

THE GROWTH OF A SOUL

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The growth of a soul by August Strindberg

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AUGUST STRINDBERG

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OF A SOUL**

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BY
AUGUST STRINDBERG

AUTHOR OF "THE INFERNAL," "THE SON OF A SERVANT," ETC.

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CLAUD FIELD

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CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I IN THE FORECOURT	1
II BELOW AND ABOVE	24
III THE DOCTOR	65
IV IN FRONT OF THE CURTAIN	83
V JOHN BECOMES AN ARISTOCRAT	97
VI BEHIND THE CURTAIN	109
VII JOHN BECOMES AN AUTHOR	120
VIII THE "RUNA" CLUB	128
IX BOOKS AND THE STAGE	154
X TORN TO PIECES	162
XI IDEALISM AND REALISM	178
XII A KING'S PROTÉGÉ	183
XIII THE WINDING UP	195
XIV AMONG THE MALCONTENTS	204
XV THE RED ROOM	219

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CHAPTER I

IN THE FORECOURT

(1867)

THE steamer had passed Flottsund and Domstyrken and the university buildings of Upsala began to appear. "Now begins the real stone-throwing!" exclaimed one of his companions,—an expression borrowed from the street-riots of 1864. The hilarity induced by punch and breakfast abated; one felt that things were now serious and that the battle of life was beginning. No vows of perpetual friendship were made, no promises of helping each other. The young men had awakened from their romantic dreams; they knew that they would part at the gang-way, new interests would scatter the company which the school-room had united; competition would break the bonds which had united them and all else would be forgotten. The "real stone-throwing" was about to begin.

John and his friend Fritz hired a room in the Klostergränden. It contained two beds, two tables, two chairs and a cupboard. The rent was 30 kronas¹

¹ A krona = 1s. 2d.

a term,—15 kronas each. Their midday meal was brought by the servant for 12 kronas a month,—6 kronas each. For breakfast and supper they had a glass of milk and some bread and butter. That was all. They bought wood in the market,—a small bundle for 4 kronas. John had also received a bottle of petroleum from home as a present, and he could send his washing to Stockholm. He had 80 kronas in his table-drawer with which to meet all the expenses of the term.

It was a new and peculiar society into which he now entered, quite unlike any other. It had privileges like the old house of peers and a jurisdiction of its own; but it was a "little Pedlington" and reeked of rusticity. All the professors were country-born; not a single one hailed from Stockholm. The houses and streets were like those of Nyköping. And it was here that the head-quarters of culture had been placed, owing to an inconsistency of the government which certainly regarded Stockholm as answering to that description.

The students were regarded as the upper class in the town and the citizens were stigmatised by the contemptuous epithet of "Philistines." The students were outside and above the civic law. To smash windows, break down fences, tussle with the police, disturb the peace of the streets,—all was allowed to them and went unpunished; at most they received a reprimand, for the old lock-up in the castle was no more used. For their militia-service they had a special uniform of their own which carried privileges with it. Thus they were

systematically educated as aristocrats, a new order of nobility after the fall of the house of peers.

What would have been a crime in a citizen was a "practical joke" in a student. Just at this time the students' spirits were at a high pitch, as a band of student-singers had gone to Paris, had been successful there, and were acclaimed as conquerors on their return.

John now wished to work for his degree but did not possess a single book. "During the first term one must take one's bearings" was the saying. John went to the student's club. The constitution of the club was antiquated,—so much so that the annexed provinces Skâne, Halland and Blekinge were not represented in it. It was well arranged and divided into classes, not according to merit, but according to age and certain dubious qualities. In the list the title "nobilis" still stood after the names of those of high birth. There were several ways of gaining influence in the club, through an aristocratic name, family influence, money, talent, pluck and adaptability, but the last quality by itself was not enough among these intelligent and sceptical youths. On the first evening in the club John made his observations. There were several of his old companions from the Clara School present, but he avoided them as much as possible and they him. He had deserted them and gone by a short cut through the private school, while they had tramped along the regular course through the state school. They all seemed to him somewhat conventional and stunted. Fritz plunged among the