Recollections of My Father, O. E. Rølvaag

by ELLA VALBORG TWEET

A thick fringe of islands protects the long Norwegian coast from the onslaughts of the northern seas. One of these, lying just south of the Arctic circle is Dønna, which, except for two heights, is a low mass of rock and heath. On the northwest side, along a barren, rocky, windswept inlet lies the hamlet of Rølvaag. Walking eastward, across moor and rock, one comes upon a low mountain with a shrubby growth of aspen and birch on the seaward side, and plantations of mountain ash and fir along the southern slopes. Nearby is an old, thick-walled stone church dating back to the twelfth century, and beyond lies the school. The high, angular outline of the mountain on the southern point of the island is in sharp contrast. Its jagged peaks resemble the features of a man lying with his face to the sky--like a giant struck suddenly dead. At Rølvaag, facing this Dønna-man, a cluster of small homes, low and sod-roofed, stand silhouetted against the sky. In summer, in the brilliant never-ending daylight, the heart sings and laughter comes easily, but the long dark days of winter and its violent storms are cause for deep depression.

No one knows when the first people settled here, but history tells of famous Viking chieftains who sailed up the inlets to their homes on the island. For generations these island people have made their living on the sea -- fishing in the home waters in summer, and in winter, sailing several hundred miles to the Lofoten Islands to seek the cod. Along the northwest side of the island it is only in the clefts that there is soil enough to raise small patches of grain, a few potatoes and other hardy root vegetables. Until very recent times most families had one or two cows; and in summer, a few sheep were moved from islet to islet for grazing. Each family owned carefully conserved stretches of peatland and was allowed to harvest enough peat to dry for fuel.

The ancestors of the family at present living at Rølvaag settled on the ridge above the water seven generations ago. In about 1870, Peder Benjamin Jakobsen brought his bride, Ellering (Ella) Vaag to his parental home. Peder was the second son of a family of four children. His elder brother, Gunnar Berg, early showed intellectual vigor; at the age of eighteen be became an itinerant schoolmaster; after several years of teaching, he was awarded financial aid to attend a teachers' college at Tromsø. Following completion of the course of study, he returned to a neighboring parish to spend a lifetime as a highly-regarded teacher. A younger brother also left Rølvaag, studied and worked

for a time in Trondheim, but finally emigrated to the United States, settling in South Dakota.

Peder Benjamin Jakobsen, according to his sons, also showed latent abilities, but for one reason or another, he remained at Rølvaag. He was respected by his neighbors and, by the standards of his community, was considered a good provider. Besides being an able fisherman he also had skill as a carpenter and cabinet-maker, to which many items in the old home bear witness. He was a voracious reader and, at a time when newspapers in the home were uncommon, he subscribed to two metropolitan papers. One of his daughters recalled how eagerly the whole family looked forward to the arrival of the mail boat. They read every article and discussed the issues of the day. The serialized novels were carefully clipped and saved for re-reading through the long winter evenings. Peder was fond of music and loved to sing and enjoyed playing tunes on his violin. He also loved an argument, and held his own in many a debate on some fine theological point.

The family has no pictures of Ella Vaag who came to Rølvaag from the eastern side of the island, but those who remember her, describe her as physically strong, though slender. Her expressive eyes reflected gentleness and goodness, yet she was firm and patient too--from all accounts, a softening influence on her husband who tended to be stubborn and strong-willed. Her children were fascinated by the stories she could tell of her uncles who were famous in that area for their feats of great strength.

Peder and Ella had eight children, of whom seven lived to adulthood. The third child and second son of the family was Ole Edvart, born on April 22, 1876. From his own accounts he had a happy childhood. He and his older brother Johan were inseparable. As soon as they could walk, the children found their way down the steep rocky path to the boathouse by the sea. There they could explore the deep mysterious shadows where the winter gear was hanging. But most of all they liked to climb into the boats--there to rock and dream, or fish with their own improvised lines, or simply to peer over the edge, down, down into the water, fascinated by the swaying seaweed or by the myriads of living beings below.

Each child had his appointed tasks. One that Ole remembered was that of helping his mother gather kelp for the cattle. One day as they were working together along the shore she asked him "And what do you intend to do when you grow up?" Without hesitation he blurted out "Oh, I'm going to be a poet, or a professor ". She chuckled a bit, then smiled down at him and took his hand as they walked back to the house.

Perhaps it was natural for him to dream of these professions, for wasn't his good, kind uncle Gunnar a teacher? And among his mother's ancestors there was the famous and beloved folk-poet, Petter Dass. Moreover, Ole himself was the namesake of Ole Edvart Klaebo, a cousin of his mother. His brother, John Klaebo was recognized as a fine poet and sensitive short-story writer.

Ole must have been five when his father decided that he was to learn to read. For his brother Johan and sister Martha, learning the alphabet and getting through the first reader had been no effort at all, but for Ole it was another story. He said later that he did not then--nor later at school--like to memorize, though he could tell things in his own words and reason well enough. But he could not fathom how K-A-T could spell soft, furry kitten, nor how the letters M-O-R stood for dear, kind Mother. The more Ole struggled, the more difficult it became, and Father got more and more exasperated and impatient. Ole's eyes finally blurred with tears so that he could no longer see the letters, and the lessons often ended with a scolding, so Ole began to feel that he was the dumb-bell of the family.

From the age of seven, when he started school, until he was confirmed at fourteen, Ole spent nine weeks a year at the school east of the mountain--three weeks in the autumn, three weeks in mid-winter, and three weeks again in the spring. In good weather the children from Rølvaag trudged the seven miles across the moors each morning and home again each evening. But in the winter term they stayed at the school during the week, living and studying in dormitories above the school-room. There were no hot lunches for these children. Each Monday morning, early, they left home carrying their meager provisions for the week--dry bread and soured milk. Though the days were long and the teacher a strict task-master, the children enjoyed their school days. Fortunately "Old Beiermann" as he was called, had travelled widely and was an able teacher, and it seems that the children were allowed to advance at their own pace.

Ole may have had difficulty learning to read, but this was not evident once he started school, for then he began to devour books. Not least enjoyable for the boys from Rølvaag was their growing friendship with the Heitmann Boys from Akvik--a settlement along the eastern coast of Dønna. The community library was housed in an upstairs room of their home, and the four boys spent endless hours, almost systematically reading book after book, both fiction and non-fiction. The most difficult volumes they read aloud and discussed, and tried to discover their significance. One of them recounted later that one book he especially remembered reading and discussing in this manner was Either-Or by Søren Kierkegaard. In this small library they

made the acquaintance of many of the world's great books. Most important, perhaps, was the influence this had on their dreams and aspirations.

It was while they were still in school that Johan Rølvaag wrote a novel which they read aloud together. Now Ole, too, began to write, but his work was done in utmost secrecy. When Johan came upon him suddenly one day as he sat writing and demanded to see what he was doing, there was a battle royal. The two boys rolled from one end of the room to the other, and before they were parted the twelve-year old Ole had torn his manuscript to shreds rather than let anyone see what he was working at. He dreamed of writing poems and songs for people to sing, too, but somehow he couldn't get the words and the rhymes to behave and he gave up in disappointment.

Johan had an unusually fine and expressive voice and his father often excused him from other tasks so that he might read aloud to the rest of the family gathered in the large living room with their work. This happened most often in the long evenings of late fall and early winter when all were busy preparing for the approaching fishing season. The men and boys had to check and mend their lines and nets, or knot new ones. Mother and Grandmother spent long hours carding, spinning and weaving, and then sewing the warm clothing the family needed. Knitting needles clicked--for socks and mittens had to be ready before Christmas. Even the younger boys often had to take their turn at knitting. Occasionally reading would give way to story-telling. Then the young Ole climbed up into Grandmother's lap, where he felt safe and secure, for the stories were of sea-demons, trolls and witches, or the hidden people of the hills and other supernatural creatures. There were those in the family circle who could relate some very mysterious experiences. Some of the men had seen that most terrible of sea-creatures, the draug, whose appearance always foretold storm and disaster; another had seen the hulder, --one of the hill-people--or their cattle disappearing around a bend in the road. One grandmother in the family was reputed to have second sight, and Ole's own mother had once seen a ghost.

The young boys on Dønna reached manhood early. As soon as a boy was confirmed, he was expected to take his place with a fishing crew. Ole Rølvaag was confirmed at fourteen, and that winter he sailed with others from Dønna, up the coast to Lofoten. The first two seasons the youngest of the crew were listed as "half-men" in the profit-sharing group. Theirs were the most demeaning tasks--cooking, washing the few pots and pans, cleaning the bunk-houses, and then helping to dress out the days' catch through the long, cold evenings. It was a hard life, but full of suspense and excitement.

For six years Ole went each winter to Lofoten. He gained a reputation as an indefatigable worker, whom neither wind nor wave could vanquish. He displayed stubbornness, grit, determination to excel, yet he was full of life and jokes and laughter. But his moods could change as suddenly as those of the sea--wild and stormy, or gentle, calm, and mysterious. Though he loved the boisterous and busy life at Lofoten, he also felt an inexpressible longing to go far away. There were dreams and ambitions to be fulfilled.

In 1893, after surviving one of the worst storms ever recorded on the Lofoten fishing banks, Ole wrote to his uncle in South Dakota, begging him to lend him money for a ticket to America. The answer was long in coming. But shortly after the ticket arrived, Ole was offered the chance to acquire a boat of his own, and to become chief of a crew. It was a difficult decision to make--to stay and enjoy the security offered him, or to face the unknown far away. But regretfully he turned down the offer of the boat, and shortly afterward set sail for America.

With only a thin dime and a Norwegian copper coin in his pocket, he arrived in New York; after three days on the train, he was literally dumped off at a station in South Dakota. Through some misunderstanding his uncle failed to meet him. It was a forlorn young man who tried to find his way on the prairie that evening--a stranger in a strange land, weary and starving. He has later told the story of that immigrant in an autobiographical novel Amerika-Breve (Letters from America). For the next three years Ole Rølvaag worked as a farm hand at Elk Point, South Dakota. Four bachelors made up the household during the time he worked there--the owner, a hired hand, Ole and his uncle. The newcomer proved to be as ambitious on the land as he had been on the sea, and quickly learned the unaccustomed chores. The same stubborn determination to excel characterized him now, too.

Even when he was on the Lofoten banks with the fishing fleet, Ole had continued the reading habit developed during his school days. When storms made it impossible for the men to put out of the harbor, he made use of the excellent library provided the fishermen by the state. At times he even read aloud to the crews who shared the bunkhouse--everything from the classics to dime novels. "But they preferred the shilling shockers" he later told a reporter. "I couldn't get them to take much interest in the tales of Sir Walter Scott." He found little opportunity for this kind of recreation in the prairie community in which he was now working. Moreover, once he had mastered the new tasks, working with horses and machines on the land instead of boats and lines and nets on the sea, he began to lose interest

in farm work. Ole now began to cast about for something more challenging to do. The dreams of childhood and manhood were not yet fulfilled. He realized also that if he wanted to better himself, he would have to become more fluent in English.

A Lutheran pastor in the community had befriended the young newcomer and lent him books occasionally. Now that pastor began to encourage Ole to go to school.

It was much against his fathers' advice that in the fall of 1898 the twenty-two-year old Ole entered Augustana Academy, a church-related school at Canton, South Dakota. This marked the beginning of a happier existence. Under the guidance of dedicated teachers he received the intellectual stimulus he had been hungering for. Though he had had little formal education at the time he entered the academy, he was in reality better educated than he knew. At twenty-two, he had reached maturity, had spent six years as a fisherman, had experienced the difficulties of emigration, the consequent adjustment to a new land and a new language, had in fact, also learned a new way of life. He said himself that "Life had educated me, and reading had educated me. My imagination was fully developed, my reasoning powers were mature, and work had taught me concentration."

Since Ole Rølvaag was entirely self-supporting, he had to find means of earning money for his schooling, for the few dollars he had earned on the farm were soon gone. He then tried his skill as a salesman. He told his own students later that no man could call himself truly educated who had not tried to sell books and aluminum-ware from door to door. He certainly spoke from experience, for he spent part of two summers as a wandering salesman. When selling books failed to produce the dollars he needed, he became a jack-of-all-trades and did whatever he could find to do: carpentry, well-digging, factory work, and in the early fall he returned to the farm to work in the harvest fields. Only in his senior year was he able to return to Augustana for the opening of the fall term. That year he worked as a janitor at the school in order to pay for his room and board.

Although the same ambition, the compulsion to excel which had marked him as a farm laborer and fisherman, characterized his work at Augustana, life at school was not all drudgery. He participated in debates and discussion groups, was a member of several organizations and enjoyed the social functions. He was high-spirited, gay, and a good conversationalist. Here at school he made life-long friends, and he met the young woman who was later to become his wife. In the spring of 1901 he graduated with honors. The text of his valedictory address no long exists, but from a newspaper account we learn that here he expressed for the first time an idea which was to recur again and again in his

lectures and writing--namely, that a human being cannot deny his own background and inherited culture and remain a whole and true and healthy person.

Following graduation from Augustana, Ole Rølvaag again took to the road as a salesman--this time of stereopticon views, a popular novelty at that time. In the fall, he entered St. Olaf College at Northfield, Minnesota. Again it was his friend and pastor, the Reverend P.J. Reinertsen, who encouraged him and sent letters of recommendation. He had almost no resources, but soon found work in the dormitory kitchen. In those days there were no central heating plants at the college, and he added to his meager income by carrying wood for the stoves which heated the rooms of Old Main, and one summer he was part of the crew which painted the buildings on campus.

In the summer of 1902 he augmented his income by teaching a term of parochial school. This proved to be both interesting and challenging, and in the summers of 1903 and 1904, he again found teaching jobs. He loved the children and the work in the classroom. No doubt these experiences strengthened his resolve to seek a teaching career.

Rølvaag took active part in many college activities--was a frequent contributor to the college publications, participated in the many debates sponsored by the literary societies, became an active member and leader of the Norwegian literary society--in short he was the typical college student of his day. But in one aspect he was not typical, and that was in the amount of course work he took on. For instance, he wrote in a letter dated 1903: "I have twenty-six hours a week . . .The most any college student is allowed to take here is twenty hours, but there were some very nice electives this year, so I thought I would try a little more." He was very conscious of the gaps in his education, and tried desperately to make up for this deficiency. Actually, the regular course of study he was registered for was one that could lead either to the theological seminary or into teaching. It included Greek, Latin, and German in addition to English composition and Norwegian and some mathematics and science courses. With the addition of the "nice electives" the four years at St. Olaf was a period of sustained, intensive effort.

It was during his junior year that he once again began writing a novel. He confessed in letters to his fiancee that he hardly had time to sleep for he dreamed of having it published before he graduated. He wrote her that he was neglecting his studies in order to spend as much time as possible on his novel, and he worried that he would fail in his final examinations. The publisher to whom he sent it rejected the manuscript. A few years later he took it out again and rewrote portions of it, but

this novel ("Nils og Astri") remains unpublished.

In the spring of 1905, Ole Rølvaag graduated with honors. Now the question of his future became more pressing. He was eager to enter the teaching profession; he was also eager to continue his education. Consequently when President Kildahl asked him to return to St. Olaf as a teacher on condition he would spend a year in study at the University of Kristiania (Oslo) he was overjoyed. With five hundred borrowed dollars he left for Norway in July, 1905.

He was excited by the prospect of returning to his native land, and overjoyed at the thought of seeing parents and home once more--of sitting in a boat and rocking on the sea. The fall and winter of 1905-06 were months of incessant reading and study, interrupted by weeks of serious illness. Intermittent moods of elation and depression mark the letters to his fiancee and friends in America. He felt it was his duty, as the first representative of his college to enter the University, to do credit and honor to St. Olaf by doing the best work he was capable of. But he also felt this was a great opportunity for him to widen his horizons, to come under the influence of great scholars, to be a part of a more cosmopolitan community, and he grasped the opportunity eagerly. In the spring he took the examinations and was elated to find himself at the top of the class. He was then able to relax by taking a tour through the fjords and mountains of western Norway, and spending a month with his family at Dønna.

Not until the summer of 1908 did he realize his dream of establishing his own home. On July 9 of that year he was married to Jennie Marie Berdahl, daughter of South Dakota pioneers. Four children were born to them: Olaf Arnljot, who died in childhood; Ella Valborg (Mrs. Torliff Tweet); Karl Fritjof (former Governor of Minnesota and U.S. Ambassador to Iceland); and Paul Gunnar, who, as a small child, was drowned in a neighbor's cistern. In spite of intrusions from the outside world and the pressures of a many-sided career, this was an unusually close-knit family circle. Ole Rølvaag loved children, and his were allowed, even encouraged, to sit at the desk while he was writing, and they soon learned when they had to be very quiet because Father was especially busy. He found time to tell them fairy stories and folk-tales, or to draw pictures of boats and sea-gulls. And one snowy afternoon he showed an entranced little child how to mark the cadence of poetry. There were Sunday afternoon walks down to the river and picnics in the yard.

An even greater sense of family unity came during the summers spent at the secluded cabin in Northern Minnesota. Thanks to his considerate and understanding wife, the days there soon settled into a routine which would at one and the same time give him time

to work as well as the opportunity to read and relax after the strenuous months of teaching and writing at home in Northfield.

When Ole Edvart Rølvaag returned to St. Olaf in the fall of 1906, he began a life-time connection that ended only with his retirement shortly before his death in 1931. The first year he taught a variety of subjects, and in addition was resident head of the men's dormitory. In addition to Norwegian, he taught Greek, physiology, geometry, geography and Biblical history. After a number of years he was able to concentrate his efforts on Norwegian language and literature, finally becoming head of that department. Suitable texts were almost non-existent; consequently, in addition to his class-room duties he busied himself with the preparation of teaching materials. There was a series of readers for which he wrote much of the material; a dictionary; and finally he assisted in the preparation of a handbook in grammar.

Rølvaag himself had, to a high degree, the ability to concentrate, and he demanded much of himself. Consequently it is not strange that he also demanded much from his students. It was not sufficient that they complete the day's assignments; he tried to awaken in them an insatiable hunger for a greater knowledge and understanding of mankind as it is mirrored in the world's great literature. He, himself, had great sensitivity, but he drew a sharp distinction between sensitivity and what he termed emotional and sickly romanticism. Though he demanded much, he also was quick to encourage, and took great personal interest in his students. His office and home were always open to anyone who needed advice, help or just a sympathetic hearing. To those who were creative he spoke of truth and life. They should write of what they knew and had experienced themselves, he stressed. He was a creator as well as an interpreter of literature, and stressed time and again the effort that must go into the act of creation. "We do not take enough pains to teach young minds that true art, whether of the pen, or the voice, or the brush, or the chisel, resists creation--that it never comes into being without a definite struggle, and sometimes a terrible one, on the part of the artist. The result is that they expect quick returns for slight effort, and so miss the whole meaning of life."

During the 1920's he developed a course in Norwegian immigration. He intended through his lectures to give the young people a knowledge of their pioneer ancestors, the sacrifices as well as the contributions their forbears had made, and which the students could still make to American culture. He was imbued with the idea that one of life's great tragedies was the feeling of not belonging. For the immigrant this was a double tragedy--he had abandoned his Fatherland, and, try as he might, it was difficult for most and well-nigh impossible for others to feel completely at home in the new land. For many of the second

generation it was a lack of knowledge or a lack of understanding of their heritage which made them feel so tragically inferior and insecure.

It is only natural, then, that Rølvaag should become a prime mover in organizations formed to promote a knowledge of his people's ethnic background. As early as 1910 he became one of the founders of the Society for Norwegian Language and Culture. He soon became a leader in Norlandslaget, an organization to keep those who had emigrated from North Norway in touch with one another as well as with their homeland. For a number of years he was editor of Nord-Norge, a magazine sponsored by this group. In 1921, he became the first editor of For Faedrearven, a publication supported by an organization formed in 1919 for the promotion of Norwegian culture in the Northwest. Because of the press of other work and a desire to concentrate on his teaching and writing, he dropped the editorship after two years. Without his driving force, the organization and its publication disappeared. He was active in the preparations for the Norwegian American Centennial which commemorated in 1925 the first organized emigration of Norwegians to the United States. It was quite natural, then, that he should be one of the group which in 1925 organized the Norwegian American Historical Association. The purpose of this organization was to collect and preserve the heritage of the Norwegian people in America. In order to accomplish this, the historical archives were established at St. Olaf College; support was pledged to the museum already in existence at Decorah, Iowa; and the publication of volumes of both scholarly and general interest was begun. He acted as corresponding secretary until his death. In this capacity, Rølvaag spent countless hours writing letters, and seeking support for the organization; in addition he spent days in the collection of and the organization of this collection of early publications and correspondence of pioneers. Ahead of his time, he was helping to develop an ethnic center in the Midwest.

In spite of these time-consuming duties he was at the same time engaged in creative endeavors. From his college days and through the first decade of his teaching career he wrote short stories, poems, numerous articles, as well as aiding in the writing of texts and readers. His first published novel, written under the pseudonym Paal Mørck, was Amerika-Breve (Letters from America), printed in 1912 by Augsburg Publishing House of Minneapolis. This is a collection of letters written by a young immigrant, Per Smevik, to his father and brother at home in Norway. Written in Norwegian, the book did not come out in English translation until November, 1971, when it appeared as The Third Life of Per Smevik, published by Dillon Press of Minneapolis. The translation was a joint venture of the author's daughter and granddaughter.

Paa Glemte Veie (On Forgotten Paths), also published by Augsburg Publishing House, appeared in 1914. This time, too, he used the pen-name of Paal Mørck. Polemical articles in the Norwegian American press and a few short stories and poems of that time also appeared under this name.

The novel To Tullinger (Two Fools), which appeared in 1920, dealt with the deterioration of character; it is the story of a couple whose avarice leads them to physical as well as spiritual death. This story was substantially re-written and translated, and in 1930 was published in English by Harper & Brothers as Pure Gold.

In Laengselens Baat (The Boat of Longing), Rølvaag pictures the dreamer, the poet who is tragically lost in a society in which he is a misfit. Like the other books, this was written in Norwegian; it was published by Augsburg in 1921. The English translation appeared in 1933.

A collection of essays dealing with the problems of adjustment of the immigrant and the immigrant's children, and a challenge to them to understand and value their culture and past was published by the St. Olaf College Press under the title Omkring Faedrearven (Concerning Our Heritage). This book, which appeared in 1922, has not been translated.

For some time Rølvaag had been planning a novel on the pioneer theme. Much factual material for such a work he had received from his wife's father and uncles, who had moved from Minnesota to South Dakota in the early 1870's. But when he learned that a Norwegian author intended to make a tour of the Midwest in order to gather material for a novel about Norwegian emigrants, Rølvaag was impelled to start work on his own projected novel. In 1923 he sought and was granted a leave of absence. He intended to work at the cabin in the woods through the early fall and then spend some time in Norway to finish the book. A serious fire which destroyed the chapel at St. Olaf led him to offer his services to the college, and his leave was cut short in order that he might spend some time in soliciting funds for his beloved institution. In February of 1924, however, he sailed for England. After a short stay there, he went on to Norway, there to immerse himself in polishing the manuscript of the novel which was to become Giants in the Earth. In the spring he brought the manuscript to the publishing house of Aschehoug & Company of Oslo. It was immediately accepted for publication. However it was agreed that the first half, with the title I de dage (In Those Days) should appear in the fall of 1924, and the second half, Riket grundlaegges (The Founding of the Kingdom) in 1925. Both books met with success in Norway. A news story in a Minneapolis newspaper concerning these novels by an American about the

American scene, but written in Norwegian and published in Norway, caught the eye of Mr. Lincoln Colcord, a free-lance journalist and short story writer. He immediately urged that the novels be translated, and introduced Rølvaag to an American publisher.

Then there began a unique literary venture. Mr. Colcord knew no Norwegian and worked only from rough translations prepared by colleagues and friends of the author. After he had made his suggestions, Rølvaag studied the revised manuscript and made further corrections and revisions. Much of the time the two worked together until they had achieved a style in English that expressed the nuances of the original. Rølvaag himself believed that translation is more than a mere transferring of words and expressions from one language to another. It is an independent artistic work, just as demanding and difficult as writing a book itself. The innate feeling, the subtleties of meaning, have to be preserved. Perhaps that is why the cooperation between author and translator was such a happy one in the translation of Giants in the Earth. The English version was published by Harper & Brothers in 1927.

While still working on the translation, Rølvaag was thinking about a sequel. In this novel he took up the story of the second generation. Shortly before Christmas of 1928, Peder Seier (Peder Victorious) appeared in Norway. The English translation came on the American literary scene in 1929.

A third novel in this series dealing with the Holm family was begun early in 1930. Both the original Norwegian version and its English translation appeared almost simultaneously in the fall of 1931.

Though Mr. Colcord worked only on the translation of Giants in the Earth, the method that they used was repeated in putting the novels that followed into English. Mrs. Evelyn Tripp Berdahl, a sister-in-law of Mrs. Rølvaag, gave valuable help. She took pains, too, to find the exact word in the preparation of the English that marked the style of the original Norwegian. And only one who saw the many revisions the manuscripts underwent could appreciate the craftsmanship that went into this man's writing.

All his life Rølvaag waged a battle against poor health. Yet he exhibited great physical stamina, and was never one to shirk any task. From time to time when illness or adversity struck, he would endure periods of depression, but they soon gave way to a more optimistic outlook. When recurring heart attacks weakened him physically, they slowed his work, but never dimmed his ambition or determination to reach the goal he had set himself.

Following an exceptionally severe illness in late October, he died at his home in Northfield on the afternoon of November 5, 1931.

RØLVAAG AS A ST. OLAF COLLEGE STUDENT