the setting was depicted. Although the book is best referred to as a romance, the strength of the narration lies in those qualities which her husband noted. *A saloonkeeper's daughter* shows Mrs. Janson's sensitivity to literary art and to the life it seeks to portray.¹⁷

The saloonkeeper's daughter is Astrid Holm, a young Oslo girl who becomes a Minneapolitan. When the novel opens, Astrid is in Oslo with her invalid mother and a father whose business is not prospering. Then the mother dies, and the day after the funeral August Holm announces to his family that he is going to America: "America is the right place for me. There a man with intelligence and experience can get ahead. It is also a democracy and a land of free institutions. I belong there where a man is free from all this aristocratic nonsense." In Minneapolis, Holm becomes a saloonkeeper in preference to a manual laborer as a stepping stone to a future career as a businessman. As soon as he can, he says, he will move up to Nicollet Avenue "and start a wholesale business." When Holm gets established in his saloon, he sends for Astrid, her two small brothers, and the family maid.¹⁸

Astrid dreams of the many opportunities awaiting her in the new country, but her first reaction as she comes into Minneapolis on the train in 1879 is one of disillusionment:

"Late one dusty afternoon they arrived in Min-

¹³Janson to Anderson, December 11, 1881, February 9, 1882, in Rasmus B. Anderson Papers, in State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison. These letters were written in English, others quoted in this article are in Norwegian. See also *Hvad jeg har oplevet*, 204.

¹⁴*Hvad jeg har oplevet*, 205-206. A brief account of Janson's work at the church can be found in *Seventy-Fifth Anniversary, 1881-1956: Nora Free Christian Church*, 3-7 (Hanska, 1956).

¹⁵*Hvad jeg har oplevet*, 215-217; Hansen, *My Minneapolis*, 103; Kristofer Janson, "Fra Amerika," in *Nyt tidsskrift* (*Modern Magazine*), 2:25 (1883).

¹⁶See Drude Janson's articles in *Nylænde*, 1:39-42, 81-87 (1887), 2:52-56, 209-212, 241-250, 273-282 (1888).

¹⁷*En ung pige* (*A young girl*) (Copenhagen, 1887); *En saloonkeepers datter* (Minneapolis, 1889). Page references in subsequent footnotes are from the 1891 (the third) edition.

¹⁸*En saloonkeepers datter*, 28, 48 (quotes).



BJØRNSTERNE BJØRNSON

neapolis. It was burning hot in the compartment. People sat sleepy and tired and staring at each other blankly. . . First they passed through the outskirts of Minneapolis. How ugly it was here — flat and dusty, with a few newly-built drafty little houses tossed out on the naked prairies. God forbid! Here people couldn't live. How people could stand to live like this she couldn't understand."¹⁹

Holm is at the depot to meet them. He takes them in a carriage down Washington Avenue to their new home. As Astrid gets out of the carriage and walks to the building, she sees a sign over the door saying "saloon" in large letters. That first evening in south Minneapolis Astrid sits alone for a long time by the window of the second-floor apartment, staring at the gaslighted street below. Young men keep coming and going, their voices drifting up to her at the open window. Then she hears much noise and confusion. Her father's voice is heard, and she sees him come out on the street. He has thrown a young man out of his place and is threatening to call the police. It is only then that Astrid realizes what a saloon is, that

her father runs a saloon, and that she is a saloonkeeper's daughter.

Astrid's attempts to escape her situation in life form the pattern of action of the novel, with each attempt ending in the realization that she is only a saloonkeeper's daughter — "neither more nor less, and could never be anything else." Chief obstacle for the young Cinderella is not the wicked stepmother but her father, whose desire to succeed in business takes precedence over everything else, including the affection of his daughter. In fact, his greatest concern is to enlist his daughter's help in building up the patronage of his establishment.²⁰

Finally, however, the fairy godmother appears in the form of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, who advises her to put this debilitating life behind her. At the end of the novel the young saloonkeeper's daughter has become a Unitarian preacher in Chicago. She has dedicated her life to the service of others. She will preach especially to women, she says — to those unfortunate women who have forgotten that they, too, are human. And as the novel closes, Astrid Holm preaches her first sermon in Unity Church. As her text she has selected: "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." She has herself thirsted and hungered, she thinks, almost to death. Now she has been satisfied. "She raised her head and looked out over the audience. She felt that her words had power; here she felt at home; she had not mistaken her call. She had finally arrived."²¹

This basic Cinderella motif, prosaic as this brief summary may seem, is rescued from total oblivion by Mrs. Janson's modification of her romance by employing some of the conventions of the novel of manners. The result is a delightful description of the provincialism of the Norwegian community in Minneapolis. There is the memorable scene of an afternoon tea — a gathering of Norwegian women from the upper class in the city — with their small talk, narrow-mindedness, and gossip. There are scenes from a day at Lake Minnetonka in the summer of 1880. And there is the glimpse into the lives of the young educated Norwegians, the Karl-Johan boys ("young-men-about-town") like Adolph Meyer, whose amorous attentions almost prevent Astrid's escape from her situation. He is an irresponsible, degenerate pseudo-intellectual with no further goal in life than pleasure. "He is," Drude has one of her characters state, "one of those Norwegian scoundrels of whom we have such a blessed abundance here in America. They want only to live, not to work."²²

¹⁹*En saloonkeepers datter*, 41.

²⁰*En saloonkeepers datter*, 111 (quote).

²¹*En saloonkeepers datter*, 229.

²²*En saloonkeepers datter*, 130. Karl Johan boys is a term derived from Oslo's principal street, Karl Johansgt., which

The temperance issue is central to the novel. All the problems are conveniently, yet realistically, presented as stemming from the saloon, blocking every attempt of the young heroine to rise from her lowly position. Astrid's venture into dramatics, which she looks upon as release from her prison, ends in a drunken brawl, with the Norwegian audience more interested in their drinks than in the play and with Astrid barely escaping the advances of young Meyer. Later, when Astrid rents a hall on Washington Avenue to deliver a temperance lecture, the young Norwegian roustabouts come to heckle her: "We Scandinavians have come up here to say that we don't want this American practice of having woman preachers imposed on us. You mind your own business and we'll mind ours." The audience is in an uproar. "You'd better preach to your father first," they yell at her. "Down with her! Away with the saloonkeeper's daughter!" When a Norwegian policeman comes to tell her she should leave the hall, she rebukes him that he cannot even keep peace. No, he says, he has too many friends there. "Anyway it is better for you to stop preaching temperance as long as [your father] is still in business."²³

Perhaps most interesting is the way Mrs. Janson has placed her narrative of Astrid Holm against the contemporary movement of women's suffrage, putting her own views into the mouth of Bjørnson, who did make a lecture tour to Minneapolis. Astrid attends one of the writer's lectures in the city:

"When Bjørnson stepped out on the stage, the crowd broke into a tumultuous hurrah. Astrid sat enthralled. . . . He looked just as she thought he would, and she stared with admiration at the stalwart figure who stood in the middle of the stage with his proud head thrown back, freedom and truth pouring forth with each word. So there were still such men to be found in the world. She had almost forgotten it. In the midst of her grief she felt carried away, and a nameless happiness came over her — a feeling of faith again, faith in mankind, faith in life as a place where there was something worth fighting for. She absorbed every word he spoke, as a dry, burnt-out meadow soaks in the compassionate rain that finally comes. Tears of deliverance ran slowly down her cheeks as she sat there quietly and expectantly."²⁴



KNUT HAMSON

Later she meets Bjørnson personally at a reception, and the following day she goes to the West Hotel to seek his advice. He tells her:

"A woman in our day has no excuse if she gives up. Thank God, the day is past — especially here in America — when a woman who finds life against her has nothing else to do than take her own life or give herself away in an immoral marriage, which is only another form of prostitution. That story belongs to the uncivilized days of history, and it has claimed millions of offerings. Now it must stop."

He advises Astrid to become a liberal preacher. Every woman, he says, has a double duty in life: "to raise her own position and then to help the thousands of other women to arise." It is to this end that Astrid Holm, the saloonkeeper's daughter, dedicates her life.²⁵

Astrid's personality and character are faithfully developed in this novel. There is always a proper motivation for her acts, and the portrait is consistently drawn. The ruling passion in her life is to become an actress. From early childhood, when she sees a famous Swedish

runs from the parliament building to the palace. It is also the street on which the University of Oslo is located. Karl Johan boys refers to the young men who loafed along the street, youths who were primarily, but not exclusively, university students.

²³*En saloonkeepers datter*, 217, 218, 219.

²⁴*En saloonkeepers datter*, 158–159.

²⁵*En saloonkeepers datter*, 182, 186.

actress on the stage and learns that her own mother, too, had been an actress before her marriage, until the day she becomes a Unitarian preacher — a type of actress — Astrid dreams of nothing else. Around this conflict in her life — that between the dream and reality, the stage and the saloon — the strands of her life experiences are woven. The result is a warm, human characterization with suggestions of autobiography. For while Astrid's situation in life is a far cry from the active social life of Mrs. Janson, her character shares the author's realization of the confinement, the limitations, of life for the gifted and sensitive immigrant in Minneapolis in the 1880s. Salvation comes — escape becomes possible — but not through the promises of the expanding city. When it comes it is in the real presence of all that modern Europe stands for in the memory of Drude Krog Janson — the stimulating, refreshing involvement in the world of ideas as embodied in Bjørnson in contrast to the petty, pleasure-seeking concerns of the Minneapolitan.

MRS. JANSON was more faithful in her role as an artist in her Minneapolis novel than was her husband in his. Kristofer's *Behind the curtain* suffers from constant melodramatic manipulations of the action and the obvious proclamations of the message. Yet these are not to be condemned entirely, for Janson was working with another form of fiction. If his work is judged on this basis, it is a lively contribution to the literature of social satire. Appearing as it did at a time when the interest in social criticism was waning in Norway, Janson's novel did not arouse the interest it might have earlier. Written in a foreign tongue, it left no imprint whatever upon the literature of protest then developing in American writing.

Up to the appearance of this novel, Janson had written nothing about life in Minneapolis. His early works were set in rural areas. In them the targets of his criticism were the intolerance of the Lutheran clergy, the drunkenness of the Norwegians, and the low, actually servile, position of the Norwegian immigrant women. In these didactic narratives Janson managed to attribute to the Lutheran clergy both the drunkenness of the immigrant and the position of the women. "No, it is you — it is you who have done all this, pastor," says the chief character in one of Janson's short stories, "Enemies of the people." "You have destroyed my home and driven me to drink. The bottle and you — the bottle and you — they are the enemies of the people." And with these words the man dies, and at his funeral the Lutheran pastor preaches on the need for "pure doctrine." If Minneapolis was mentioned at all in Janson's early work, it was as the home of some enlightened American, either a woman or a liberal pastor, who provided a haven of refuge for a Norwegian woman dominated by her husband and her Lutheran pastor.²⁶

When *Behind the curtain* was first announced in

Saamanden in September, 1889, Janson stated that the novel would disclose the mysteries of Minneapolis: "It is an attack on all public and private rottenness hereabouts," he wrote. "It will be a workingman's book." The novel is one of social protest, satirizing American culture, the refusal of the American to accept the immigrant, the saloons, the place of women in American society, capitalists, and the conditions of the common laborer. Drawing upon the larger Minneapolis community for its focus, *Behind the curtain* is Janson's attempt to disclose the evils "which are concealed under the disguise of the newly-rich."²⁷

The *nouveaux riches* in the novel are the Plummers, who own a large house on South Seventh Street. A clever man, Plummer is always first to contribute to a cause when the names of donors are listed in the newspaper, but "he carefully weighed each quarter in his hand if some poor creature knocked at the door and asked for help." Plummer had begun his career as a captain on a Mississippi barge, which he finally bought and set on fire in order to collect the insurance. Money in hand, he purchased a sawmill in Wisconsin, married an Indian woman, had one son, and then met a "small, red, round, and lively seamstress," who came to work for him. She took his fancy, and "since Mr. Plummer was very well versed in the Scriptures and was, in all things, a 'Christian' gentleman, he knew what he had to do in such a situation": He got rid of the Indian woman and journeyed to Minneapolis with his little seamstress to find a place in society.²⁸

The Plummer home is overelaborate and gaudy. The paintings are cheap imitations — and always large. The Plummers realize their lack of culture, but if an artist comes to town, they can always be depended upon to entertain him lavishly and to invite some local pastor to the home to speak in honor of the guest. Plummer has a library of well-bound books of standard authors, but he has read none of them. He does, however, know the names of the authors, for behind the various authors stands that which provides his greatest enjoyment in life. His favorite author is Byron because behind Byron stands the brandy bottle. "Compliments and candy and pretty girls — they are the country's distinctive features," says Mr. Bradford, who has learned to address all men in America as colonel because "half the grown men in America are colonels." Mr. Plummer remarks: "We old-fashioned Yankees aren't too much occupied with culture. What do we want with culture here in the West?"

²⁶"Folkets fiender" ("Enemies of the people"), in *Praerens saga* (*Saga of the Prairie*), 3:36 (Chicago, 1885).

²⁷*Saamanden*, 3:29 (first quote) (September, 1889); *Hvad jeg har oplevet*, 259 (second quote), Kristofer Janson, *Bag gardinet* (*Behind the curtain*) (Minneapolis, 1889).

²⁸*Bag gardinet*, 5, 6 (quotes).

That's merely for show and nonsense and a waste of money and only makes life bitter and tiresome for others." The Plummers, attending a showing of foreign art in the city, see nothing at all in the paintings. "They perhaps don't realize that in America we can get larger paintings for five dollars," says Mrs. Plummer. "But then industry has a much higher position here."²⁹

This ridicule of American culture is best illustrated in Janson's description of a familiar American culture-bearer, the elocutionist:

"There is here in western America a sort of wandering torture-instrument that is called an elocutionist. Her business is to teach people how not to read. In general, she is a professional wreck from Boston who has been weighed and found wanting and who now wants to win her laurels in the West's infant civilization. Better to be first in a small town than second in Rome. She puts on an artist's air and tells how she appeared on the stage as Juliet. She changes her voice as a chameleon changes color and rips the truth to pieces ten times on each page of the book. First she is sentimental and speaks in a quivering voice; then she conjures spirits with a deep bass; and soon she chatters away like a small-town girl on the sidewalk. She runs the gamut from sorrow to laughter, from a washer woman up to a heroine, just as deftly as a frog jumps or a trapeze artist turns in the air. There is nothing she seems to hate as much as naturalness, she seems to think that art is simply affectation. And the old farmers, who have risen in the world to become lumber dealers look with stupefied amazement at all this affectation and think it is 'real art.'"³⁰

The most cultured person in the Plummer household is Agnes Pryts, a Norwegian servant girl who has had a good education in Norway and has become a talented musician. During the course of the novel she becomes known in the community as a musician and is constantly sought after by Americans who want her to give piano lessons to their children. This allows her to leave her position at the Plummer household, but she has been there long enough for young Frank Plummer to be attracted to her and to seek her hand in marriage. It is in this episode that Janson most delightfully presents another of his issues, the place of the Scandinavian immigrant in Minneapolis in the 1850s.

Mrs. Plummer opposes her son's wishes to marry Agnes, and when he asks her if Scandinavians are not as good as other people, she replies: "Do you think so? Don't we see them coming to town in boxcars and crowding the depots so honest people can hardly get in? Their clothes smell as if they have been kept in their food chests, and they always have dirty children hanging on them. They're the ones who clean the streets, work in the sewers, and do all the common labor; they're the ones who fill the saloons and houses of prostitution. And such people you want to drag into the Plummer house?"³¹

Mrs. Plummer then goes over to see Mrs. Pryts, Agnes' mother, to make sure that Agnes will not marry her son. On the wall of the Pryts's living room Mrs. Plummer sees a picture of a Raphael Madonna.

"Is that one of your relatives, Mrs. Pryts?"

"Mrs. Pryts couldn't keep from smiling a little as she answered, 'No, that is, of course, the Madonna.'

"Madonna — Mrs. Madonna? Does she live in Minneapolis?"

"No, that is the Virgin Mary with the Christ Child."

"Well, she ought to have put some clothes on him. Do you think it is based on reality, Mrs. Pryts?"

"No, that is the artist's own imagination," Mrs. Pryts answered, barely able to keep from laughing."³²

Mrs. Plummer then says that the Prytses have it very comfortable in their home, that they probably were not used to such comfort in Norway. Mrs. Pryts disagrees.

"Well, but I seem to remember that people in your part of the world lived in small sod huts, isn't that so?"

"People tell so many lies about foreigners, Mrs. Plummer."

"Then you have real glass in your windows and regular houses? I had always pictured Norway as a horrible country, full of ice and mountains and bears," said Mrs. Plummer."³³

Mrs. Plummer then brings up the subject of Frank and Agnes. She does not want a misalliance, she says.

"I am entirely in agreement with you, Mrs. Plummer," answered Mrs. Pryts quietly, "and I believe you can have confidence in Agnes. Her education has made her superior to your son both in knowledge and in culture, and I do not believe marriages are happy when the wife is superior."

"Mrs. Plummer sat very much amazed. That was just the opposite of what she had meant."³⁴

The saloon, one of Janson's favorite subjects for abuse, also receives its share of criticism in *Behind the curtain*. At one point in the novel, one of the lively episodes, young Frank Plummer escorts what is assumed to be an authentic French count around the city.

"The count and Frank walked over to Washington Avenue. The lights in the splendid shops had long since been extinguished. Only a

²⁹ *Bag gardinet*, 25, 40-41, 50-51, 56-57, 156 (quotes).

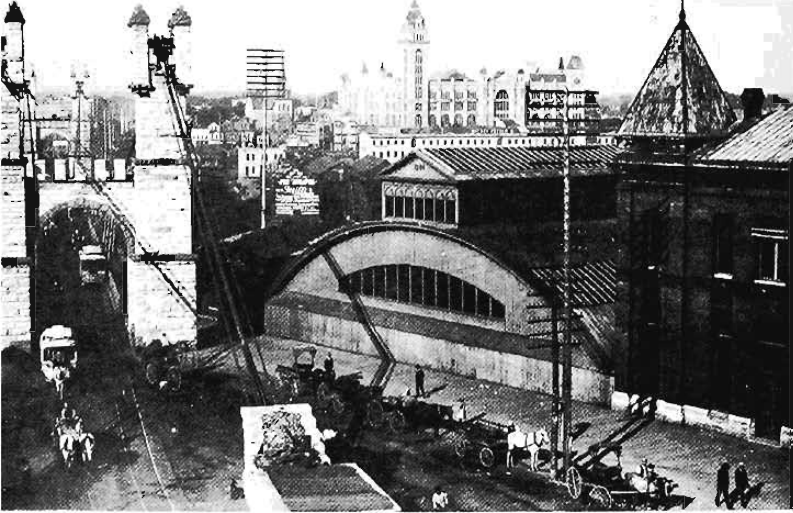
³⁰ *Bag gardinet*, 40-41.

³¹ *Bag gardinet*, 97.

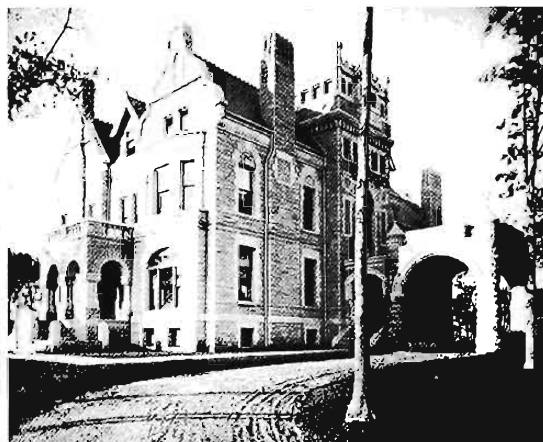
³² *Bag gardinet*, 98-99.

³³ *Bag gardinet*, 99.

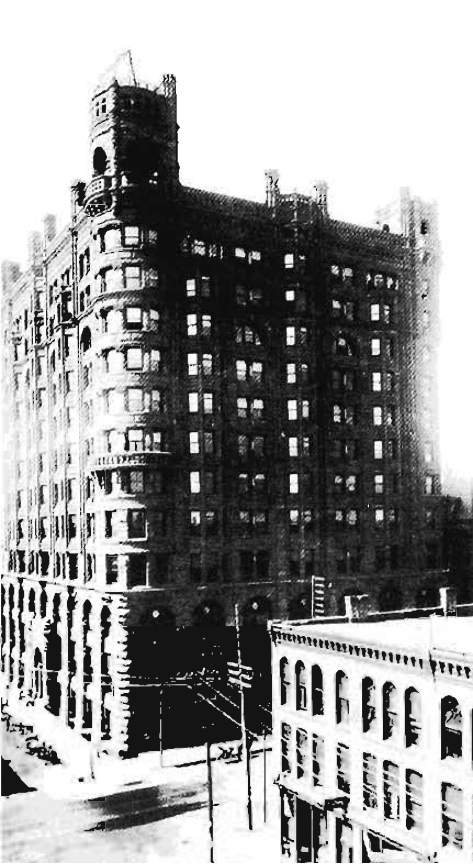
³⁴ *Bag gardinet*, 100.



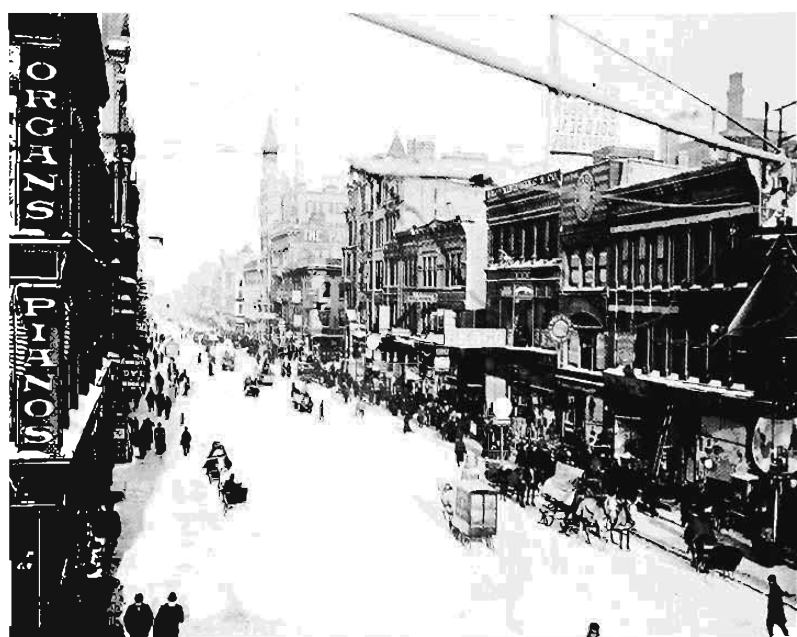
BRIDGE SQUARE is seen from two vantage points in these 1880s and 1890s photographs. The second Suspension Bridge and the Exposition Building (middle background) are prominent structures in the picture at left, City Hall (center) in the photograph at right.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: The old Minneapolis Public Library, Tenth Street and Hennepin Avenue; the William D. Washburn residence, "Fair Oaks," at Twenty-second and Stevens Avenue; the West Hotel at Fifth and Hennepin. Below left: the Metropolitan Building, Second Avenue South and Third Street. None of these buildings still stands.



*NICOLLET
AVENUE
and Fifth Street,
looking toward
the Mississippi
River*



single flame was lit, so the patrolman could see if anyone was inside who wanted to lay his hands on his neighbor's property. The streets were almost empty; it wasn't like Paris, where the rumble of carriages and throngs of people plague a person at night as much as in the day; where merry young people sit with their coffee or ice cream or glass of wine outside the cafes; and where you can hear laughter and music and the shouting of waiters at a time when all honorable Yankees have long since pulled their nightcaps over their ears and are dreaming about grain speculations and the stock market, while their better halves still see before their half-closed eyes the beautiful new set of jewels displayed that day at Eliot's. Minneapolis gives the impression of being a respectable city, a Puritan city, even at night. No fluttering women assailing you with their questions; no chattering young men on the sidewalks discussing the theater or politics; at the most only a couple sluts, who can pass by you on a dark street, throw a sandbag at your head, and rob you of your watch and money — if you have any.

"But the respectability is still not so great as it appears to be. There is something which is called 'behind the curtains' — and there is much in Minneapolis that goes on behind the curtains. The newspapers report that such and such an evil is stamped out, but it really has only been moved — behind the curtains. And the city lifts high its pretty, moral face for all to see, just as moral as an American Sunday — but no one talks about what goes on — behind the curtains."³⁵

Frank takes the young man the Plummers have mistaken for a French count to see the chorus girls at the theater, to Shades Saloon, and to the Nicollet House, the "city's next to the best hotel," where they gain admittance to a gambling room guarded by a burly doorman. From there they make their way to the finer saloons on Washington Avenue. At one of these the special attraction is a Norwegian violinist, a former lawyer who, because of the saloons, now makes his living playing for idiots, as he calls the young men who frequent the place.

No issue receives more vivid attention in the novel than that of the position of the workingman. This issue is woven together with Janson's platform on women's rights, and both are displayed chiefly in the events involving the Plummer and the Nilsen families. Dina Nilsen is the young Norwegian girl who takes Agnes' place as a maid in the Plummer household. Her father is

a Norwegian laborer, a bitter enemy of all capitalists. One night Frank Plummer lures Dina into his office, gets her drunk, and attacks her. Dina is subsequently sent from home by her father and is on the point of committing suicide when she is found by an elderly American woman who takes her home and assists her in bringing a lawsuit against Frank Plummer. "It is unfortunate you are a woman," Mrs. Walter says to Dina, "and a penniless woman at that. For such a person justice is difficult to obtain. People say that we women in America have such a great privilege . . . but they don't even give us the right to vote."³⁶

In the court scene that follows, the fallen Norwegian lawyer, Linner, stays away from the bottle long enough to defend Dina brilliantly and to give vociferous expression to Janson's thesis: "It is money that rules. It is money that creates the criminal political groups and monopolies and makes workers remain slaves; it is money that today as before attempts to trample justice underfoot."³⁷

The jury awards the case to Dina who promises the settlement of \$15,000 to the Bethany Home for Girls. But the Plummers, requesting another trial, collect false witnesses and bribe the jury. This time Frank is declared innocent. Dina runs out of the courtroom and jumps off the Hennepin Avenue Bridge. A melodramatic scene follows:

" . . . the workers were on their way home with their lunch buckets in their hands. Then suddenly there appeared a strange sight on Bridge Square. There was an old man, bareheaded in spite of the brisk cold, who came pushing a wheelbarrow. And on the wheelbarrow lay a woman, dead. Stiff as ice, with icicles hanging on her clothes. The man must have been crazy, because he walked and shouted, so that one could scarcely make out what he was saying. 'Brothers! Workingmen! Look at this. It is my daughter. She has been murdered — murdered by the capitalists, murdered by Frank Plummer. She was as innocent and pure as the lilies in the fields. First they raped her. Then they committed perjury and said she was a woman of the streets. Should we tolerate this any longer? They cut our wages, they drive us away from our work, they let us go helpless when we are worn out and old, they try to starve us to death. And now they attack our innocent daughters, and we can't get the law on them because we are poor people, and they are millionaires. Look at her. Look at her. She was as beautiful a girl as ever lived in Minneapolis, and now look at her. This the capitalists have done! That's the way these rich men's sons will treat your daughters, too.'"³⁸

Of course, Frank Plummer lurks nearby to overhear

³⁵*Bag gardinet*, 65–66.

³⁶*Bag gardinet*, 174–175.

³⁷*Bag gardinet*, 215.

³⁸*Bag gardinet*, 232–233.

all this. He is discovered and chased by the mob to the police station, where police drive the workers away. From there the mob moves on to the Plummer house, where a party is in progress. Police arrive to drive the mob away. Then later, as the guests are leaving, they find on the front porch the body of Dina's father, Daniel Nilsen, hanging by a rope, with a note addressed to the "thief, robber, and Pharisee James Plummer" tied to his body: "You have killed my life's happiness; you have killed my child; you have killed me. You have taken away everything I own — now take my corpse with it. I present it to you at bargain rates. The rope which you have bound around my neck will one day twist around yours and that of all millionaire robbers, who live on the tears of widows and the drudgery of workingmen."³⁹

At the funeral the city's workers demonstrate against the capitalists, and speeches are made by one of Minneapolis's liberal preachers and by a representative of the workers. In a capitalistic society, controlled by money barons, Janson suggests, all sense of justice is destroyed.

Money is Plummer's favorite word: "Money, you see, rules the world," Plummer tells his son: "Remember you are a businessman, and a businessman always says that nothing is humbug that can be of help to him. For you to join a young people's Christian society would be a good advertising card, you see; it gives an appearance of respectability, it creates confidence and trust, and what is a businessman without that?"⁴⁰

Some days later Agnes Pryts and her mother go to the cemetery to visit Dina's grave. There they discover Frank Plummer's body sprawled over her grave. He had shot himself. And so the novel closes with an ironic statement of Plummer, as the body of his son is brought home: "'It's sad about Frank,' he said as he wiped a tear from his eye. 'He was a good son, but no good at business. He had too much of what we call heart — and a conscience is no good — no good — in business.'"⁴¹

The novel is not without its hope: In the closing pages of the book, Arne, the young son of Daniel Nilsen and brother of Dina, vows to go off to study to become an engineer, and Agnes Pryts promises to wait for him. But the interest of the book lies in the reality of the present, not the promise of the future. And though the novel may lack subtle character portrayal, it nevertheless is a spirited, imaginative glimpse of several aspects of life in the expanding city in the upper Midwest in the 1880s.

BY THE TIME *Behind the curtain* was published, Kristofer Janson had already begun to lose much of his zeal for his work in Minneapolis. In addition, he had become fascinated by spiritualism, and he was restless — impatient with his activities in the city. His wife was unable to follow Janson in his new religious views. Coupled with this growing difference of interests was Janson's infatua-

tion for a young woman, a spiritualist whom he invited to stay in their home. Difficulties in the household and developments in his congregation made Janson anxious to leave Minneapolis. "There was, of course, no other road," says a character in *The saga-chair*, a novel by the Wisconsin poet, Ole Buslett. "The poet had to see about getting back across the sea, compose, and die at home — like Janson and others. . . . and he was right in that: when poets make themselves impossible as men, then they have little to do as poets."⁴²

On April 12, 1893, Mrs. Janson and children left New York. In May, Kristofer began to make preparations to leave. That fall he sailed from New York for a "temporary absence in Norway." When in the spring of 1894 Janson went to Denmark, he had definitely decided not to return to Minneapolis. "I have now reached one of the most important decisions in my life," he wrote in a communication to *Saamanden*, "namely, to leave America and to remain in my fatherland." Work among the Scandinavians in America no longer possessed the future that work in Norway had for him, "for with the coming of the third generation in America, the Scandinavians will soon become Americanized and use only the English language," he said. "There will be new immigrants, but they will be poor and uneducated people."⁴³

The Jansons were divorced in 1897, and a few weeks later Kristofer married Georgine Louise Bentzen, the spiritualist who had lived in their home. Kristofer died in 1917. Drude lived for some time in Dresden, Germany. She died in 1934 in Copenhagen.

For the Jansons their Minneapolis sojourn was but a brief interlude in their lives, yet both Kristofer and Drude responded to the lure of the growing metropolis in Minnesota. For a little more than a decade they took part in its development. However, when they stopped to record their visions of that life, which they enjoyed, they were not moved by the optimism the city might seem to have called forth. Rather, they looked beneath the surface, and they were disenchanted: They hoped for stars, but they found only tinsel and dust.

³⁹*Bag gardinet*, 239.

⁴⁰*Bag gardinet*, 89, 157–158.

⁴¹*Bag gardinet*, 247.

⁴²Ole Buslett, *Sagastolen (The saga-chair)*, 161 (Chicago, 1908).

⁴³*Saamanden*, 6:327 (first quote) (August, 1893), 7:245–246 (second quote) (May, 1894).

PHOTOGRAPHS of the sketches of Drude and Kristofer Janson and of the books' title pages were taken by Orin Lofthus, retired dean and professor at St. Olaf College, Northfield. Pictures of Knut Hamsun and Bjørnsterne Bjørnson were published with the permission of the Norwegian-American Historical Association. All other photographs except where noted in captions are in the Minnesota Historical Society's audio-visual collection.



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