

Clear View

Se dig ud en sommerdag

Look around in summer's day,
Farmers cultivating,
See the farmlands stretch away
And the birds a-mating.
Grain in spear and brush in bloom,
Children playing round their home,
Waving grain fields ever loom
Round the many farmsteads.

Denmark is a pretty land,
Measured by the acre,
Gives its bread to every man,
Farmer, blacksmith, baker.
Verdant rye with bulging knee
Tall and stately grows in lea,
Crawling hope and apple tree
By the whitewashed gables.

Ferries broad-bowed in contour
With their steel clad shutter,
Making way from shore to shore
Over belts of water.
Church spires lofty and serene
Mirrored in the water's sheen,
In the distance sails are seen
Gainst the verdant island.

Trains are puffing on their way,
Smoke-clouds rise and alter,
Colts beside the right of way
Snort and tear their halter.
Herdsman couple up their chore,
Evening sighs in field and moor,
From the open blacksmith door
Flickering flames are glowing.

Halt a moment, Danish man,
When your labors down you,
Take a view of Denmark's land
From the hills around you.
Distant ranges meet your sight,
Open belts your eyes delight,
Lofty as the sea gull's flight,
Sunset summer evenings.

Jeppe Aakjær
English translation: J. A. Peehl

Jutland

Jylland

There looms in the distance my fatherland's shore
With woodlands and meadows o'er spread;
From Skagen's bald reef to the uttermost moor,
It makes out of sandhills its bed;
But not to be sleeping the sleep of the just,
For seldom the land is at rest;
For storms are unfurled,
And breakers are hurled
On coastlines in east and in west.

There trickle the brooklets through meadows in glee,
To join in a creek on the plains,
That flows in a serpentine course to the sea
But never to river attains.
But how it can glitter on late summer eve
When salmon are braving the stream,
And flags by the way
Catch dewdrops and spray
While daylight fades out like a dream.

And hay fields so spacious I nowhere have scanned
As margin its belts and its fjords;
Where glassy-horned cattle, the amber hoofed brand,
Are browsing in numberless hordes.
The colt here is growing so plump in the loin
On succulent meadowland feed;
Its head so aloft,
Its muzzle so soft,
Its hoof beats give clue to its breed.

The fox by the stone hedge is gnawing a bone
And bathing in sunshine his pelt;
The rabbit is sniffing the stubble and stone
And hopping o'er mosses of felt.
The otter is plunging so swift in the pool
When hunter or dog is in sight;
Peewees on the wing
Flock close in a ring
Where vipers are burrowed from sight.

O'er cornfield a hillock is lifting its crest
With heather and bramble o'ergrown;
Here meadowlarks build in the bushes a nest
And plaintively twitter and moan.
The waves of the rye fields loom up gainst the sky
And are swayed and tilted and shocked,
Gaining fullness and form
In sunshine and storm,
As babies in trundles are rocked.

It whirls in the heath, it whirs in the rye,
It crackles in acres of straw;
The clouds overhead float so leisurely by,
So swiftly the shadows withdraw.
The honeybee turns round the cottage's gable
To hive in the shrubs of the way;
There back in the yard
By gate transom barred
Come echoes of roadsters at bay.

Here stood once a home on a spurry green tuft
With chimneys a trifle upset;
It only had one row of bacons aloft
And otherwise nothing but debt.
Yet swallows build nests o'er the vestibule door,
And flowers grace drop-board and ledge;
And plants grow in kegs,
And chickens lay eggs
In lee of the hazel green hedge.

And here sat our mother with us on her knee,
Bent under the loft beams so long;
She offered her breast to my brother and me
While tenderly humming a song.
Now yonder she rests by the ivy clad hedge,
Secluded, where hollyhocks grow.
Remembered above
For labors of love —
So hushed through the gateway I go.

But what is a life in privation and need,
By poverty's worry depressed,
If not a sod patch in a dell or some weed
Our tender affection possessed?
If we did not come from the uttermost sea
To listen submissive withal
For mem'ry's reply
In ripple and sigh
From streams that we drank of when small.

How blessed this land where the storm winds abound,
A people submissive to toil;
I own not so much as a foot of thy ground,
As homeless I long for thy soil.
Thou handedst me out from the stone-bounded copse
One evening so crooked a stave;
When broken it is,
My hope is in this,
Perhaps thou wilt give me a grave.

Jeppe Aakjær
English translation: J. A. Peehl

Jutland's Heath

Den jyske lyng

Thousands of years have I stood as a king,
Each generation's melodious hummer,
Nodded good day to the hastening spring,
Wafted good bye to the vanishing summer.

Rain storm and hail have been combing my lock,
Wind storms have scattered my purplish flower;
Meanwhile the badger skulked home by the brook,
There to provide for its young in the bower.

I have protected the outlaw from harm,
Hidden the rabbit when wounded and driven;
Larks and the nestlings lay safe in my arm,
Trustfully lifting their eyes toward the Heaven.

Women have gathered their cranberry fruit,
Bending their backs to the arduous labor;
Vipers are crawling by serpentine route,
Wiggling their tails as a warning to neighbor.

Lonely the plover is humming its song,
Skimming so low o'er the top of the heather;
Gypsies from various wanderings ere long
Retrace their steps and are hastening thither.

Have I not sheltered, O Jutland, thy earth,
Spread out a screen o'er thy flitting sand sections,
Muffled thy downs which to sand storm give birth,
Patiently strengthened thy beach grass protection.

Ask every curlew that spies o'er thy strand,
Ask every shore bird that raises a cackle,
Ought I be trampled to death on my strand,
Do I deserve in the bonfire to crackle.

Ask any dweller, whoever he is,
When to the distant horizon he gazes,
If he will part with my doleful whiz
Or with my vistas' magnificent spaces.

Ask if he longs for the woodlands and lakes
When in the morning he's eating his curry;
Sheep flocks are bleating and skylarks awake,
Lifting their tops in the dew covered spurry.

Dry is my stalk and when counted as feed
Little I yield to the milk pail as profit;
Scarcely the sheep or the cattle me heed,
Honored by hunter and poet, — what of it?

Strange as my heath are the cravings of man,
Bread is not causing contentment but rebels;
Fill him with plenty, as soon as he can,
Falters his heart in his hunger for pebbles.

Grant me the right on my ancestral sand
Only to scatter my rootlets or wither;
Bread you must draw from the black-moulded land,
Outlook and peace from my dream-haunted heather.

Jeppe Aakjær
English translation: J. A. Peehl

The Land of Heather

Hedelandet

Thou somber land,
Thou dreary land,
With flocks of sheep and oxen spanned,
Mid endless toil,
In sandy soil,
And wind and storm in wild turmoil!

Thy tender tree
Got crooked knee,
In western wind and eastern lee;
Thy grain froze out,
Was killed by drought,
Or thrashed by windstorms from the south.

Thy fleecy flock
Is hardy stock
But straight and coarse in every lock;
This wool I feel
Was our chief weal
Though spun on mother's spinning wheel.

By heather decked,
By windstorm checked,
And poor in more than one respect;
Though storms abound
In field and town,
A single rock has ne'er been found.

Thy prayer is rain,
Thy labor drain,
Thy constant toils rich milk obtain;
In summer heat
And without meat
Thy milk and rye bread was a treat.

The Dane can plod
On barren sod
With far to rain and far to God,
But will succeed
And fight the weed
When all his trust is cow and steed.

He thinks a bit
But does not quit,
Then answers he "Whose choice is it?"
There was I born
One lucky morn
Behind the copse of brush and thorn.

There lived my ma,
There light I saw
First in this hut of clay and straw;
I labored long
But I was strong,
And met my fate with cheerful song.

That hut you see
Belongs to me,
So picturesque with shrub and tree;
Its frame so thin
Lets sunshine in
And all the neighborhood of kin.

With words so sound
The Dane is bound
To meet you on his chosen ground;
His lot is cast,
He's not surpassed
In breaking up the purple vast.

A barren land,
A charming land,
With luring fjords and heathered sands;
In rain clouds nursed,
In storms immersed,
In bold and noble outline first.

Jeppé Aakjær
English translation: J. A. Peehl

Jutland

Jylland

From mist my homeland rises forth
with ridges and pasture-lands;
with its back to the south and its feet to the north,
it made its bed behind sands;
but never to sleep the sleep of the just,
for the land and the sea are at war;
when the storm wakes,
and the surf breaks
its knuckles pounding the shore.

The brooks roll sluggishly on through the lea
where the rivulet snares them at length
and sedately spirals away to the sea
before it has gathered its strength.
But how it can glitter a late summer-eve
when the salmon go swimming upstream,
when dew hangs in beads
on the beards of the reeds,
and the day creeps away like a dream.

Across the broad meadow the summer wind moves
through a carpet of mossy turf.
There are shiny-horned cattle with amber hooves
in the marshes behind the surf.
The colt grows fat on the upland grass
where the sap pours out in streams;
when he roams the field
his pasterns yield
with strength, and his red coat gleams.

The fox suns his wicked head beneath
the dyke, as he gnaws his bone.
A hare bounds over the stubbly heath
and sniffs at the grey field-stone.
The otter, safe from hunter and dog,
plumps into his hidden hole,
and the herons fly
to the field nearby
where the viper lurks in the knoll.

A hill looms over the seas of grain,
heather-and blueberry-dark.
Up from the thicket, with swift refrain,
rises a tufted lark.
Far over the wold to the long skyline
the windy billowings sweep
from the changing sky
through the ripening rye
that is rocked like a child asleep.

A breath in the heather, a tinkle of rye,
a crackle in stalks of the grain;
the big-bellied clouds troop over the sky
and the blue fades to colour of rain.
Wild bees sweep round the cottagers' eaves
toward their hive in the onion patch.
Sometimes you hear
a whinnying mare
from the gateway under the thatch.

Here in the home-field long ago
stood a house with its chimney aslant;
sausages hung from the beam in a row,
all else was but debt and want.
Yet swallows nested above the door,
and the yard was a flowery mass,
and wormwood dried
on the walls outside,
and the hen laid her eggs in the grass.

There she sat and spun, my weary mother,
bent over her work, day long,
and shared her breasts with me and my brother,
and sang a sorrowful song.
She is resting now by the leaning wall
which the poppies have overgrown.
When I can not bear
my weight of care,
then I go through the gateway alone.

What were life worth with its endless needs
and its gnawing vanity,
if there were no spot with a dale and reeds
where the heart trembles to be!
If we were not drawn across the world,
drawn back, to stand at last
and hear the song
of dream along
the brook we loved in the past.

Blessed land where the people toil
in want, by the blown sea foam,
I have never owned a grain of your soil
since, a wanderer, I left my home.
One harvest night from your scraggly thicket
a crooked stick you gave
as a farewell token,
and when it is broken
perhaps you will give me a grave.

Jeppe Aakjær
English translation: Robert Silliman Hillyer

Pae' Sivensak

With wobbling paunch and rigid neck and scant, fat wheeze,
And meerschaum pipe that dangles to his round knock-knees,
His arm curved round a jersey blouse, his red wrists bare,
So waddles forth Pae' Sivensak who's dancing there.

So worthily he polkas with a bent, hunched back,
As though he were cavorting with his big rye-stack!
The sweat drips to his boot-tops from his lank, damp hair,
Indeed it is Pae' Sivensak who's dancing there.

Along the wall his family titters — quite ill bred!
The frightened floor is rocking with his ten-ton tread,
And he mashes with his pigeon toes the dance tune's blare
That follows up Pae' Sivensak who's dancing there.

With wriggling shoulders, swollen eyes, and face like dough,
And neck in fatty folds and creases row on row,
And jingling watch that sounds as if it cried out clear:
"O look! This is Pae' Sivensak who's dancing here!"

His brain is dizzy inwardly; his pulse hard pressed, —
It clatters like the cover of a brass bound chest.
His eyes are popping like a toad's when storms break near:
"God help me, poor Pae' Sivensak, who's dancing here."

A tailor sat behind the skirts (a full two score)
And pushed his club-foot forward on the smooth dance-floor,
And every one sprang up and craned with round-eyed stare:
Good God! it was Pae' Sivensak who tripped up there!

Jeppe Aakjær
English translation: Robert Silliman Hillyer

Prelude

Forspil

I crouch among the friendly roots of rye, in shelter here.
I listen, and I listen till my blood is singing clear.
The white rye, the kind rye that strikes me, as the breeze
Plays with a thousand little fingers on the silver keys.

It sounds like music in a vaulted hall where dancers pass,
And the crystals of the lamps are tinkling with their bells of glass.
The calling song, the bell song, along the summer rye,
The dear familiar Danish sound in which we live and die.

It hymns across the cottage roofs and pastoral expanse,
And round the living hedge the flying flute notes glance,
Behind the brook and bramble bush and marsh its flowing chord
Goes out to meet the song of waves across the windy fjord.

Jeppe Aakjær

English translation: Robert Silliman Hillyer

Books

Four poems of Jeppe Aakjaer, translated by J. A. Peehl, (Wheaton, IL: W. Wakeslee, 1917)

A book of Danish verse, translated by Robert Silliman Hillyer, (New York: American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1922)

The Jutland Wind, translated by R. P. Keigwin, (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1944)

A second book of Danish verse, translated by Charles Wharton Stork, (New York: American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1947)

In Denmark I was born, translated by R. P. Keigwin, (Copenhagen, A. F. Høst, 1948)

Songs from Denmark, translated by S. D. Rodholm, (Copenhagen : Det danske Selskab, 1988)

Poems in English

Auld Lang Syne (Burns)
Clear View
Evening
Farmer's Song
George Brandes
Girls in the Meadow
Golden Sun
Jutland
Jutland's Heath
Mother's Spinning Wheel
Ole sang as he watched his sheep
Pae' Sivensak
Prelude
Sweet on Anders Anna was
The Land of Heather
The Oats
The Sower
The Stone Breaker
To Bundgaard, Sculptor