



Sons of Norway
HERITAGE PROGRAMS



MiniPresentation#30

KRISTIN LAVRANSDAUGHTER—A NOVEL

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One of the most fascinating works in Norwegian literature is the three-volume novel about Kristin Lavransdaughter (KRIS'tihn LAHV'rahns'daughter). The novel is set in the early and mid-1300s, but introduces people to whom the reader can relate. We don't feel estranged in this historic environment. On the contrary, it feels like a privilege to be allowed to come into a world that we have assumed was closed to us.

The story about Kristin and her family is dramatic reading. At the same time the author paints an accurate and vivid portrait of **Norwegian society** in the 1300s. Traditions and customs, rules and regulations, attitudes and beliefs—it all comes alive. This is history at its best—as a backdrop for fictional, yet very believable persons and happenings.

To hundreds of thousands of readers, Kristin Lavransdaughter (KRIS'tihn LAHV'rahns'daughter) has almost become a historical person. When the township of Sel ('SEHL), Norway is mentioned, you can often hear people say: "Oh, yes, that is where Kristin Lavransdaughter (KRIS'tihn LAHV'rahns'daughter) was born." The literary portrait of her is so vivid that she has become real to the general public.

The author who created Kristin and several other monumental personalities in Norwegian literature, was a master. Her name is **Sigrid Undseth** ('Sig'rihd UHN'set) and she won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1928. The daughter of an archaeologist, her interest in history started as a young child. Without that very special background and insight she might never have been able to portray Norwegian society in the Middle Ages the way she did. This is how she describes Kristin on her wedding day:

"Kristin sat in a great armchair that had been brought up there. She was clad in her scarlet bridal robe. Great silver brooches held it together over her bosom and fastened the yellow silk shift showing in the opening; golden armlets glittered on the yellow silken sleeves. A silver-gilt belt was passed thrice around her waist, and on her neck and bosom lay neck-chain over neck-chain, the uppermost her father's reliquary cross. Her hands, lying in her lap, were heavy with rings.

Lady Aashild stood behind her chair, brushing her heavy, gold-brown hair out to all sides. 'Tomorrow you will spread it loose for the last time', she said, smiling, as she wound the red and green silk cords that were to hold up the crown, around Kristin's head. Then the women came thronging 'round the bride."

This is only one of the many vivid scenes Sigrid Undseth ('Sig'rihd UHN'set) paints in her story about Kristin. Interesting as well as entertaining, the novel is a treasure in the library of historical literature and a must to anyone attracted to Norwegian history and culture, **Norwegian literature**, or just good reading in general.