

SIGRID UNDSSET DIES; NORWEGIAN AUTHOR

Winner of the 1928 Nobel Prize
for 'Kristin Lavransdatter'
Trilogy Was Foe of Nazism

FLED HOMELAND IN 1940

Wrote and Lectured Here Five
Years During War—First
Book Published in 1907

OSLO, Norway, June 10 (AP)—
Sigrid Undset, winner of the 1928
Nobel Prize for literature and crus-
ader against nazism, died today
at Lillehammer. She was 67 years
old.

Mme. Undset had been ill
throughout the winter but had been
feeling better this spring. She suf-
fered a stroke two days ago and
was taken to Oppland County Hos-
pital.

Her prize-winning work was the
"Kristin Lavransdatter" trilogy,
which won world-wide acclaim as
a novel of the Middle Ages. Mme.
Undset's writings aroused the an-
ger of Hitler's Nazis long before
the war and, in 1940, when the
Germans invaded Norway, she de-
voted herself to work for her Gov-
ernment.

Lost Eldest Son in War

For years, before the Nazi in-
vasion, Mme. Undset lived "above
the battle" in a medieval house on
a mountainside near Lillehammer.
Her eldest son, Anders, 27, was
killed in action early in World War
II. With her youngest son, Hans,
who had joined an ambulance unit,
she fled to Stockholm in May, 1940,
to elude the Germans. Then she
traveled through Russia, Siberia
and Japan, arriving in San Fran-
cisco in August, 1940.

Subsequently she wrote and lec-
tured here, living in a hotel on
Brooklyn Heights in a room with
a view of the harbor. She returned
to Lillehammer in July, 1945.

Mme. Undset's five years in the
United States were active. She
had bid her fellow Norwegians to
resist submission to loathsome
catchwords about "blood and race"
and "nerves of steel." In 1942 she
wrote "Return to the Future," an
account of her odyssey from Nor-
way to this country.

The same year she received an
honorary degree from Rollins Col-
lege in Winter Park, Fla., and the
next May Smith College awarded
her a degree, citing her as one of
the great novelists of our time and
a symbol of the struggle the Nor-
wegian people continued to wage
for freedom.

Foresaw Dark Future

In a letter to THE NEW YORK
TIMES, Mme. Undset foresaw a
dark future in which the Germans
must suffer for the sins of their
fathers. The Germans, she feared,
would inherit the war mania of
their fathers and never be cured
of it. The people of Norway, she
wrote, would never again be taken
in by German traits and "sentimen-
tality," for which she had no
use.

She had won critical acclaim
throughout the world for her his-
torical novels, but English-speak-
ing peoples first knew her for
"Kristin Lavransdatter," which
sold more than 150,000 copies in
the United States alone.

Her early volumes of fiction dealt
with modern times, and she made
realistic use of her office experi-
ence. She shared in the researches
of her father, Ingvald Martin Und-
set, a prominent Norwegian archae-
ologist, and familiarized herself
with the Middle Ages in Scandi-
navia. Out of these studies came
the frame for her more ambitious
novels.

Mme. Undset was born on May
20, 1882, in Kallundborg, Denmark.
While her father's research work
took him all over Europe, she re-
mained home with her mother,
Charlotte Gyth Undset, a Dane.
Later, she was taken to Oslo (then
Christiania), where her father
taught in the university and where
she was sent to a private day
school.

Assistant to Father

She was the oldest of three
daughters and took the place of a
son in the household at an early
age. She became her father's as-
sistant and her knowledge of the
medieval ages dated from the time
when she pored over old books of
scientific and popular works of
history, archaeology and religion,
and developed a profound taste for
sagas and ancient traditions of the
Viking period.

Her father died when she was 11
years old. Sigrid was graduated
from the Christiania Commercial
College at 16, and, thrown on her
own resources, worked in the office
of a lawyer, who had been her
father's friend. While supporting
herself, she dreamed of a literary
career and spent her evenings and
holidays writing. Thus originated
her first novel, "Fru Marta Oulie,"
the story of an unhappy marriage.
Written in diary form and com-
pleted in 1907, it was received with
mild approval.

Her second book, a bitter one,
was published the next year, with
the ironical title, "Den Lykkelige
Alder" ("The Happy Age"). She
made her first attempt at re-creat-
ing the past in a saga appeared in
1909. She then gave up her office
work and, in 1910, published a
small collection of poems.

Won First Success in 1911

Mme. Undset achieved her first
popular success with the publica-
tion of "Jenny" in 1911. Remark-
able for its courageous treatment
of erotic subjects the novel created
a sensation. A study in feminine
psychology, it followed the same
general plot as her other novels of
modern life, which were realistic
descriptions of middle-class homes
and families in Oslo, such as her
own.

Her considerable research work
into the history, life, work and
manners of the Norwegian people
resulted in the medieval trilogy,
"Kristin Lavransdatter," the story
of Kristin from birth to death. It
has been called a glorification of
the Roman Catholic Church of the



SIGRID UNDSSET

1942

Middle Ages, and the chapter re-
lating Kristin's pilgrimage to the
shrine of St. Olav, in the choir of
the Nidaros Cathedral, gives a
vivid impression of what Catholic
faith meant to people of that age.
The author's admiration for the
majesty and beauty of that church
was unbounded. She was received
into the Roman Catholic Church at
the Chapel of Hammer in 1924.

Mme. Undset's tetralogy of "Olaf
Audunsson" laid against a medie-
val background and richly detailed,
was published in this country be-
tween 1928 and 1930, under the
title of "The Master of Hestviken."
It was followed by several other
works in which the author turned
back to the modern novel. Of these,
"The Wild Orchid," and a sequel
"The Burning Bush," were pub-
lished in the United States.

Former Wife of Artist

Shortly after her success with
"Jenny," Mme. Undset was mar-
ried to the well-known Norwegian
painter, Anders Avarstad, in 1912.
Her marriage was ended amicably
in 1925, and Mme. Undset lived
with her children at Lillehammer,
a small Norwegian artistic resort
on a lake some distance from the
capital. Her house dated from the
year 1000, and it had been restored
and furnished with genuine old
Norse pieces.

She was the third Norwegian
author to receive the Nobel Prize
in literature. It had been given in
1903 to Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and
to Knut Hamsun in 1920.

Mme. Undset wrote in 1938 "Im-
ages in a Mirror," a novel about
a happy marriage. She paid tribute
to her adopted faith in "Men,
Women and Places," a group of
essays published in 1939. After-
ward she wrote "Christmas and
Twelfth Night" and "Happy Times
in Norway." Her novel, "Madame
Dorothea," was published here
early in 1940.