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'KRAEN¹ FOGED'

A CATTLE DEALER FROM THY

CULTURAL TALES
BY HENRY E PEDERSEN

TRANSLATED BY ANETTE NORGAARD JAPPE
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¹ Translator's note: In Danish 'Kræn', which is the way that the name of 'Christen' is pronounced in the Thy dialect.

OLE TOPPENBERG, born in 1845 in Gettrup, has told these memoirs to the Historical Yearbook. They give a particularly good picture of an old cattle dealer from the district of Thy and his experiences on his many journeys to different places to buy cattle and horses:

My father was a clock and watch maker and jeweller in Gettrup. He became apprenticed to a clock and watch maker in Thisted, but when he had been with him for half a year, he moved to Hjørring² and brought his apprentice with him. Father has told himself how he walked on foot all the way from Hjørring to Southern Thy when he was to go visit his parents, and when the visit was over, he walked back to Hjørring again. His master also started to work as a jeweller after he had come to Hjørring, and then father also learned that trade. At the age of 19, he had served his apprenticeship, and he returned to Gettrup where he rented a room and started his own clock and watch maker's shop. Some years later, he was granted a royal warrant of appointment as a clock and watch maker and jeweller, which was something exceptional in those days. At that time, the jeweller closest to him lived in Holstebro. However, father was not allowed to practice the craft himself, but had to employ trained staff. My first childhood memory is that father had four trained clock and watch makers and jewellers in the workshop. They were all drafted for war in 1848, but since in those days hostilities were suspended during harsh winter times, they returned to Gettrup on leave; or rather only three of them returned as the fourth person had been killed in action, and one of the three returnees had been wounded in the head and died half a year later.

It was as if people were more honest in those days than nowadays. I recall once I was asked to go to the grocer's in Agger together with my younger brother. Just across the street from my childhood home lived a provision dealer, and when he heard that we were headed for Agger, he wanted us to take 200 specie dollars³ with us to the grocer's. The money was put into a sack. The sack was tied to a stick, and we boys grabbed hold of either end. In this way, we had to carry the many coins to Agger. As ill luck would have it, my younger brother became tired, sat down by the roadside and started to cry. A tramp happened to pass, and when he heard what was the matter, he offered to carry the coins to Agger. And the money reached the grocer safely.

Father was the first member of the Danish Liberal Party in Southern Thy. I clearly recall when he wanted to retire after 12 years on the parish council. The needy people of the parish came in large numbers and urged him to stay while they cried

heavily. They had the painful knowledge that he was their only advocate on the parish council. It was indeed hard times to live in poverty. People receiving parish support were often paid in goods. In most cases, the foods given to them were tainted.

I went out to service as a 9-year-old boy. With my first master, my pay for doing a summer's work was food during the following winter. Later, I was in the service of Anders Hilligso⁴ at the farm of 'Søndergaard'⁵ in Flarup. He was a very versatile man: blacksmith and house carpenter for himself. As a matter of fact, he built the first windmill in Southern Thy.

After my confirmation, I came into the service of Jakob Boel at the farm of Dover Vestergaard⁶. He sold cattle to Germany, and since he had learned some of the language in this way, it was not in any way strange that some German salespeople who were travelling around Southern Thy at that time selling scythes took lodgings with him. Here they had a stock of scythes, and when they came back to the farm, they gave their money to Jakob Boel to have him keep it safe until they were to return to Germany again. However, when the day of departure came and the Germans asked for the 700 rix dollars that Jakob Boel had received for safe-keeping, Jakob Boel insisted that he had not received any money, and the German salespeople had to leave the farm with empty hands. Later it was told that the Germans had cast a curse upon the farm and its inhabitants, and things also went really badly for Jakob Boel.

In the winter of 1861, the rumour reached me that the cattle dealer Kraen Foged needed a farmhand to be his driver, and since I liked to travel around different places and see different things, I approached him and also got the job.

Kraen Foged was born at the farm of Dover Ostergaard⁷, but his parents had died when he was six years old, and therefore he was raised by a paternal aunt at Dover Vestergaard. After his confirmation, Kraen Foged became a cattle drover, and it did not take long before he turned out to be a natural salesperson as on his trips to Germany he bought different kinds of smallware, which he sold after his return on his walks around Southern Thy. When he turned 18, his inheritance of 600 rix dollars was paid out to him, and he started to trade in cattle and horses. When I got a job with him in 1861, he was 44 years old. At that time, he was reckoned to be a particularly wealthy man.

Immediately after I had started the job, Kraen Foged ventured on his first buying trip. He usually took the same route every year, and he was therefore almost always aware beforehand where the good

² Translator's note: In Danish 'Hjørring'.

³ Translator's note: In Danish 'speciedaler'. A specie dollar was a silver coin worth two rix dollars.

⁴ Translator's note: In Danish 'Hilligso'.

⁵ Translator's note: In Danish 'Søndergaard', which translates into 'Southern Farm'.

⁶ Translator's note: The Danish name 'Vestergaard' translates into 'Western Farm'.

⁷ Translator's note: In Danish 'Østergaard', which translates into 'Eastern Farm'.

cattle could be bought. Indeed, the cattle had to be good, otherwise the creatures were of no interest to Kraen Foged. We drove in an unstrung dray. At the back of the dray stood two mighty iron-mounted chests, which usually had 20-30,000 rix dollars in hard cash at the beginning of the trip. However, those who did not know Kraen Foged would not assume that he was a particularly wealthy man as he wore ordinary frieze clothes, which were sometimes even both faded and full of holes, but he was not particular about that. But he was commonly known for being a man who paid in cash, and that meant quite a lot, especially in cattle trades.

Kraen Foged often bought the first cattle from Mr. Eyber at the farm of Orumgaard⁸. There he bought the entire herd of cattle, which numbered around 40 animals. They were indeed precious cattle that were easy to sell in the German markets as the buyers in those markets highly appreciated cattle from Orum, and he usually got a good price for them. From Orum, we drove to Mr. Jens Jessen at the farm of Lyngholm⁹, where we also bought the entire herd of cattle. At that time, the usual price for a good three-year-old animal was around 70-80 rix dollars. Kraen Foged bought around a couple of hundred heads of cattle as well as half a hundred horses on each journey, so there is no need to wonder why he had to bring that much money.

From Lyngholm, we went to the farm of Sogaard¹⁰ in Nors and got 44 brilliant heads of cattle from Mr. Peder Holst. We took lodgings there for two days; then we drove to the farm of Hyldgaard¹¹ in Hinding where we got 16 heads of cattle. We never drove at night as it was, after all, much money that we carried on us. And the first thing that happened on our arrival at a farm where we had the prospect of staying overnight was that the money chests were carried into the house.

The trip now continued through Thy and the district of Han Herred, and cattle were bought when the quality was as desired. We even drove further north into the district of Vendsyssel, but we made no deals there. Kraen Foged put it as follows: 'When you have money, you want to have your money's worth.'

From Vendsyssel, we returned to the strait of Aggersund to pass the water to go to the district of Himmerland. There, Kraen Foged bought eight old heads of ploughing cattle with huge horns at the farm of Naesborg Praestegaard¹². Kraen Foged was indeed a pure-blood salesperson, and if he was able to cheat someone, he did so, of course. Since he knew that the Germans highly appreciated ploughing cattle from Orum¹³, he cut out the Danish letter of Ø on the old ploughing cattle, but it was in vain as it did not take

long for the Germans to pick out the eight heads of cattle and state that they were not good enough for them. They wanted cattle that were genuinely from Orum.

I recall a funny incident from the drive across Himmerland. The pastor of Naesborg had given Kraen Foged directions for his drive to Mr. Holk, the large farmer of the farm of Holkasminde¹⁴, which had 26 heads of cattle and two horses for sale. Then we drove over there. The cattle and the horses were taken out into the farmyard twice, but no deal was made as the large farmer wanted 3,200 rix dollars whereas Kraen Foged was willing to pay no more than 3,100 rix dollars. Just before it was time to go in for the midday meal, Kraen Foged drew me aside and instructed me to put harnesses on the horses after the meal, pull up in front of the door and leave the farmyard as fast as the horses could trot when he nudged me.

Then I pulled up in front of the door, Kraen Foged got in and said to the large farmer, 'Come on, accept my offer, young man, I know that it would serve you right to let me have them. Here is the money.'

At that very moment, I was given a push in my side, and the horses left the farmyard at a gallop. The distance to the main road was 600-800 feet, and at Kraen Foged's urge I looked back and saw the large farmer standing there waving. However, Kraen Foged did not pay any attention to that, but urged me to drive faster. Shortly after, a horseman from the farm caught up with us. He asked Kraen Foged to come back, but got the brief reply from Kraen Foged that the gentleman could meet him at the local magistrate's house in Havbro if he wanted anything from him.

When we had arrived and had dragged the money chests upstairs into our room for the night, the local magistrate wanted to serve food. However, we had not been at the table for very long when we heard the rumble of a carriage in the farmyard.

'Now the scoundrels are coming,' Kraen Foged said. And right he was. In the farmyard was the large farmer of Holkasminde.

The local magistrate asked him to come in, and now it got out that he was in fact willing to close the deal at 3,100 rix dollars. Now it was Kraen Foged's turn to play hard to get. He said that he had no need for the cattle anymore as he had bought quite a few animals on his way to Havbro, and moreover he believed that he did not have that much money left. When the large farmer started to get a long face, Kraen Foged said to me,

⁸ Translator's note: In Danish 'Ørumgaard', which translates into 'Orum Farm'.

⁹ Translator's note: the Danish name 'Lyngholm' translates into 'Heather Islet'.

¹⁰ Translator's note: In Danish 'Søgaard', which translates into 'Lake Farm'.

¹¹ Translator's note: the Danish name 'Hyldgaard' translates into 'Elder Farm'.

¹² Translator's note: In Danish 'Naesborg Praestegaard', which translates into 'the Parsonage of Naesborg'.

¹³ Translator's note: In Danish 'Ørum'.

¹⁴ Translator's note: The Danish name 'Holkasminde' translates into 'Holk's Remembrance'.

'Ole, why don't you and the other lad try to scrape the bottom of the small chest; there might be that many pennies left.'

And then 3,100 rix dollars were piled on the table with 10 specie dollars in each pile. And the deal was concluded at both parties' satisfaction.

From Havbro, we passed Bjørnsholm¹⁵ to Hvalpsund, and from Hvalpsund we went to the district of Salling. This was where Kraen Foged made the last purchases. We drove from there past Viborg to Herning, where we met with the cattle drovers and continued southwards together with them. The cattle were driven 3 miles a day. When we were in the heathlands, hay was taken to the animals along the drovers' road. There were usually two drovers for a herd of cattle numbering 50 heads of cattle. As we came further down in Jutland, the herds expanded, and sometimes there could be several thousand heads of cattle at the same place at night. It was fairly early in the year, and the weather was not always the best after all. Until we reached the town of Sonder Omme¹⁶, we usually found overnight accommodation with farmers, but in Sonder Omme and further south, we had to use the inns. On my first trip, we were even that lucky to find room for the cattle in the stable of the inn in Sonder Omme, and since we had a blizzard that night, it was a tough job for the drovers to keep together the many thousand heads of cattle gathered in the vicinity of the inn.

One of the largest inns that we used for overnight accommodation was Sohollingbro¹⁷ Inn. This was the home of the 'Flying Post', the mounted mailman who delivered letters between towns. On the night that we were accommodated there, there were about 100 cattle dealers at the inn. Since most of them were people who would enjoy a large drink, the atmosphere was a jumble. On that occasion no less than 16 members of the Stockholm and Breinholdt families were amongst the many cattle dealers who had gathered. All of them were plucky fellows with much or little capital who bought and sold cattle.

As opposed to most others, Kraen Foged never drank any alcohol, and since his clothes were moreover often quite shabby, it was no wonder that the other cattle dealers made fun of him at times. That night, the above-mentioned local cattle dealers had picked out Kraen Foged as the target of their jokes. However, after he had put up with their joking for some time, he said dryly,

'Yes, you are indeed true skunks! You have 800 heads of cattle and 50 horses, but you are so many that you can hold them by their tails. But the boy and me we have 200 heads of cattle and 50 horses, and they have been fully paid!'

That made the bragging cattle dealers shut up. Kraen Foged had touched a sore point. As a matter of

fact, most of those cattle dealers bought the cattle on credit and paid only when they returned from the German markets.

The destination of the journey was Husum, where there were usually three fairs in the month of May. Many thousand heads of cattle were gathered, and sales did not always come easy, especially because the fair only lasted few hours. The German buyers came on the morning train and left again around noon, and then the fair was over for that day. A new fair was held two weeks later. If their sales efforts were not successful that day, they had to continue South to other German markets.

At the first Husum fair, there was not much trading. The German buyers were not willing to accept the prices demanded by 'Herrn Fogt'. By the look of him, he appeared to be a needy person, so they thought that they could depress prices. But Kraen Foged taught them a different lesson when he said,

'You believe that I am in need of money. But I just have to write to Cripple Jorgen¹⁸ at Heltborg to get 20-30,000 rix dollars if need be.'

However, the Germans did not understand Kraen Foged's broad Thy dialect, and he had to translate it for them. That seemed not to impress them in any way as the cattle continued to belong to Kraen Foged. Of course, I had a cheap laugh when Kraen Foged told this lie as I knew Cripple Jorgen at the Heltborg Poorhouse quite well.

Before the end of the fair, Kraen Foged approached me saying, 'We can't sell anything here, but don't you think that we should buy then?' There is a boy over there from Spottrup¹⁹. He has good cattle, and he wants to sell.' Obviously, I did not have any objections. Kraen Foged bought all the cattle. Eight days later, we sold all the cattle and all the horses at the fair in Elmenhorn. Prices were good there, and Kraen Foged made a profit of two specie dollars on each of the Spottrup animals. Then the drovers were sent home after the amount owed to them had been paid. They usually made 4 German marks a day in addition to food, and on the return trip they could have food at the inns where Kraen Foged had paid for them.

Kraen Foged also bought a good portion of skinny cattle, which he brought to the German marshlands of the Ditmarshes to graze in an area that he rented from the Hage brothers. Those two brothers, Johan and Rolf Hage, sold cattle to England, and Kraen Foged sold quite a few heads of cattle to them. On one occasion, we lived there for six weeks until they returned from England. The brothers, who were bachelors and 70-80 years old, owned vast areas in the Ditmarshes and a huge farm, which had only one wing, 180 feet long and 60 feet wide, built on a 10

¹⁵ Translator's note: In Danish 'Bjørnsholm', which translates into 'Bear Islet' or 'Bjørn's Islet' (Bjørn is a male name).

¹⁶ Translator's note: In Danish 'Sønder Omme', which translates into 'Southern Omme'.

¹⁷ Translator's note: In Danish 'Søhollingbro', which translates into 'Soholling Bridge'.

¹⁸ Translator's note: In Danish 'Jørgen'.

¹⁹ Translator's note: 'Spottrup' in Danish.

feet tall rampart. A railway track ran to the farm. The brothers had paid for the construction of the track themselves to be able to transport their immense money chests to and from the farm. On one occasion when I was there together with Kraen Foged, the two cattle dealers returned home to the farm bringing two immense money chests, which were hoisted to the house by means of a winch. Those two chests contained the most money I have ever seen at the same place.

The Hage brothers had a German girl as their housekeeper, and everyone at the farm was treated like a family member as they all slept in the same room with five or six beds. Kraen Foged and I also took lodgings there when we visited the farm.

On the return trip from Germany, which usually lasted five or six days, we stayed overnight once at the Thim Inn. Kraen Foged preferred overnight accommodation with the farmers as cleanliness was not that good everywhere at inns. Having entered the room at the Thim Inn, Kraen Foged said after he had inspected the bedstead,

'Oh bother, it's so dirty here. We will not lay down there. We do risk getting lice, and then it would not be fair of us to go see decent people.'

Then I fetched some horse clothes in the dray, which we used to make a bed for the night.

When we reached the strait of Odde Sund that we had to cross on the rowing ferry, it sometimes occurred that we had to wait several days due to stormy weather. I recall one occasion when we waited at the northern side of Odde Sund for the storm to subside. Mrs. Kastberg was the ruler at the local inn. She had lost two husbands in the strait, but she was a masterful woman capable of soothing the tempers of people staying at the inn. When sitting in the taproom on the third day, Kraen Foged said to me while nodding in the direction of Mrs. Kastberg, 'Look, Ole, that woman has proposed to me, but I don't want her because we do not go on any better than a cat and a dog.'

She later married Mr. Kvissan, an Austrian army officer who came here in 1864. However, he endured it for four years only. Then she gave him 8,000 rix dollars to get rid of him.

Some years later, she instituted proceedings against the Government, who had deprived her of the ferry service without further ado. She believed that she had been granted a concession to the ferry service for life, and she also was the successful litigant and was awarded 80,000 kroner.

Following a journey to Germany, Kraen Foged usually rested for a little while at different farms in Southern Thy. After the first journey that I had attended, we were staying at the farm of Gundtoftgaard, and one day at noon I gave a narrative account of the impression it had left on me

when in Husum I saw a train for the first time. But that was too much for the good people to believe, and when Kraen Foged and I left through the door, the man said,

'Look how Kraen Foged is making the boy foolish. He has come here telling us that he has seen wagons that could move without horses.'

On another occasion, we met some of the Breinholdt cattle dealers at a farm on the peninsula of Thyholm, and as usual they were ready to make fun of Kraen Foged. They outdid each other in incredible cattle dealer stories until Kraen Foged said,

'Oh, you should have been there when the boy and I squandered 15,000 rix dollars at the Husum fair. You wouldn't have been able to stand it. They would have crushed you to red ashes the lot of you.'

To people of humble means, Kraen Foged never showed any pettiness. We once drove across the Dover Heathlands between Ydby and Boddum. This was the location of an old, ramshackle house, which was the home of Anders Oddershede. When we reached the house, Anders was sitting outside, and Kraen Foged lifted his hand as a sign for me to stop. Then he shouted to the man,

'How do you do, Anders, how do you do!'

The old man looked up and replied, 'Who is this man?'

'What, are you not able to recognise Kraen Foged?'

'Oh, my Lord, are you Kraen Foged, are you?', the old man said while weeping a little.

'Well,' Kraen Foged said to me, 'Look at him and me. We were both born at Dover Vestergaard, whose farmland had a yielding capacity of 18 tonder hartkorn²⁰, and now he is the owner of such a pitiful house, and I have none at all.'

Before leaving, he gave Anders Oddershede two specie dollars, and the old man cried from happiness. He had not seen so much money for several years.

I served Kraen Foged for three years, but later I visited him several times. By then, he had stopped selling cattle and had married. His wife had been the housekeeper of Niels Edvardsen in Tilsted, who had left the farm of Sondergaard for her. However, Kraen Foged did not want to live at the farm, but built a small house a short distance away, and there he stayed and lived of his money.

One of Kraen Foged's peculiarities was that he never deposited any money with banks or savings institutions. He mostly placed it in different farms. Accordingly, at some point he had 11,000 rix dollars invested in the farm of Legindgaard in Norhaa²¹ and 8,000 rix dollars in the farm of Horstedgaard²². He charged nothing for the amounts owed to him; he just noted it down in a notebook. This is not how things are nowadays.

²⁰ Translator's note: In Danish 'tønder hartkorn', which translates literally into 'barrels of hard grain'.

²¹ Translator's note: In Danish 'Nørhaa'.

²² Translator's note: In Danish 'Hørstedgaard', which translates into either 'Farm of the Cairn's Place' or 'Farm of the Flax Place'.

Once when I visited Kraen Foged in Tilsted and we returned to the house after a walk in the fields, a poor man was standing at the house.

Kraen Foged asked him whether he had received a penny, which the man admitted. Knowing that his wife was particularly reluctant to pay money to people of humble means, Kraen Foged now shouted to his wife inside the house,

'Ann Dorthe, do not give away pennies and marks, but rix dollars and specie dollars. We do have enough money, and we can't take anything with us in the end.'

Kraen Foged had a nice home. He had purchased most of his furniture in Hamburg, and when someone blamed him for his lavishness, he replied,

'As a matter of fact, we will be here only once, so we might just as well have a good time while we are here.'

Kraen Foged died on 3 June 1883 and was buried in Skjoldborg. The funeral party comprised around 50 Germans and squires from the districts of Thy, Vendsyssel, Himmerland and Hardsyssel. It was one of the largest funerals of his time, the mourners numbered around 600 altogether²³.

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After I had resigned from my job with Kraen Foged, I worked at Sjørring²⁴ Lake for some time digging canals. In those days, the work done to reclaim land from the lake was impressive, and the life was varied because people travelled from afar to view this fantastic project, of which there were very many rumours. Captain Jagd, who was at the centre of it all, was a nice man to work for, even though it was difficult for us most of the time to get our money. When we were dismissed in the middle of the fall, the captain owed me quite a handsome amount of money, but when I left, he said to me that I would indeed get the amount owed to me when money was paid to the Sjørring Lake. I then gave him my address and went home. Around Candlemass, I heard that the captain had received 900,000 rix dollars. Some days later, I received a letter saying that I could now come and collect the amount owed to me. In addition to entertaining me in the best manner, he also paid me a day's wages for both the outward and the home journey.

For some years, I had various railroad construction work around Struer and Holstebro and later also in Vendsyssel where 1,600 men worked on digging through the hills of Tolne Bakker. There, I assisted the engineer with the levelling work, which inspired me to start doing drainage work later on.

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From 1873 to 1875, I transported passengers and freight from Gettrup through Vestervig, Bedsted and Koldby to Thisted. I had a closed carriage made in Thisted, which had cost 800 kroner. At the back of the carriage, there was room for freight.

During that period, I became familiar with Mr. J.P. Jacobsen, a Danish novelist and poet, who was a passenger in my carriage numerous times when he went to see Pastor Jørgensen²⁵ in the town of Hassing, Mr. Lützhøft²⁶ at the manor of Tandrup, Mr. Jens Jessen at the farm of Lyngholm or Mr. K. Jessen in Morup Molle²⁷.

At that time, Mr. J.P. Jacobsen had just returned home very sick from a journey in the South, and he was now going to see his friends to regain his vigour. He was exceptionally kind and modest, but it could easily be sensed that he was already severely affected by the disease.

When the poet was my passenger, he preferred to sit on the front box rather than inside the carriage where the air was obviously not always that good. After we had come out of town, he usually asked for permission to drive the horses, and when I had entrusted the reins to him, he always became so occupied with the driving that we never managed to have any long conversations.

Mr. J.P. Jacobsen was my passenger quite a few times. He usually spent about two weeks at each place, then he went to town for some days before taking to the countryside again to see his friends.

(Historical Yearbook for Thisted County 1935, pages 111-126)

²³ Kraen Foged and his wife did not have any children of the marriage, and when his wife died, a foundation worth 40,000 kroner was created from the assets left by him. The foundation, which is named 'Foundation of Christen Foged Jensen and his wife Ane Dorthea Foged', is managed by the Thisted County Council. Each year 16 or 17 grants of 100 kroner each are awarded, mainly to relatives of the founders.

²⁴ Translator's note: 'Sjørring' in Danish.

²⁵ Translator's note: In Danish 'Jørgensen'.

²⁶ Translator's note: In Danish 'Lützhøft'.

²⁷ Translator's note: In Danish 'Morup Mølle', which translates into 'Morup Windmill'. It is not clear whether the text refers to a windmill or the village of the same name.