

PELLE THE CONQUEROR

BOYHOOD

MARTIN ANDERSEN NEXÖ

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NEXÖ



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1915

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SOME PRESS NOTICES.

PELLE THE CONQUEROR: BOYHOOD.

"Novel-readers in search of something out of the common will be grateful to the publishers and the very competent translator, Miss Jessie Muir, who give them access to the work of this Danish writer."—*Spectator*.

"No reader with any sympathy for human nature can escape the charm of Pelle's boyhood."—*Morning Post*.

"The book, despite its recountal of the brutish ways of the Bornholmers, is no more coarse than 'Wuthering Heights' is coarse. It is fragrant with the smell of the sea, the sweet air of the meadows, the sharp joy of strength and speed."
Englishwoman.

"Sympathy and sincerity pervade the entire work."
Boston Evening Transcript.

PELLE THE CONQUEROR: APPRENTICESHIP.

"It is a book which posterity may well call the Iliad of the poor."—*Daily Chronicle*.

"There is no trace here of the morbid gloom which too exclusive reading of one Scandinavian man of genius has tempted us to expect from northern writers, but rather the gentle tolerance and ruthless truth-telling of the great Russians."—*Englishwoman*.

"One of the most momentous books which this century has so far produced."—*Manchester Guardian*.

"It is by the translation of such masterpieces that the chasm that divides one nation from another is bridged, and the peoples shown how superficial for the most part are their differences."
Daily News.

"Nexö is not afraid of life. He shows us the peasants—whom he loves—as cruel, sensual, grasping and suspicious, and yet capable of the noblest form of self-sacrifice and the most winning kindness."—*Chicago Record-Herald*.

Pelle the Conqueror



PELLE THE CONQUEROR

- I.—BOYHOOD. Translated by JESSIE MUIR.
II.—APPRENTICESHIP. Translated by BERNARD MIALL.
III.—THE GREAT STRUGGLE. Translated by BERNARD MIALL. [Autumn, 1915.
IV.—VICTORY. Translated by JESSE MUIR. [Autumn, 1916.

Crown 8vo.

NEW YORK: HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY.

Pelle the Conqueror

BOYHOOD

BY

Martin Andersen Nexö

*Translated from the
Danish by Jessie Muir*

SECOND IMPRESSION

NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

29297

82-3=2
N.PZ3
.N49
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1915*All rights reserved*

First Edition . . . June, 1913
 Second Impression . . . October, 1915



ACERVO DE LITERATURA

129206

Printed in England

NOTE

WHEN the first part of "Pelle Erobreren" (Pelle the Conqueror) appeared in 1906, its author, Martin Andersen Nexö, was practically unknown even in his native country, save to a few literary people who knew that he had written some volumes of stories and a book full of sunshiny reminiscences from Spain. And even now, after his great success with "Pelle," very little is known about the writer. He was born in 1869 in one of the poorest quarters of Copenhagen, but spent his boyhood in his beloved island Bornholm, in the Baltic, in or near the town, Nexö, from which his final name is derived. There, too, he was a shoemaker's apprentice, like Pelle in the second part of the book, which resembles many great novels in being largely autobiographical. Later, he gained his livelihood as a bricklayer, until he somehow managed to get to one of the most renowned of our "people's high-schools," where he studied so effectually that he was enabled to become a teacher, first at a provincial school, and later in Copenhagen.

"Pelle" consists of four parts, each, except perhaps the last, a complete story in itself. First we have the open-air life of the boy in country surroundings in Bornholm; then the lad's apprenticeship in a small provincial town not yet invaded by modern industrialism and still innocent of socialism; next the youth's struggles in Copenhagen against employers and authorities; and last the man's final victory in laying the foundation of a garden-city for the benefit of his fellow-workers. The background everywhere is the rapid growth of the labour

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movement; but social problems are never obtruded, except, again, in the last part, and the purely human interest is always kept well before the reader's eye through variety of situation and vividness of characterization. The great charm of the book seems to me to lie in the fact that the writer knows the poor *from within*; he has not studied them as an outsider may, but has lived with them and felt with them, at once a participant and a keen-eyed spectator. He is no sentimentalist, and so rich is his imagination that he passes on rapidly from one scene to the next, sketching often in a few pages what another novelist would be content to work out into long chapters or whole volumes. His sympathy is of the widest, and he makes us see tragedies behind the little comedies, and comedies behind the little tragedies, of the seemingly sordid lives of the working people whom he loves. "Pelle" has conquered the hearts of the reading public of Denmark; there is that in the book which should conquer also the hearts of a wider public than that of the little country in which its author was born.

OTTO JESPERSEN,
Professor of English in the University
of Copenhagen.

GENTOFTE, COPENHAGEN,
April, 1913.

PELLE THE CONQUEROR

I

It was dawn on the first of May, 1877. From the sea the mist came sweeping in, in a grey trail that lay heavily on the water. Here and there there was a movement in it; it seemed about to lift, but closed in again, leaving only a strip of shore with two old boats lying keel uppermost upon it. The prow of a third boat and a bit of break-water showed dimly in the mist a few paces off. At definite intervals a smooth, grey wave came gliding out of the mist up over the rustling shingle, and then withdrew again; it was as if some great animal lay hidden out there in the fog, and lapped at the land.

A couple of hungry crows were busy with a black, inflated object down there, probably the carcase of a dog. Each time a wave glided in, they rose and hovered a few feet up in the air with their legs extended straight down towards their booty, as if held by some invisible attachment. When the water retreated, they dropped down and buried their heads in the carrion, but kept their wings spread, ready to rise before the next advancing wave. This was repeated with the regularity of clock-work.

A shout came vibrating in from the harbour, and a little while after the heavy sound of oars working over the edge of a boat. The sound grew more distant and at