

INFORMAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

of

HARALD ULRIK SVERDRUP

The name Sverdrup is originally Danish but has disappeared in Denmark. It was a farm name meaning "black new broken soil" (sverd probably related to the German schwarz, and rup related to the endings rud and roda and meaning "broken and cleared ground"). The first known person of the name to live in Norway appears to have arrived there around the year 1600, but all persons now living and bearing the name Sverdrup descend from my great-great-grandfather who had large land holdings in northern Norway. He had three sons, one of whom took over the farms, while the other two went to Copenhagen to study. Of these the older, Georg Sverdrup, studied classical languages and philosophy, and was appointed professor in Oslo (at that time Christiania) when the University was established there in 1813. He participated in the convention which prepared the present Norwegian constitution in 1814 and was one of the three persons who wrote the document. The younger brother, my great-grandfather, studied history, language and botany. Some time after returning to Norway he took over the management of some large estates in southern Norway where he soon accepted young men as apprentices. He became more and more interested in this instruction and in 1825 he bought his own farm and established the first agricultural school in Norway. Among his sons two reached considerable prominence. Johan Sverdrup, trained as a lawyer, entered politics and from 1851 to 1884 was a member of the Norwegian legislature (Storting) where he became the leader of the liberal party and after a long fight introduced the parliamentary system. His older brother, Harald U. Sverdrup, my grandfather, was a minister of the State Church of Norway (Lutheran), and served in a district in Sogn in eastern Norway from 1845 to 1883. He had very broad interests, was a representative in the Legislature (Storting) for about 20

years; was much interested in fruit growing and established the basis for the now very profitable fruit-growing industry of his district; he participated in organizing the first local steamship company; and established and directed the savings bank of the district.

My grandfather had five sons, all of whom became ministers of the Church, and three daughters who married ministers. My father was the youngest of the brothers. After completing his studies he first served several years as a teacher in an adult school in Sogn, was subsequently minister in two different districts in western Norway and in 1908 was appointed professor of church history at a private theological school in Oslo which was established by the conservative elements within the Church and which soon was authorized to prepare young men for service as ministers, that is, it was given the same status as the corresponding faculty at the University.

My grandfather on my mother's side was born on a small farm in southwestern Norway and, because of his native intelligence and perseverance, succeeded in entering the University and graduating from the theological school. He never became a minister of the Church but served as a deacon, as well as editor of a large newspaper. As an extra-curricular activity he published a textbook in arithmetic which for years was widely used in Norwegian schools. My grandmother on my mother's side had most of her ancestors among persons from Scotch families who had migrated to Norway in the 17th century.

I was born on November 15, 1888 while my father was teaching at the adult school in Sogndal, Sogn. In 1894 he became minister in the ~~MISSE~~ island district of Solund, about forty miles to the north of Bergen where he remained until 1898. From 1898 to 1908 he served as minister at Remusö, ten miles north of Stavanger, and from 1908 until his death in 1923 he lived in Oslo as professor of church history. I spent my boyhood in various parts of

western Norway and was instructed by governesses until I was nearly fourteen years old, at which time I was sent to school in Stavanger. I had to take a number of hard knocks coming as a boy from the country into a group of the more sophisticated youngsters of the city. At that time I had no idea as to what line of study I eventually might wish to follow although I had become much interested in natural sciences. In the late '90's a Danish series of publications had been launched under the general title "Frem" (Forward). This publication comprised a popular scientific periodical and popular books on a number of subjects ranging from astronomy to anthropology. My father subscribed to these publications and for the first time I became acquainted with the concept of evolution. I read everything I could come across and I must admit that the reading did upset me considerably, because it was difficult to reconcile the presentation of evolution with the first chapter of Genesis. I was also very much intrigued by articles on popular astronomy but at that time it did not occur to me that one could study these subjects at the University. Having been born and raised in a theological environment, study at the University was to me synonymous with studying theology. When I entered the "Gymnasium" in 1903 and had the choice between following the classical line with emphasis on Latin and taking science with emphasis on physics and mathematics, I selected the former. However, during my second year in the Gymnasium when I read every book in popular astronomy which I could find in the public library in Stavanger, and also learned that one could study natural sciences including astronomy at the University in Oslo, I decided that that was what I wanted.

I graduated with honors from the Gymnasium in 1906, but after a year in Oslo during which I passed the required preliminary examinations in philosophy and psychology, I decided that I would take advantage of the opportunity to obtain my compulsory military training in the Norwegian Academy of War, because