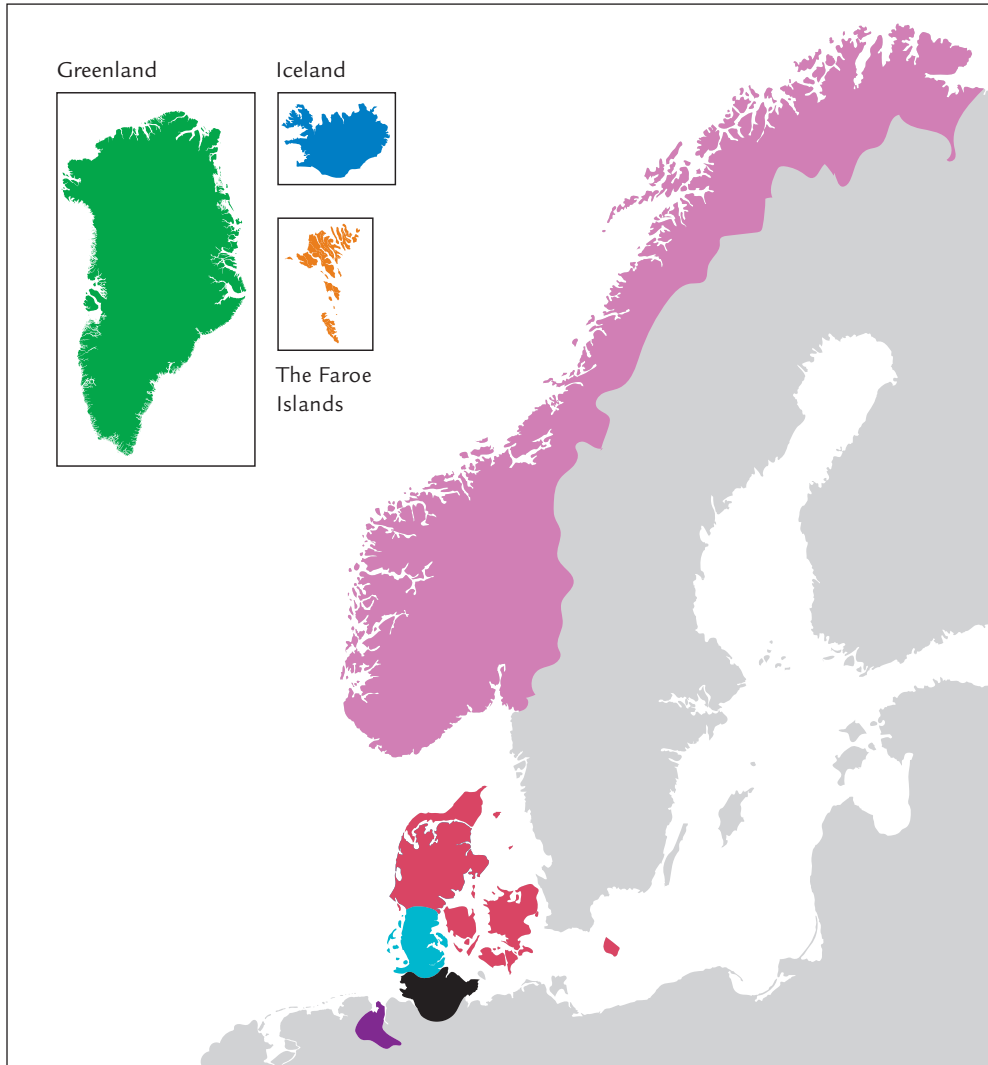


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THE LIFE



1. Map of The Kingdom of Denmark-Norway at Grundtvig's birth

1. Oldenburg, lost in 1774
2. Norway, lost in 1814
3. Schleswig-Holstein, lost in 1864 – North Schleswig returned in 1920 as South Jutland
4. Iceland, lost in 1944
5. The Faroe Islands – part of the Kingdom of Denmark, but self-governing since 1948
6. Greenland – part of the Kingdom of Denmark but self-governing since 1979

I. The Making of Modern Denmark

Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872) lived in a unique period in Danish history. During his lifetime the Kingdom of Denmark lost four-fifths of its territory, including Norway. Would it even *survive* as an independent country? Strong forces wanted it to become either part of a Scandinavian union or a vassal state of Prussia – and not even the King of Denmark was averse to the idea! Ultimately, Grundtvig was instrumental in the revival of his people and the reinterpretation of their history in a new national self-understanding. This catalyst role makes him a figure of interest for readers worldwide, especially those facing similar challenges today to the ones that Denmark faced in the 19th century. He is an essential figure in any discussion about freedom and democracy, history and nation-building, heathen mythology and Christian faith, and, most of all, lifelong learning. Not for nothing is he known as “the father of adult education”.

“My life is to fight!” said Grundtvig, “The tongue’s a sword, the pen’s a spear!” These words appeared in *Nordic Mythology* 1832 and sum up the stance that he took throughout his life. He saw himself as a Viking ‘shield-warrior’, defending the Christian faith and the Danish nation, attacking all challengers, and seeing his whole life as a battle, first with himself, then with the Church, and finally with society in general. In a letter to his friend and fellow hymnwriter Bernhard Ingemann dated 27th November 1824, he admitted that he was better at expressing disagreement than solidarity with someone:

I am the armour-bearer of the spirit, much better at making myself understood to enemies than to friends. I can express my particular view and my strong and deliberate antipathy to whatever is base, self-opinionated, and toothless in our times, but only very obscurely can I express my fellowship with those who have a feeling for the Spirit.²

Grundtvig died just six days short of his 89th birthday, having lived twice as long as the average Dane of his time. Had he died at the age of 42, like his contemporary Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55), he would not have had much to show for his warrior-stance beyond his new translations of ancient texts, some philosophical thoughts on human life, and a handful of original hymns. Aged 42, in 1825, Grundtvig’s greatest works still lay ahead of him: *Nordic Mythology*, the pioneering volume on education for the people; *Song-Work for the Danish Church*, the huge collection of original and translated hymns; the mature thoughts of his *Basic Christian Teachings*; and his frequent parliamentary contributions to the establishment of ‘government by the people’. He preferred the Danish word *folkestyre* (lit. people rule) to ‘democracy’, a foreign import. Above all, Grundtvig gathered the forces of the past, Nordic and Christian, and acted on them as a catalyst. He helped to build them into the foundation of the country’s future, even as Denmark was undergoing the severest test in its history. His legacy is to be widely regarded as the major founding figure of modern Denmark.

2. (INGEMANN, 37).

Grundtvig had prodigious talents and boundless energy, both of which he put to good use for his country. He read voraciously; an inventory of his library at his death counted 8,963 volumes.³ He published c. 1,000 works in 36,000 pages, and wrote some 1,500 hymns and songs. In his time he was Parliament's most voluble speaker. He transformed himself from a conservative monarchist into a freedom-loving democrat without losing his roots among the common people or his respect for the King. He realised the importance of literacy and education for all Danes and developed his own original ideas about a 'school for life'. He strongly believed that the roots of history and religion – in Denmark's case Nordic mythology and Christianity – were fundamental to the development of his country, so his 'fight' was to raise his people's awareness of their unique history and to ground them in its cultural, social, and national ideas. These are what Denmark is best known for today: political accountability, a strong, effective state, and the rule of law. In *The Origins of Political Order* (2011, 14) Francis Fukuyama presents Denmark as a good example of these three fundamental democratic ideas, noting: "For people in developing countries 'Denmark' is a mythical place that is known to have good political and economic institutions: it is stable, democratic, peaceful, prosperous, inclusive, and has extremely low levels of political corruption. Everyone would like to figure out how to transform Somalia, Haiti, Nigeria, Iraq or Afghanistan into 'Denmark'."

Much of what happened in Denmark was inspired by, and even compelled by, what happened in other parts of Europe. Denmark's transformation from a multinational to a national state may therefore be seen as an overture to the transformational processes in Europe, especially in Germany, England, and France. These did not find a preliminary conclusion until after the First World War, when the Austria-Hungarian and the Ottoman empires were dissolved into smaller national states.

Conditions of life 1783-1872

Although Grundtvig's Denmark was smaller than it had ever been, its population in the 19th century was on the increase:

1801	1,000,000 (excluding Norway)
1834	1,231,000
1850	1,415,000
1880	2,000,000
1901	2,500,000. ⁴

From 1660 to 1814 the Kingdom of Denmark-Norway was a single absolute monarchy. In 1733 the Danish government had passed an 'adscription' law, which forced all 14 to 36-year-olds to remain in the area of their birth, under the watchful eye of the lord of the manor, who owned all the land on which they worked. In 1764 this restriction had been

3. (Toldberg, 35).

4. Today the population is approaching 6 million.

tightened to include all 4 to 40-year-olds. Personal freedom did not exist. The government – i.e. the King in Council – gradually realised the economic potential for the country in promoting agriculture, which in turn required improvements in education and greater legal security for the peasant farmers. From 1788 all Danish agriculture was therefore reformed, allowing for much greater freedom and increasing progress in cultivation and trade. The reforms were widely welcomed, and by 1815 two-thirds of the peasants actually *owned* their farms. Higher earnings meant more livestock and thus more manure, better crops, an improved diet, and therefore a lower death rate for children. The population increased markedly, with villages growing faster than towns, and agriculture becoming the dominant source of income.

2. Population percentage and distribution by trade in 1787 and 1870

	1787	1870
Population	0.8 million	1.8 million
Agriculture	43	44
Labourers	25	16
Crafts and industry	14	21
Fishing and shipping	3	3
Trade and business	3	5
Professionals	7	6
Rich and poor without an occupation	5	5

Source: Erling Olsen, *Danmarks økonomiske historie siden 1750*. G.E.C. Gads Forlag, 1967, 20.

It is much harder to calculate the economic growth of the country, which depended on many and various factors including: an unwise financial policy leading to the state's bankruptcy in 1813; siding with Napoleon against Britain and the subsequent loss of Norway to Sweden in 1814; and a European agricultural crisis between 1818-28. However, *after* 1828 prosperity began to return to all sections of Danish society and real economic growth more or less doubled in the course of Grundtvig's lifetime, at least for the peasant farmers.

At Grundtvig's birth in 1783 the population of Denmark numbered just under 1 million, rising to just under 2 million by his death in 1872. Throughout his life, 75% of the people lived in the country, where most farmers paid each other in kind and only a few took their wares to market. The emphasis on agriculture set the pattern for the next 150 years; by the mid-20th century Denmark was still living mainly off its agriculture. Not until the 1870s did the industrialisation of Denmark really gather speed, motivating country people to move to the cities for work opportunities and a better standard of living. Life in the country could be terribly hard, and for the same reason Danes also began to seek farming opportunities *outside* the country, emigrating in particular to North America and Argentina. Between 1820 and 1930, no fewer than 336,000 Danes left for the USA. Industry did not finally overtake agriculture as the largest export provider until 1963.

The growing freedom of mind and body

All over Europe people were classified into ‘estates’ with widely differing life-conditions. From the Middle Ages onwards Denmark was divided into four ‘estates of the realm’: the nobility, the clergy, the citizenry, and the peasantry. In the so-called ‘Danish Law’ of 1683, the ‘peasantry’ included peasant farmers, villagers, smallholders, and cottagers, i.e. the bottom layer of society, which constituted 70% of the population. The social structure in Grundtvig’s day favoured the first estate of the realm, the nobility, meaning the lords of the 800 or so manors dotted round the country. Their tasks were to administer the king’s justice, to distribute the produce of the manor to the cities and trades, and to provide soldiers, should the king choose to go to war. Administering justice allowed the lord the right to punish corporally all household members on the manor estate; adult males could do the same to their servants and their children – though by the Danish Law of 1683 not to their wives. Corporal punishment of servants was abolished in 1921, of school pupils in 1967, and eventually of *all* children in 1997.

Human rights were not a determinant in Grundtvig’s early life, but came to the fore in the first democratic Danish constitution from 1849, which allowed for freedom of speech, religion, and political organisation. The even more basic right to have control over one’s own body and the fruits of one’s labour was hard to handle by legislation. Until the abolition of adscription in 1788 most people’s ‘bodies’ belonged to the lord of the manor. Not until an agreement between workers and employers in 1899 did the former gain the legal right to strike to improve their life-conditions. Grundtvig returned time and again to the British Habeas Corpus Act of 1679, whereby no one can be denied physical freedom without a legal judgement to that effect; this he called “the firm foundation of their freedom”.

The most conspicuous examples of people who lived without control over their own bodies during Grundtvig’s lifetime were, apart from Danish women in general, the Danish West Indian slaves. From 1839 to 1848 Grundtvig was a member of a small committee working for the abolition of slavery in the Danish West Indian colonies of St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix (now the US Virgin Islands). For some years he had argued that full freedom for all his compatriots in Denmark should take priority over the case of the African slaves in faraway West Indies. In the late 18th century criticism of slavery was coming to a head in England. Denmark took the lead in 1793 by forbidding the transport of slaves from the Danish colony in present-day Ghana to its colonies in the West Indies. Britain followed in 1807-08. In 1833, Britain abolished slavery in all its colonies except for India and Ceylon, bringing Denmark under considerable pressure to follow suit. In the event the Danish slaves in the Caribbean managed to free themselves by rebellion in 1848 before the new constitution in Denmark in 1849 made all forms of slavery illegal.

Women were largely subservient to men in Grundtvig’s Denmark. Enfranchising women in the constitution of 1849 was never up for debate. The family, and in particular the head of the household, decided who could marry whom and with what dowry, and only the pastor could ratify the marriage before God and society. The husband was required by law to treat his wife respectfully, but it was not until 1880 that she could dispose over her own assets legally; married women achieved legal authority in 1899 and the right to

vote in 1915 for *all* women. Equal parental custody was allowed in 1922. In Grundtvig's day divorce was frowned upon by both the Church and the State; in 1800 there were still only 100 divorces a year in the whole of Denmark. By 1925 divorce was a free right – though on specific legal grounds.

As regards their cultural and social position, until the 1870s Danish women were in general referred to by the German term *fruentsimmer*, literally a 'female staying (and working) in a room or chamber'. Grundtvig preferred to talk about women using the word *kvinder* (present-day 'women'), in accordance with his respect for all the significant women in his life – from his mother and his nurse to his three wives and the many other women in his social circle. This was also in accordance with old Nordic mythology, where women were not just the object of man's love but also and often active shield-warriors in their own right. Grundtvig regularly referred to them as the ideal Danish women, *Dannekvinder*. or Dane-women.

The four estates converge into one people

Grundtvig was born into the second estate, the *clergy*, but his father's relatively high social status was not matched by his income in a rural parish. Although Grundtvig lived close to 70 years of his life in Copenhagen, he always maintained that his roots were in the country – in the gently rolling hills around Udby where he spent his first 9 years, and on the Danish heath around Thyregod where he spent the next 6. He belonged to the *land*, and strongly believed that social change should come from the grass roots where the great majority of the people lived.

Grundtvig was acutely aware of the peasant wisdom that lay behind the many country proverbs and sayings. He collected and published 3,012 of them in 1845 under the title *Danish Proverbs and Sayings*. If and when the people were to be given their say in the running of the social and political life of the nation, the new nation-state should bear in mind this great store of folk wisdom. With the coming of democracy in 1849, the four estates gradually faded into the background. The legal privileges of the nobility were abolished – although today there are still some 200 so-called 'noble' families in the country, by and large a titular privilege. Little by little the three other estates became social classes, so that pastors and farmers, bankers and butchers all share one status nowadays. Similarly, although the very *first* franchise of 1849 was limited to 15% of all Danes, this nevertheless meant that 73% of all men over 30 had the vote. In 1915 the franchise was extended to all men *and* women over 25; it currently stands at 18 years old.

Grundtvig was born 7 years after the American revolution in 1776 and 6 years before the French in 1789. Who knew *what* would happen from then on? Was this the wind of freedom or of chaos? Grundtvig was conservative by nature, believing that Denmark was unique in having an *enlightened* absolute monarch who really *did* listen to his people – and who then did the right thing *for* them. The King's Law of 1665 had actually legitimised this relationship, with 'representatives of the people' establishing the king's absolute rule and the order of succession to his first son. Not only was Denmark unique, Grundtvig argued, it was also a country divinely blessed! Mob rule in 1789 and Napoleon's imperial ambition



3. The Four Estates of the Realm.

In the illustration from Bishop Frans of Viborg's album (c.1600) a sword is granted to the nobility, a sceptre to the king, a book to the clergy, and a flail to the peasantry.

in the 1810s had destroyed the French nation; the same must not be allowed to happen in Denmark. Philosophically, Grundtvig was already conjecturing that the future might lie with 'people rule', i.e. democracy. Already in 1819 he wrote in *On Church, State, and School*:

... We can also quite reasonably get it into our heads that the agreement between every man's demand and the interests of all can only be brought about by each man giving his vote and everything being decided by the most votes.

King Frederik VI (ruled 1808-39) admired Grundtvig for his translations into Danish of the Icelandic and Norse⁵ sagas, as well as of the great Anglo-Saxon epic poem, *Beowulf*, dating from the 8th century. He gave him an annual grant, and paid for his 3 trips to England in 1829, 1830, and 1831. Grundtvig was both flattered and honoured, and came home full of ideas of freedom based on education for *life* rather than for an occupation. When His Majesty dragged his feet at the very thought of 'government by the people', Grundtvig went

5. 'Norse' relates to the Viking Age of the 9th and 10th centuries, when the Norsemen reached as far as Canada, North Africa, and Central Asia, and wrote their Norse Sagas. Otherwise the preferred term throughout is 'Nordic'.

along with him, until both bowed to the people's pressure, and the King established four provincial advisory assemblies from 1835. Although these included citizens and farmers, the keyword for the King was 'advisory'; they were not to enjoy any *real* power.

Nonetheless, the stone was now rolling. It gained momentum with the demands for greater freedom that the four assemblies recommended. When Christian VIII succeeded Frederik VI in 1839, he was expected to *meet* these demands, and when he failed to do so, disappointment turned into active popular dissatisfaction. The National Liberal Party increased its pressure on the King, and when revolutions again broke out all over Europe in 1848, there was no way back for Denmark. To avoid any whiff of a popular uprising, Frederik VII signed the new democratic constitution into law on 5th June 1849. Grundtvig's ambiguity about the move is apparent in a witty speech he had given, with women present, as late as 26th April 1848:

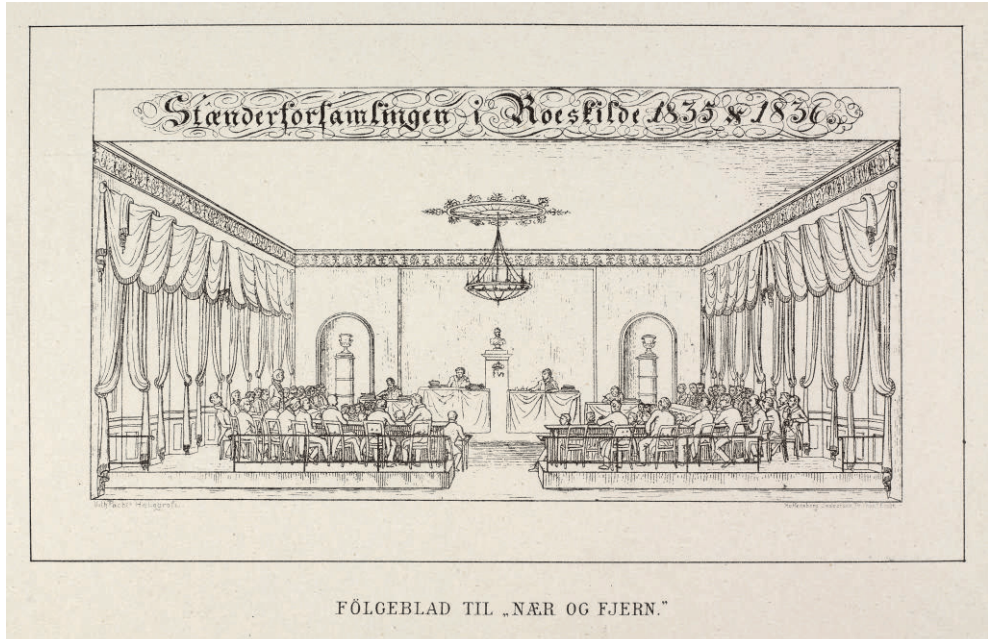
... not only am I royally minded, but more recently I have noticed that I am more royally minded than I ever realised myself! Now it is no longer enough for me just to *have* a king; now I would like to be a little king myself and see nothing but other little kings around me, just as long as we have learned the noblest art of all: the royal art of controlling oneself. Naturally I want to see nothing but small queens of Denmark around me too, not just where I am going to speak but *everywhere*, provided they have a little self-control (even if they are wearing crowns), and no claim on the government, but in all modesty settle for perhaps not a *powerless*, but nevertheless only an *advisory*, voice.⁶

Grundtvig nevertheless became a member of the Constituent Assembly that drew up the new constitution which legally moved the people from four estates into one nation. He promoted all forms of 'Danishness' to weld the country together, one of his favoured combinations being 'Fatherland and Mother-tongue' – linking history, territory, and governance to language and culture. Above all, in order to understand themselves Danes must learn about their past, and then learn *from* it. Their forefathers' experience was paramount in this process.

The new Danish reality

Denmark's geographical position may be a good way north of Europe's centre, but it was never independent of the rest of Europe. More often than not, what happened south of Denmark was a determining factor in its history, its development – and even its destiny. The country comprises the Jutland peninsula north of the German border plus 406 islands. The chief of these are Zealand (with the capital Copenhagen) and Funen. In area, Denmark is slightly bigger than the Netherlands, slightly smaller than Estonia, and about the size of the US state of Virginia. To move around the country, island ferries were essential – and also efficient. Whole trains transferred onto ferries to sail across the Little Belt and the Great Belt until two bridges, built in 1938 and 1998, linked the west to the

6. TCG, 252.



4. Roskilde Provincial Assembly in 1835-36.

On the plinth in the centre is a bust of King Frederik VI. To the left sits the Royal Commissioner, Anders (A.S.) Ørsted, later prime minister (1853-54). To the right, with his face turned towards the standing speaker, is the assembly president, Joachim (J.F.) Schouw. Heliograph by Vilhelm Pacht after a drawing by an unknown artist. Royal Danish Library.

east by road and rail. Denmark is simultaneously *protected* by water and easily *accessible* by water. Indeed it has lived off its water for much of its existence, both as a naval and as a fishing nation. The former helped Denmark to build a small empire, trading with its colonies abroad in India, West Africa, and the West Indies. But in the early 1800s the navy was lost, Norway was lost, and later the twin dukedoms of Schleswig-Holstein were lost. Multi-cultural, multi-lingual Denmark became a small heterogenic nation-state – all in Grundtvig’s lifetime.

Two potentially dangerous political factors had emerged in Europe around 1800: a growing nationalism, and competition for supremacy in Northern Europe. The French revolution shocked citizens across Europe. When the French king and queen were executed in 1793, and Napoleon Bonaparte seized power in 1799, monarchies such as the Danish feared for their lives. Caught between the major powers the Danish king took Napoleon’s side *against* Britain and set up a peace alliance with Russia, Sweden and Prussia – a fateful move. Copenhagen was shattered first by the British attack in 1801 and then by the British destruction of half the city in 1807. Denmark had chosen the losing side, with the loss of Norway at the Kiel peace negotiations in 1814 as a result. ‘Denmark’ in this case meant the absolute monarch himself, who since 1665 had enjoyed complete control over all three branches of power: the legislative, the executive, and the judicial.

In the meantime Prussia, which had been defeated by France in 1806, was back on the move. The old Holy Roman Empire had gone, but a new Federated States of Germany was formed in 1815, and looked to add the Danish duchies of Schleswig and Holstein to their number. This failed in the First Schleswig War (1848-51) but succeeded in the Second Schleswig War (1864). In 1870 the Federated States of Germany went on to defeat France, and from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century the now unified Germany was the strongest power in Europe. Denmark had to be very careful of its huge southern neighbour, but could not prevent Nazi Germany from occupying Denmark between 1940-45. Since the 1950s, however, and Denmark's entry into the European Union in 1972, there has been a new attitude of mutual respect on both sides.

In the midst of the political and military turmoil in Northern Europe, a strong existential, cultural and philosophical questioning was taking place: Who are we as a nation? Do we have a common way of thinking and acting that *unites* us? In Denmark, the academic and cultural elite had put down its roots in classical Latin and Greek culture. From the 1750s onwards the existential inspiration and cultural standards of Denmark followed Germany in the philosophies of rationalism and romanticism. Grundtvig was at first fascinated by German literature and philosophy, especially Goethe, Schiller, Fichte and Schelling, but he was critical of German rationalism and turned to his indigenous Danish cultural heritage of Nordic mythology and the oldest sources of Denmark's history. Among these he included the epic Old English poem, *Beowulf*, set in Denmark and Swedish Götland. He coupled these with his awareness of Scottish liberal ideas, and his practical experience of an industrialising England, where on his visits he was particularly struck by the repeated question: "Yes, but what do *you* do, Mr. Grundtvig?"⁷

As he made his way from country boy to city pastor, Grundtvig became increasingly aware of the injustices inherent in pre-democratic Denmark. His conscience was slowly awakened to the need for *reform*, but never for revolution. He was still both a royalist and a champion of "the educated world" at this point. He was 47 years old before he published his first genuinely political work, the 72-page *Political Observations with Regard to Denmark and Holstein* (1831).⁸ Prophetically, Grundtvig pointed out that the revolutions around Europe were creating a "new world of peoples", based on the irrefutable fact of language preference and mind-frame. He predicted that German-speaking Holstein could therefore no longer be part of Denmark and that sooner or later Schleswig would divide into a Danish-speaking and a German-speaking area; and indeed the former happened in 1864, the latter in 1920. In the same work Grundtvig also proposed "a high school for the pursuit of learning by the people and for civic training, which on the one hand would give students who wish to be part of the educated world the education that is actually required of them, and on the other hand would give the state a yardstick with which to draw its border-line." Grundtvig argued for freedom of expression, but only for those who had some learning, i.e. mature students and academics. Only later, as his ideas on freedom progressed, did he support an almost unrestricted press freedom. It is

7. (Schroder 1901, 105).

8. TCG, Text 15.

significant that Grundtvig wrote most of his works on education between 1831 and 1847, i.e. in the period between the announcement of the four Provincial Advisory Assemblies in 1831 and the change in the political system in 1848-49. Despite his reservations about democracy, Grundtvig was carried along by the tide, and his conversion to ‘government by the people’ was relatively swift.

The following diagram illustrates the many major changes during Grundtvig’s lifetime:

5. Social changes in Grundtvig’s lifetime

1783	1872
King’s sovereignty	People’s sovereignty
United monarchy	Nation-state
Royal law	Democratic constitution
Religious duty	Religious freedom
Mono-religious society	Multi-religious society
Multi-lingual	Mono-lingual
Time of the Estates	Time of the People

Source; Ove Korsgaard, *The Common Good* (2019) 25.

The last transition in the diagram is the one that concerned Grundtvig most – the Time of the Estates becoming the Time of the People. His earliest political concern for the Danish people was to improve the lot of the peasantry – not to introduce a democratic constitution. He realized that there can be no democratic nation – big or small – without a common identity for the people who belong to it. Since there can be no national identity without national educators, and since there is nothing for the national educators to teach without a foundation in history, Grundtvig cultivated what Anthony Smith calls a “cult of the ancestors”.⁹ This was the purpose of his plans for a people’s high school. Five teachers were indispensable, he asserted: for Danish language and literature, Danish history, Danish geography, Danish songs, and Danish law.

Changes in local life

In most respects the lords of the manor were the king’s representatives in local society. For instance, when Grundtvig sought to improve the miserable schooling conditions in Udby in 1811, it was to the local landowner, the king’s local administrator of education, that he had to write – and without much success, it must be added. Nevertheless, as the local landowners gradually lost power after the agricultural reforms, it was the pastors who took over as local leaders, including local schooling. The Education Act of 1814 was one of the most progressive in Europe, stipulating that all children should receive educa-

9. Hall et al, 51-78.

tion regularly between the ages of 7 and confirmation (between 14 and 19).¹⁰ This meant that in Denmark primary education *preceded* industrialisation. Following this reform, local community/parish councils came into being in 1841, with the pastor as a sitting member and most often the council chair, plus 4 to 9 other males elected by and among the peasant farmers. This was extended in 1867 into a ‘municipality’, charged with the administration of local affairs outside the boroughs, i.e. the major towns and cities. Following this, pastors were gradually phased out of local executive administration, though they retained their powers within the Church until the 20th century.

The new liberal politics introduced a general taxation and conscription. Tithing was replaced by an annual church tax at the beginning of the 20th century, and all farmers were gradually made freeholders. Grundtvig’s demand for “freedom for Loki as well as for Thor” (two opposing gods in Nordic Mythology) was being implemented slowly but surely. The speed was often determined by economic factors and technical development.

Grundtvig and his fiancé Lise had to wait 7 years before he had enough income to marry her; by then he was 34 and she was 31. The marriage age of the day was thus surprisingly high, 30 for men, and 28 for women. In Grundtvig’s time a household was a self-sustaining entity. Just as the country was governed by the king, and the manor by the lord, so was the household governed by the husband. All production and early education took place in the household, where leisure-time was at a minimum. Among the landed gentry and the clergy it was common to send children away to be educated by other families, when such an arrangement was convenient to both. Grundtvig’s 6 years away from home, from the age of 9 to 15, is an example of this. By today’s standards of freedom and security Grundtvig and his family lived a rather poor and economically insecure life.

Until around 1850 all hot meals in peasant homes were prepared over an open fire. Meat was boiled, fried, or roasted on a spit, but in the main, like fish, it was preserved either salted or smoked. Only during slaughtering, was the meat fresh; any mincing, which was rare, was done with a knife. Eaten with the meat were bread, cabbage, or preserved vegetables, such as dried peas, bottled beetroot, or apples, while fresh fruit and vegetables were only eaten in season. Around 1850 three major arrivals changed the home: the iron stove with an oven, the mince grinder, and the potato, a late arrival on the dinner table, and served with the meat or the fish. In the late 1800s the cooperative movement, often initiated by local students from the Grundtvigian people’s high schools, improved all areas of agriculture, enabling fresh meat and dairy products to be transported, while by the end of the century Copenhagen was sampling both *smørrebrød* (open sandwiches) and fancy cakes. In this development, energetic people managed to create freer conditions for their own lives, opening many new branches of business and production, free of previous restrictions.

10. To this day there is no compulsory school attendance in Denmark, only a compulsory teaching duty.

From State Church to People's Church/*folkekirken*

At the Reformation in 1536 the Danish king, Christian III, followed its leading protagonist Martin Luther (1483-1546) and its doctrinal Augsburg Confession of faith in 1530. Grundtvig was proud to have been born precisely 300 years after Luther. The 28 articles of the Augsburg Confession were the bedrock of Grundtvig's faith and remain legally valid to this day. The first ten articles can be summarised as follows:

1. God is Triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
2. The natural sin of human beings is redeemed through Holy Baptism and the Holy Spirit
3. God's son, Jesus Christ, is the incarnation of God. Jesus has atoned for human sin and reconciled humankind to God
4. Human beings are saved (justified) only through faith in Jesus Christ
5. To ensure that the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached throughout the world Jesus has established the Church and the holy ministry
6. Good deeds are the fruit of faith and salvation
7. There is only one holy Christian Church, and it is found wherever the gospel is preached in its truth and purity and the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion are administered according to the gospel
8. The twin sacraments are always valid because they are instituted by Christ
9. Baptism at any age is necessary, and signifies the grace of God
10. Christ's body and blood are truly present in, with, and under the bread and wine of the Sacrament. (The Lutheran doctrine of the real presence is more accurately and formally known as "the Sacramental Union", differing from 'transubstantiation')

Christianity was the king's religion. It was superior to all other religions, adhered to by all citizens, and disseminated to the Danish colonies. This included the people of Greenland following the arrival of the Danish missionary Hans Egede in 1721. Under the absolute monarch, a law was passed in 1735 making church-going compulsory in Denmark. It proved impossible to enforce and was widely ignored, and contemporary records show that by 1783, the year of Grundtvig's birth, only 10% of Danes went to Sunday service. However, the apathy towards church-going must not be interpreted to mean that the Danes were either irreligious or ignorant about Christianity. They simply could not see how worship could be relevant to their situation as peasant farmers. German pietism had made an impact in the 18th century but was now marginal. The only innovation was a Christian revival among lay people in the form of so-called 'godly assemblies' outside the Church. Grundtvig was favourably disposed towards *anyone* who wished to worship, and in his early years he considered himself a revivalist preacher, but he stayed *within* the Danish national church throughout his life, also when the State Church became the People's Church in 1849. All who were baptised were members, meaning 99.6% of the population

in 1849. They attended the rituals of baptism, confirmation, wedding, and funeral, but the majority found the worship and the pastor's long dogmatic sermons tedious. Today secularisation and immigration have brought the number of members of the People's Church down to 73.2% (2022), with another 10% belonging to other recognised religious bodies. As in Grundtvig's day membership comes automatically with baptism. All members of the People's Church still pay the annual church tax of 0.87% on average (2022), and 75% of the population attend a church gathering at least once a year. In this respect the Danish churches differ from most others in their widespread support among the people.

Trained as a theologian and seeing himself as a Christian prophet in the Old Testament style Grundtvig was at the heart of the transformation of the Danish Church. He opposed the bishops who wanted the new People's Church to be the same as the old State Church, but he drew the line at a democratically-elected synod to govern the Church. His ideal was the free congregation under the state umbrella, but with no state interference in the faith or the life of the congregation – a system that has aptly been termed, “well-organised anarchy”.

Education for life

When Grundtvig was born, young children had two duties: to help in the household as soon as they could, and to learn Luther's *Small Catechism* by heart in order to be confirmed in their faith in their early teens. Without confirmation they could not be considered adults. The Roman Catholic sacrament of Confirmation had been abolished by Luther and the Danish king, but it was reintroduced in 1736 by Christian VI, not as a *sacrament* but as a means to educate loyal, Christian citizens. Like other Pietists of the time, the King thought his people had become ignorant of their Christian faith. In consequence of this restrictive measure, without baptism and confirmation one could not marry, become a soldier, run a business, be a godparent, witness in court, or take Holy Communion. The parish clerk helped with the teaching of confirmands alongside a number of other duties, being the middleman between the pastor and the peasantry. Slow learners of the catechism were browbeaten, and the totally recalcitrant were detained until the pastor was satisfied. Confirmed youngsters were issued with a character reference book, which also listed bad or criminal conduct. Grundtvig protested long and hard but in vain at this intertwining of Church and State politics and demanded that there be no *civil* consequences of people's faith or of their standing in the church. He argued that the teaching of confessional Christianity should be removed from all public schools, as this was an issue for the Church only. This finally happened in 1975.

From 1736 the State had had to ensure that all youngsters had access to teaching *before* their compulsory confirmation. The Education Act of 1739 had introduced a teaching duty available for all children, which involved the inculcation of selected religious texts, but also included the training of reading and writing abilities. In 1791, Denmark opened

its first teacher-training college in Copenhagen,¹¹ and, as we have already seen, Denmark's Education Act of 1814 instituted 7 years of education free of charge for all children, as well as the opportunity to lead the singing in churches on Sundays! In the country children attended every other day, in the cities every day. Not every child went to school of course, for parents needed them on the farms so much so that they ignored the threat of fines for absence – and for the most part got away with it. This resulted in the opening of many new schools run by gradually more qualified teachers and the opportunity for children to be active in church. From 1814 onwards city children went to school 6 half-days a week, and country children 3 half-days a week. The basic subjects were Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic. In 1820 a Teachers' Association was founded by teachers in private schools. By 1880 some 200,000 children were attending country schools, only 40,000 town and city schools.

Songs and ballads were not uncommon in Grundtvig's youth, but they took a huge step forward with his own contribution from the 1830s onwards. Referring to the 1840s, the folklorist Karen Toxværd wrote in 1914: "In those days the peasants bought neither books nor ballad collections, but they sang a lot, and when they learned a ballad, they wrote it down on any piece of paper they could get hold of, and sewed the pieces together in a book."¹²

The people's high school movement and its counterpart, 'Danish Society', a popular society for the promotion of Danish, consciously employed community singing to further Grundtvig's ideas and to consolidate 'the Fatherland and the Mother-tongue'. After Grundtvig's 34th lecture in the Within Living Memory series in 1838 the audience spontaneously broke out into song – Grundtvig's *own* song about the Danish naval hero, Peter Willemoes, who had fought against Lord Nelson in 1801. By tradition, this was where the widespread Danish custom of community singing was born. At the famous meeting on 4th July 1844 at Skamling Hill there was both community singing and choral singing, including the song that was to become Denmark's national song, 'There is a lovely land.' National songs soon became an integral part of Denmark, witness this excerpt from the 21-year-old Peter Boisen, the teacher of 37 students at Uldum People's High School in 1859:

I sing for all I am worth, and they roar along with me like thunder! I urge them to sing from the heart, even though they sound no better than the owls of the night. The schoolroom ceiling is far too low, so the tobacco smoke and the fumes of the many people present gather under the beams and drip down, worst of all on the teacher's platform, so I have to put on my raincoat! But it makes no difference; there is such *spirit* here and always good humour; that is the main thing!¹³

Grundtvig was always interested in what young people were learning. In the 1840s he even edited school textbooks with patriotic songs and Norse and Greek myths.

11. Preceded by cf. Reims, France 1685, and followed by Concord, USA 1823, Genadendal, South Africa 1838, and Chester, UK 1839.

12. (*Dansk folkemindesamling: dafos.dk*).

13. (Skovmand, 158).

So, how well equipped were the children to be the good citizens needed for the coming Time of the People? On 25th July 1851 some 10,000 people gathered at Lejre, the legendary home of Denmark's prehistoric kings. They were celebrating Constitution Day and a famous victory over Prussia at Idstedt. Grundtvig was proud to be invited as the main speaker, and as he left the meeting to take the train back to Copenhagen, he passed a group of happy country girls and asked two of them how they liked the two songs they had sung: 'Denmark, loveliest field and meadow' (by himself) and the new victory song, 'Danes have won the vict'ry'. The girls said they liked the tunes, but did not know the words. Grundtvig encouraged them to learn both by heart, for they were the rhythmic pulse of the new Denmark.



6. Landscape with view to Udby.

Painting 1853, Vilhelm Kyhn. Frederiksborg Museum of National History. Photo: Hans Petersen.

2. The path enlightened by our fathers' worth

“He is above all a rooted man.”¹⁴ With this bold statement, Grundtvig’s English biographer, Donald Allchin, asserts that we cannot understand Grundtvig without digging deep into the four roots of his heritage and his own self-understanding. He is primarily rooted in the history of Denmark and the history of Christianity, and these two histories merge into his understanding of God’s purpose in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. This third root is *world* history, as Grundtvig makes clear in his three works on the subject in 1812, 1814, and 1817, and in the three later volumes, *Handbook of World History* 1833-43. However, there is a fourth and in many ways an even richer root nourishing Grundtvig: his own family history. To illustrate or justify his choices and battles he repeatedly turns in prose and poetry to his ancestors, and not least to the four generations of pastors on his father’s side. Thus the word ‘forefathers’ appears no fewer than 162 times in the five previous volumes in this series.

Grundtvig himself believed that it was the family that decided who you were and who you might become. This is apparent not only from his many references to his forefathers in his own life, but also from his only personal attempt to write a brief biography. When his patron, Count Christian Danneskiold-Samsøe died in 1823, Grundtvig and his brother-in-law, Pastor Poul Glahn from the Count’s parish, decided to publish a book about the Count’s life and achievements – though in the event the book was never published.

In the high-flown and often freely imaginative style of the times Grundtvig wrote a detailed draft of his contribution in which he expressly rejected the idea that we are born with a *tabula rasa*, an empty tablet upon which our family and environment can freely etch their influence. Instead he paid tribute to “the ancient tenet that everyone takes after what they have come from”. Grundtvig had no modern theories about the relation between heredity and environment, yet his entire organic thinking affirms that we must never neglect, let alone reject, the context into which we are born. As with the multitude of peoples throughout world history, as with the many and various historical churches, as with the generations that make up the history of Denmark, and as with every single individual, we all stand on the shoulders of our predecessors. Every new-born child is unique, and will lead a unique life, however long or short; but in Grundtvig’s time it was the family that set the basic framework around that life.

In depicting the most important features in Grundtvig’s ancestral history we follow his first great biographer, Frederik Rønning, and his third son, Frederik Lange Grundtvig: on the basis of comprehensive source studies, both men published their works in 1904. For the family history we follow primarily his son Frederik’s notes, collected in *The Origins of the Grundtvig Family*. From the list below, going back to 1618, we can see that on his father’s side between 1706 and 1811 Grundtvig had no fewer than 11 ‘forefathers’ who were pastors, all of them on Zealand – an ancestry that was a major influence on his own self-understanding. He was proud of this patrilinear descent:

14. Allchin, 1997, 16.

Morten Tuesen (died 1618), Mayor of Nykøbing
father of 8, including

Jørgen Mortensen (1609-57), also Mayor of Nykøbing
father of

Morten Jørgensen Grundtvig (1642-77), alderman
& Hans Jørgensen Grundtvig (1644-1700), alderman, recorder (1682) in Nykøbing
father of 5, including

Morten Grundtvig (?- 1736), recorder in Nykøbing
& Niels Hansen Grundtvig (1670-1737), parish pastor in Svallerup (1706)
& Jørgen Hansen Grundtvig (1671-1712), parish pastor in Kregme-Vinderød (1697)
father of 6, including

Isak Jørgen Grundtvig (1697-1767), parish pastor in Strø (1722) & Hillerød (1725-34)
& Otto Jørgensen Grundtvig (1704-72), parish pastor on Sejerø (1732)
& Vallekilde-Hørve (1760)
father of 9, including

Jørgen Grundtvig (1733-87), parish pastor on Sejerø (1760) and in Ledøje-Smørum (1772)
& Christian Grundtvig (1737-97), parish pastor in Gladsaxe-Herlev (1780)
& Enoch Grundtvig (1744-85), parish pastor in Ude & Oppe Sundby (1778)
& Johan Ottosen Grundtvig (1734-1813), parish pastor in Odden (1766) & Udby-Ørslev
(1776)
father of N.F.S. Grundtvig and 4 siblings, including

1. Otto Grundtvig (1772-1843), parish pastor in Torkilstrup, Falster (1800), rural dean
(1805), parish pastor in Gladsaxe & Herlev (1823)
2. Jacob Grundtvig (1775-1800), pastor in Guinea (1799)
3. Niels Grundtvig (1777-1803), pastor in Guinea (1802)
4. Ulrikke Grundtvig (1782-1805)

5. Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872), called Frederik
father with Elisabeth (Lise) Blicher (1787-1851) of

1. Johan Nikolai Blicher Grundtvig (1822-1907), historian & archivist
2. Svend Hersleb Grundtvig (1824-83), literary historian and folklorist
3. Meta Cathrine Marie Bang Grundtvig (1827-87), in 1847 m. Peter Boisen,
who became Grundtvig's curate 1854-62

and father with Ane Marie Elise Toft, née Carlsen (1813-54) of
Frederik Lange Grundtvig (1854-1903), folklorist and pastor in Clinton, Iowa, USA
(1883-1900)

and father with Asta Tugendreich Adelheid Reedtz, née Krag-Juel-Vind-Frijs (1826-90) of
Asta Marie Elisabeth Frijs Grundtvig (1860-1939)

Patrilinear descent

As we can see from the above list, the name 'Grundtvig' was first used by Morten Jørgensen Grundtvig around 1670. Researching the name, Grundtvig's son Frederik noted:

As far as we know, this is the first time the name 'Grundtvig' appears in written records; it is also spelt as Grundtwig, Grundtwiig, Gruntwij, Gruntvig, Grundwiig and Gruntwiig. Its origin is unknown, but it is undoubtedly a place-name. N.F.S. Grundtvig writes that it 'very likely' comes from Rørvig. But this seems less than probable. Possibly on Ise Fjord there was a place called 'Grundtvig'.¹⁵

On his father's side Grundtvig came from a family of active villagers in the fishing-port of Nykøbing in North-west Zealand (pop. 1740=350; 1787=532). They assumed local responsibility on the village council, and included two local mayors and a number of village 'recorders', or record-keepers. Although in 1700 the pastor and the recorder had fallen out with each other, the latter, Hans Jørgensen Grundtvig (1644-1700), nevertheless encouraged two of his own sons to study for the priesthood. This was a sure way to climb the social ladder, despite the surplus of theology students queuing up to become parish pastors. Eventually, the two sons did become pastors, while a third became the recorder in Nykøbing, Zealand.

Most of the sons and male cousins read theology at Copenhagen University with a view to a permanent pastoral benefice afterwards. The majority of Grundtvig's patrilinear uncles and distant cousins also became pastors, as did his three elder brothers, Jacob, Niels, and Otto. There were not so many other studies available at Copenhagen University, where Theology functioned as a 'mother-subject' for many others. The supreme professional title was 'Professor of Theology', towards which many other professors aspired – at least until 1830:

Around 1830 at least half of the university's roughly 1,000 students from the Faculty of Theology occupied prominent positions in society. However, in the course of the century the situation changed, and by 1900 the faculties of Medicine, Law, and Theology were more or less the same size, with 500 students in each, whereas the Humanities and Natural Sciences were somewhat smaller.¹⁶

Grundtvig's family of pastors had its background in semi-prospering citizens, most of them devout and orthodox pastors, but also powerful figures, who often had to work under difficult conditions. He himself was most impressed by his grandfather Otto's ability to assert himself physically in the face of refractory parishioners and a confrontational, drunken parish clerk on the island of Sejerø. Grundtvig's son Frederik recounts the episode:

15. (Grundtvig F.L., 17).

16. (Grane, col. 325).

Close to the church there was an inn, where up to Sunday service a number of farmhands would always sit drinking. He wished to put an end to this unacceptable practice, but all his admonitions were in vain. One Sunday morning before church Otto turned up at the inn. There sat his parishioners drinking around a long oak table. He spoke harsh words to them about their ungodliness; but one man, Mads Jutland, sitting at the end of the table became so furious that he leaped up, drew a knife from his belt and said, "What has it got to do with him? If he does not control himself, there will be an accident!" At this the pastor tore open his cassock, bared his breast, went up to him, and shouted in his face, "Stab me, if you dare!" And when Mads Jutland let the knife fall, Otto said, "You coward! You dare to *threaten* me, but not to *stab* me!" And straightaway he gave him such a box on the ear that the man fainted. "I am going to church now," he said, as he left the inn. "Whoever wants to can follow me!" And they all got up and followed him.¹⁷

There were also debilities in the family. Aged only 37, Otto's brother Isak was pensioned off as chapel pastor at Fredensborg Palace for his mental fragility, while one of father Johan's brothers lost his mind and died, aged 38. Quite often sons who rejected the priesthood fell on hard times. Another of Johan's brothers emigrated first to England, then to Germany, then to Russia, where he disappeared without trace.

When Grundtvig was a child in Udby he read about the achievements of Martin Luther and felt a 'Little Luther rising up in me'.¹⁸ He later identified closely with Luther, on whose insights he built and then transcended. Within his own family he was encouraged to identify with the brave Pastor Otto who bared his breast to the knife, ready for a fight:

You bravely bared your breast
against the reckless knife
that threatened you with steel.¹⁹

Yet Grundtvig realised that his grandfather's courage was ultimately in a good cause:

For that holy sound you prayed,
when your organ-pipes were played;
there was nought but parish wonder
when you spoke with voice like thunder
roaring at the people's sin,
when you preached the end is nigh,
sought the Word to clarify.

The impact of 'the forefathers' was reinforced even after Grundtvig's death, when his son Frederik, unable to shake off his father's influence, emigrated to the USA. Long after his

17. (Grundtvig, F.L., 47-48).

18. (*New Year's Morning*, 1824, st. 68).

19. (*Roskilde Rhymes*, 1812).

father's death Frederik had a dream which he described to his brother Svend in a letter dated 27th September 1881:

Last night I dreamed that I was out on a big river. Three boats came up. In the one sat my father, in the second my grandfather, and in the third my great-grandfather. All three of them looked sad, but my father and grandfather embraced me and kissed me on the brow without saying anything, and their boat went away. So only my great-grandfather remained (i.e. Otto, ed.). He looked very much like my father. But his face was smaller, his eyes somewhat bigger, and his hair and beard dark grey. He spoke in a gruff tone, asking me why I would not stay in the Fatherland, and threatening to have my name deleted from the family tree. He refused to hear what I had to say, but turned round and rowed away. But some time later he came back, and now I could barely recognise him. The tears were running down his cheeks, and he embraced me and kissed me softly on the brow.²⁰

Matrilinear descent

In 1731 Grundtvig's grandfather Otto married Marie Lauenstein (1706-55). She bore 11 children in 14 years, including Grundtvig's father, Johan, in 1734. The legacy from his father's family that weighed on Grundtvig's one shoulder weighed no less heavily than the legacy from his mother's on the other. For his mother's family were just as insistent that the boy should make something of himself in order to honour *her* family. Was he not *proud* to inherit the name of 'Bang', famous throughout generations of Danes? When Grundtvig's mother, Cathrine Marie Bang, aged 20, married Johan, aged 33, in 1768, he had just been called to his first pastorate at Odden, Zealand. She in contrast had grown up on the manor estate of Egebjerggaard, North Zealand, as the daughter of Niels Bang, a King's Councillor of the 2nd Rank and Steward of the Royal Manor in Odsherred. She was proud to trace her descent back to the famous Hvide family, whose oldest-known forefather was Skjalm Hvide (died c. 1113). Cathrine had 8 siblings and 8 step-siblings. Among the former was Frederik Bang (1747-1820), a highly-respected doctor at Frederiks Hospital, Copenhagen, and stepfather of Jakob (J.P.) Mynster, Bishop of Zealand (1834-54), who turned out to be Grundtvig's theological adversary. Another of Cathrine's siblings, Susanne, was the mother of the philosopher, Henrik Steffens, a cousin who was to play a major role in Grundtvig's understanding of Romanticism. In 'To Cathrine Marie Bang, My Beloved Mother' (1815) Grundtvig acknowledged his debt to his mother:

Once you bore beneath your heart
all my sight and song submerged,
brought them to this world in pain,
from your womb this bard emerged.
In the ancient hero-days
he has roots through you inspired,

20. (Høirup 1955, 84).

and a sense of song and self,
with your noble blood acquired.²¹

In his close study of Grundtvig's relationship to his ancestry on both sides, Steen Johansen states that in appearance Grundtvig resembled his mother, while in later life he looked just like his cousin Oluf, again on his mother's side; this was true both of his facial features and especially his mild but somewhat inscrutable eyes.²² Like Grundtvig, cousin Olaf had 'an enormous desire to write and rhyme', as well as a vitality that was characteristic of his mother's family rather than his somewhat sterner father's side. It was not only Luther who taught Grundtvig to "go forward through life cheerfully", as he himself put it;²³ he had also inherited this trait from his mother's family. It was the mental instability on his *father's* side that occasionally surfaced in the son. Grundtvig accepted this: "People's spiritual abilities, like their physical features, depend largely on their origins."²⁴ Other features that Steen Johansen notes are Grundtvig's height, c. 172-73 cm (quite tall for the time), his build, described as 'sturdy' and 'straight-backed', and his long-lived family.

Cathrine was a strong-willed woman, whose motto was: Rather dead than irresolute! She had been advised to smoke tobacco for her health and this she did from a long pipe. Grundtvig's tribute poem to his mother acknowledged that it was she who taught him to read and write, and then kept him at his studies until he left home, aged 9.

Mother, I will not spell out
how I caused you since to moan;
no one in this vale of dust
knows except for God alone.
But my thanks I bring you here,
bless you with good Jesus' grace;
let my harp sing out for you
sinking in your warm embrace.²⁵

Grundtvig sent the finished poem to his mother and in a letter dated 5th July 1815 she thanked him with the words: "I have read your verses to me and was much moved by them" (Letter II).

Both his mother Cathrine, and his paternal grandmother Marie, had kept four of their sons at their books in order for them to follow their forefathers into the Church, despite the small clerical income. Each pastorate functioned as a farm, but in contrast to the manor farms where inheritance could pass from father to son, there were no inheritance

21. No. 129 in *LW*.

22. (Eller, 18).

23. (BFOTG I, 43).

24. (*A Brief View of World History in Context*, 1812).

25. No. 129 in *LW*.

rights for children of *retired* pastors. Once the pastor left the living, that was that – as Grundtvig was to discover in 1813 when he applied for his late father's living and was rejected. His talents were indeed many, but despite being already 30 years old his pastoral experience was by then limited to the last two years in Udby. It is fair to conjecture that the same sense of legacy and duty that in 1810 brought him home from Copenhagen also kept him in his parents' affection on his path to serving the Church. After 1810 there was one task more important than all others, and that was to witness to God and to His purpose with human life.

A distinctive though not unequivocal testimony to Grundtvig's relationship with his parents and their respective family traditions can be found in Letters 2 and 3. When father Johan's health was definitively failing in 1810 and they called their son home to help out in the parish, Grundtvig showed his filial duty to his father but made it clear that he had another calling than the Church in mind, one that he would rather not abandon (Letter 2). In a missing letter, his mother took him severely to task for his hesitant response, to which he replied with unusual intensity in a self-justifying defence of his literary calling (Letter 3). He acknowledged their albeit limited financial support throughout his life so far, but he was unwilling to help them out in their old age – at least for the time being (Letter 4). In the end, however, he bent his will to his mother's wish and returned home – at the price of a mental breakdown and a religious crisis.

If the boys in many an educated family were to become pastors, what about the girls? Most of them married and settled into their husband's position, though for some this came later rather than sooner; they were called upon to give priority to their aging parents, especially if it was the father who outlived his wife – as in grandfather Otto's case. In addition, married brothers and sisters often 'inherited' an unmarried sister, who lent a hand in the household or in some cases even managed it. Grundtvig himself knew the magnitude of the task: what was a poor son to do if there was no sister to look after his parents when they grew old? On 7th March 1805 Grundtvig was back in Udby, where not only the maid and his mother were ill, but also his sister Ulrikke, who was suffering from an abdominal inflammation. She had been his "best friend" in childhood, but now Grundtvig tersely wrote in his diary:

I would be so sad if my sister died, though not so much for her sake. With her lack of money, beauty, unusual talents, and the cheerfulness of a warm soul, she will hardly be happy. I would be sad more for my own and my aging parents' sake, for who would then look after their house? Who would take care of my ailing mother? It would be sad, and if I lost a sister, I would probably also lose my mother.

Ulrikke died shortly after, aged 23. Among her belongings was a love-letter from the young student who had taught her to play the piano!

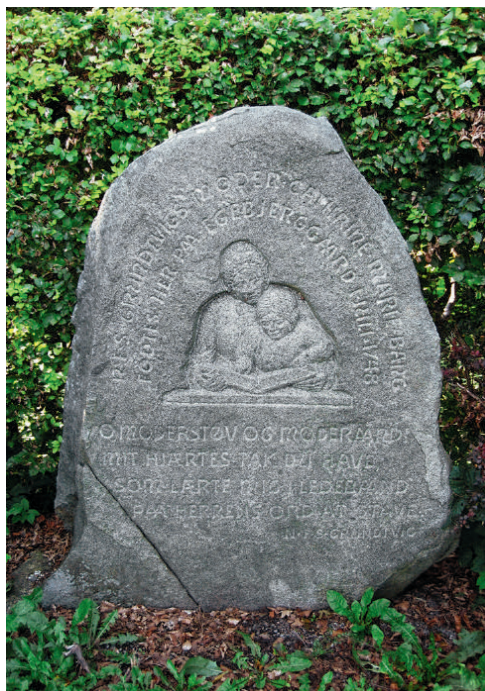
The struggle against early death and poverty

Emphasising Grundtvig's family roots – including those he himself engendered – is not solely in order for us to begin at the beginning; it is also in order to argue for a *continuity* that ran throughout his life. This is before the individualism that characterises our age today, where 'family' has become an ever-more-diffuse concept. In Grundtvig's day 'family' meant primarily the *household*, i.e. the family itself and all other residents. In the 1787 census there were 14 people living in the vicarage at Udby. Everyone contributed to the farm maintenance and the household welfare, but Pastor Johan's stipend was the sole income from outside the home.

The extended family here comprises the Grundtvig core family, house tutors, house labourers, and various other accumulated members. With these roots in the South Zealand countryside in the late 18th century Grundtvig was born into a family of which he was always proud. The legacy of the forefathers can be seen in the Christian names of the sons: thus father Johan's middle name was 'Ottosen' (son of Otto). Grundtvig's first brother was named after his grandfather, his second brother after his mother's stepfather, his third brother after his mother's father, and his sister after her maternal grandmother. Grundtvig himself was baptised 'Nicolai' after the husband of his late paternal aunt, followed by 'Frederik Severin' after the same aunt, Frederikke Severine.

Although life expectancy at the time was no more than 40, we can see from Grundtvig's family tree that many of his ancestors and siblings died much older: his grandfather Otto at 68, his father Johan at 79, and his brother Otto who reached the ripe old age of 60. Against these figures Grundtvig's own 88 years and 11 months are nevertheless incredible, especially since he never took exercise, smoked a strong pipe tobacco, and slept many a night in an armchair. At 50 he called himself an old man, while at 55 his lecture series 'Within Living Memory' was couched as memories and conclusions from a long life coming to an end. And yet he remarried and fathered a child, and then remarried and fathered yet another child at the age of 76! Quite extraordinarily, all five of his children actually *survived* him – their deaths coming respectively in 1883 (Svend, aged 59), 1887 (Meta, aged 60), 1903 (Frederik, aged 49), 1907 (Johan, aged 85) and 1939 (Asta, aged 79), 67 years after her father's death. Grundtvig was deeply grateful for their lives and their good health, as he wrote to Lise from England: "Thank you, dear Lise, for eleven years of loving companionship and for our lovely children" (Letter 20, 1829). And again, writing of their three children, Johan, Svend, and Meta, he speaks of "the threefold love-tie that our children represent" (Letter 32, 1831).

Throughout the generations listed above outright poverty never touched the Grundtvigs, but occasionally they lived close to the poverty line – until, that is, N.F.S. Grundtvig himself married his second and third wives, both wealthy widows. By comparison, once the death duties had been paid, grandfather Otto could leave nothing to his children. Father Johan for his part had lived a decidedly spartan life for 6 years as curate to older pastors. He had to take out a loan to buy the vicarage in Odden, when he finally became parish pastor in 1766 at the age of 32. When he moved to Udby in 1776, the old vicarage there had to be totally renovated, while from his meagre salary he had to pay the house tutors



8. Memorials to Grundtvig's parents.

A memorial to Johan at Udby Church, and a memorial to Cathrine at Egebjerggaarden (south of Nykøbing, Zealand) where she was born in 1748; on the granite stone erected in 1915 she is teaching her son to read. Photo: Edward Broadbridge.

and then the sons' schooling and university expenses. Actual earnings from the vicarage farm were paltry, and the size of the tithes that the parishioners owed him fluctuated considerably. Illustration 7 shows a household of 14 people with only one earner – Johan.

The uncertain outlook for his sons, Jacob and Niels, led them to offer their pastoral services abroad. Initially, Jacob was intended for the Danish colony of Greenland, but in the end, and at a 3-year interval, they both went to the tiny Danish colony on the Gold Coast – in present-day Accra, Ghana. From 1659-1850 Denmark had a small but profitable colony here. Its trade was not only in gold and ivory, which were sent back to Denmark, but also in thousands of slaves, who were sent to the Danish West Indies. After 4 years pastoral service, Grundtvig's elder brothers could expect to find a living back in Denmark – but they died of malaria and neither of them made it home. Jacob had been a resounding success, Niels a resounding failure. But rooted in the Church they had both been: Grundtvig's parents, Johan and Cathrine, had four sons, who all became pastors.

The reason that the Grundtvigs did not go bankrupt in Udby was that mother Cathrine had a brother, Major Carl Bang (1754-1806), who had married the rich widow of a brewer in 1798. When the major died in 1806, followed by his wife in 1807, the assets were divided

between the two families, and Cathrine inherited the substantial sum of 3014 rigsdaler.²⁶ This explains how Johan could provide his son with the 200 rigsdaler needed for his pastoral vestments when he was appointed curate in Udby in 1811; at last his parents could see him in the pulpit of his childhood church. The path had been “enlightened by his fathers’ worth”.²⁷

26. A rigsdaler was the Danish name for the silver coin first minted in 1518 after the discovery of vast silver reserves in Bohemia. It was in use in Denmark long before the word *daler* was officially minted on the coin in the late 18th century, until it gave way to the present-day *kroner* in 1873. At that date the conversion rate was 1 *rigsdaler* = 2 *kroner* = c. 100 *kroner* in 2022.

27. No. 86 in *LW*.



9.

Above. **The fertile fields of Zealand.** *Marklandskab med en bro*, Vilhelm Kyhn, 1858. SMK, National Gallery of Denmark.

Below. **The Jutland heath.** *En jysk fårebonde på heden*, Frederik Vermehren, 1855. SMK, National Gallery of Denmark.