

# Review of *Solstad*

By

James A. Peterson

James Alsak Peterson (1859-1928) was a lawyer by profession, a politician who failed to win high office, a defendant in a famous sedition prosecution and, late in life, a novelist. *Solstad: The Old and the New*, his second novel, was published in 1923 by the Augsburg Publishing House in Minneapolis, Minnesota. It was reviewed in 1 *Scandinavia* 87 (April 1924):

**JAMES A. PETERSON: SOLSTAD; THE OLD AND THE NEW. MINNEAPOLIS: AUGSBURG PUBLISHING HOUSE.**

Every attempt to tell in English some fragment of the record of Scandinavian pioneers in the United States deserves more than passing attention for it is a chapter almost entirely unknown to those who read only English. If for no other reason, this in itself would be sufficient to justify the appearance of this book; but there are also other reasons why "Solstad" should appeal to a large number of readers, for it is a realistic story of family life in Norway and among some Norwegian pioneers of the American northwest.

Mr. Peterson has written a fascinating novel in which the development of the plot engages the interest of the reader from beginning to end, and as a cultural document depicting the hopes and disappointments, the pleasures, and the sorrows, of a group of people it should take its place among the works which for both racial and other reasons convey a quite special message to Americans of Scandinavian birth and extraction, for it is nothing less than a page of that part of American history which has escaped the attention of the general public.

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# SCANDINAVIA

VOL. I

MARCH, 1924

No. 3



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SCANDINAVIA

A MINNESOTA PIONEER STORY

## SOLSTAD

THE OLD AND THE NEW

A STORY BY

JAMES A. PETERSON

AUTHOR OF

"Hjalmar, or The Immigrant's Son"

A FASCINATING STORY of pioneer life in Minnesota—of gold digging in California—of hopes and ambitions, love and complications.

A TALE, true to life, as only he who himself has grown up with the new empire of the Northwest can tell it.

A CHAPTER from the great history of the Americanization of a sturdy race.

"SOLSTAD" is another tangible proof of the ever increasing interest in the heretofore unwritten history of the hardy pioneers of the Northwest. The second and third generations of the first settlers are beginning to see the romance, the adventure, the history-making of their fearless ancestors, to whom they owe so much of their present progress and comfort.

Mr. James A. Peterson, the well known Minneapolis lawyer, a native of Wisconsin, has produced in "Solstad" a book which has much more than a local appeal. It depicts a piece of American history that has a message to the whole nation.

**344 Pages, Cloth, \$1.65**

It was mentioned in the "News and Comment" section of *Minnesota History* 80-81 (March 1925):

*Solstad, the Old and the New* is the title of a new novel by James A. Peterson (1923. 344 p.) which has its setting in Minnesota and the Far West before the Civil War and is centered about the theme of the Norwegian immigrant and his reaction to the American environment.

In addition, it is discussed by scholars of Norwegian-American literature. From Aagot D. Hoidahl, "Norwegian-American Fiction, 1880-1928" in *5 Studies and Records* 61 (1930, Norwegian-American Historical Association online):

James A. Peterson has published two novels of Norwegian-American life: *Hjalmar, or the Immigrant's Son*, 1922; and *Solstad: The Old and the New*, 1923. The first is a combination of two stories, that of Peter Aspelund, and that of Hjalmar Summere. We are given pictures of the daily life and the interests of the immigrants and of the part played by the Norwegians in the Civil War. The second book, *Solstad*, is the story of a baby, later named Arne, who was washed ashore from a schooner wrecked somewhere on the northern coast of Norway. After the death of his foster mother, Arne was bound out to Knute Solstad, a rich farmer in the neighborhood. Knute had a daughter, Gunhild, a trifle younger than Arne. The years passed. Arne learned to love Gunhild. After his term of service was at end, Arne left Norway for America, where he hoped to gain enough wealth to buy land and build a home for Gunhild. He was successful and a few years later returned to Norway for his promised bride. Fate played the proper cards, for he returned to America not only with Gunhild but also with "Nora of the Mill," who proved to be his mother. A few years later Solstad and his wife came to America to visit Gunhild and her family. It was not long before Knute, too, became imbued with the American spirit

and asked to be taken to the county seat so he could flake out his "first papers" and vote for "Mr. Linkin." In this book are pictured the usual trials and difficulties of the early Norwegian-American settlers. One feels that these are authentic and yet one is not particularly excited by them. This is probably due to the looseness in the construction of the plot, especially in the weaving of the stories of Nora and Arne.

From Dorothy Burton Skardal, "The Scandinavian Immigrant Writer in America" in *21 Studies and Records* 14 (1962, Norwegian-American Historical Association online):

Other English-language novelists of Scandinavian background can be classified according to their interest in immigrant themes. Among authors of one or two volumes, some privately printed, James A. Peterson may represent those who wrote only about immigrant life as they knew it at first hand. *Hjalmar, or the Immigrant's Son* (Minneapolis, 1922) and *Solstad: The Old and the New* (Minneapolis, 1923) communicate many of the problems and attitudes of two generations of Norwegian immigrants, despite an awkwardness in construction and style.

