

of their existence. A high, strong guard stood in front of the fire, and this completed the furniture of as cosy a children's room as I have ever seen.

It will be understood, of course, from what I have said, that the nursery which I have been describing was not made so much a "living-room" as a "play-room" for the little folks. The practice, so prevalent in many houses, of keeping the children constantly shut up in the nursery, when not out of doors, is, I think, a very bad one indeed. How should we, their elders, feel if we were compelled to spend so many hours every day in one room? Yet children require even more liberty than we do. I do not mean for a moment that they should be allowed to run wild all over the house; but the plan I myself followed, and which I have found to answer admirably, was this: whenever I had half an hour to spare, the children were brought down-stairs to me, and allowed then to have a good romp, if they felt so inclined, or sometimes we would have stories, after which they would

return to the play-room quite refreshed and happy. Their meals, too, I always had laid down-stairs, where I could superintend them myself. Who so fit, or able, to teach the little ones gentle and proper behaviour at table as the mother? Surely no servant, however good and faithful she may be, can have the future interest and well-being of the children at heart so sincerely as the mother; and it is only by beginning at the very commencement, to teach them what is right and proper, that we can reasonably expect them to turn out well afterwards. Another advantage of having meals down-stairs is, that it gives time for the nursery to get properly aired, and "put straight," before the children return to it. This will be found a much healthier plan than having all the meals up-stairs.

There are many points of interest respecting the little inmates of the nursery themselves, upon which I should like to say a few words, but space will not permit.

AN EVENING IN A NORWEGIAN VICARAGE.



If you will take the map of Scandinavia before you, you will discover, some hundred miles beyond the Arctic Circle, a myriad of islands of all sizes and shapes, extending as a tapering barrier deep into the Arctic Ocean, and separated from the mainland by the turbulent Westfjord, of which every traveller in the north of Norway has woeful experience. These are the Lofodden Islands.

For thousands of years the icy waves from the Pole have been shivered to spray against their granite sides, which often rise perpendicularly some 3,000 feet out of the sea, with hardly a vestige of flora or fauna. Bold, and gigantic, they stand here as a bulwark in the ocean, where hardly a sound is heard but the monotonous sigh of the wave as its force is broken on the rock, or the plaintive cry of the eider-fowl and the sea-eagle—whose favourite haunts these islands are—as they call their young to the nest.

But some of the larger of these islands offer, nevertheless, an inhospitable abode for a hundred souls or so, and as these people must be christened, married, and in rare instances, when the ocean refuses to do it, buried—besides, of course, requiring spiritual guidance—they are endowed with a church and a clergyman; and it is a visit to this worthy functionary—who toils here by the sweat of his brow for a scanty compensation, and with the prospect before him of some day laying his limbs to rest in the depths of the terrible fjord—to which I invite you.

The family in the vicarage have just finished dinner,

and are now taking coffee. It is only two o'clock, but being mid-winter, it is already dusk in the room, and were it not for the windows facing in three directions, lights would be necessary. From the windows can be scanned the vast Westfjord, separating the Lofodden Islands from the mainland, where terrific gusts of wind sweeping down from the mountains are lashing the enormous waves into drifting froth, accompanied by the melancholy howl of the storm. From time to time the house is shaken by a squall, as if it were in the grasp of a giant; and an Arctic cold cuts through the cosy drawing-room, in spite of the enormous log-fire blazing on the hearth.

But why this anxiety depicted on everybody's face? Why this constant peeping through the windows, as if somebody were expected? Yes, somebody is expected, has been anxiously expected for the last three weeks—the post. "The post is coming!" is the magic sound which causes the blood to roll faster through the veins here in the Arctic north. The post is the connecting link between the small community here and civilisation without. Europe may be in flames without the fact being known here. The post brings news, but whilst perusing the newspapers or scanning the lengthy letters from friends outside, one forgets that the events which for the moment excite the reader have taken place weeks before, and are almost matters of history to the world down south, while others are at that moment agitating the mind.

On the ottoman the clergyman and the only merchant on the island, the chief dignitaries, are in conversation as to the probabilities of the post arriving that day, the merchant having for the last fortnight paid daily visits in anticipation thereof. This post is also awaited

with more than usual interest by all parties. The commercial representative expects to receive "anticipations" as to the price of fish down in Bergen, on which his purchases at the impending winter fishery depend; while the vicar expects a letter from his son-in-law down south. For more than a month the worthy vicar has been looking for news, and for the last fourteen days he has anxiously scanned the turbulent waters for the white canvas of the mail boat, and with patient resignation observed each day slip by. He also has great reason to be interested in its arrival. For the past twenty years he had preached the Gospel up here, and was, so to say, nearly grown to the mountain, when his curate, obtaining a better appointment in the very parish down south where he was himself born, married, and carried his eldest daughter away with him. This has no doubt touched the old man's heart, and the longing again to see his daughter and recollections of childhood have caused him to seek the living as vicar there, just fallen vacant; and although his heart is gladdened by the probability of rejoining the friends of his youth, he cannot dwell without regret on the separation from his honest parishioners, with whom he has shared good and evil for a score of years.

His wife is busy at the coffee-table, but her attention is with the conversation among the gentlemen, from which she silently concludes that the post may certainly be expected that day.

The vicar's curate, who walks up and down the room in meditation, now and then glancing through the window, is greatly interested in Constitutions, and enthusiastic, above all, about the French. This does not, however, prevent him seeking the living up here, in case his chief should be removed to another parish; and as last mail brought tidings of troubles in France, and the appointment in question must by that time be settled, he is not the one least interested in its arrival.

By the window two of the vicar's daughters are seated, engaged in an animated conversation with the tutor. They, too, are longing for the post with the passionate expectation of youth: the girls to hear news from their sister and the decision as to the removal, whilst the tutor has a sweetheart down south, from whom he has had no letter for some time. But these three are not able to wait for its arrival in silence. The tutor, who is madly in love with his sweetheart, has the weakness of wishing to conceal it, perhaps, in order better to act the gallant up here; this the girls have discovered, and are now teasing him with the pleasing prospect of not receiving any letter this time. "Well, perhaps she is," they say, "already married to some one else, as the ladies down there are so strange." The tutor writhes under the lash, and tries to look unconcerned, and replies that such a discovery would not affect him in the least.

But at the window stands a trusty sentinel, the vicar's young son Fred. He has no personal interest in its arrival, but he takes great interest in what concerns sailing and the sea, and when the post arrives

it is his function to run down for the bag, and at the same time to get a hasty account of the weather encountered, how many "claws have been set,"* &c. He stands there, with his nose flattened against the window-pane, and his gaze fixed on the ness from behind which the boat will appear. He has stood there at the same time each day for the last fortnight, and at last he sees to-day something heading the point—a canvas and a flag.

"There is Nils Postman!" he exclaims, and disappears through the door. Everybody hastens to the window to observe the mail boat running for the quay by the vicarage at a terrific speed. With only one claw set, the gallant little craft darts through the waves with the lightness of a sea-bird.

While the circle at the vicarage is watching the tumultuous movements of the boat as she dives in the enormous waves, or the gusts catch the sail and heel her over, I must explain about Nils.

Nils has all his life been one of the most daring sailors in Lofodden, and there never was weather in which he was afraid of putting to sea. In his youth he was for some time naval mail-carrier: hence his *sobriquet*; and, as such, he had many a rough trip across the Westfjord, but they never seemed to affect him. If the weather were boisterous, and he came up with a sloop, his greatest pleasure was to race her, and as it was his rule never to "set a claw" until the vessel took a reef, he always won. But he had, of course, slight accidents now and then. Once, for instance, in mid-winter he sailed a passenger across the Westfjord, who had a carriage with him; the wheels were taken off, and the man took his seat snugly enough in the body of the vehicle. Sailing thus, a wave, which Nils had for some time seen approaching, but which he could not escape, sweeps over the boat, carrying passenger and carriage with it. Nils does not even turn his head, saving being out of the question, but as the boat is swamped in the same moment, and near sinking, he grasps the fall with a presence of mind almost superhuman, and hoists the sail "taut" in the fearful gale; the skiff shoots forward like an arrow, whilst the water washes out behind, and the crew is saved.

After he was dismissed from the King's service for certain irregularities, he was for a time to be found loafing about the vicarage, and now and then was sent out to catch fish; his function soon became, however, to fetch the post for the vicar and his flock. Thus employed, he waits about the post-office on the mainland, waiting for its arrival, which is often delayed.

Mais nous verrons. By the window the family stand aghast at Nils' reckless sailing. The merchant is in terror lest Nils, who only sets one claw when every sensible man would set three, should hereby lose his valuable commercial epistle. Nils is, however, in his element as the boat dances in a sea of foam, and in a few minutes he is alongside the landing-stage. A hurried conference between Fred and him, and the former comes tearing up the path with the bag in his hand.

In the meantime the vicar's wife has ordered

* To set a claw is the term used for reefing in Lofodden.

candles to be lighted, and all now congregate round the table on which the precious bag is subsequently deposited, and hands are soon busy in breaking the seals. Then comes a lengthy silence. The vicar raises, as from old habit, his velvet cap from his silvery head; the lips murmur a short prayer. He replaces it, and is soon intent upon opening the newspaper packets and the letters. The valuable bits of paper, which would not be exchanged for gold, are at last displayed to view. But now for the sorting. The first letter is written in a lady's neat character, and the hand of the tutor shoots forward to catch the gem, but not before a white little hand has caught it, and one of the vicar's daughters holds it between the tips of her tiny fingers, taunting him to confess how dear its possession would be to him.

"Bah! I would not mind waiting until to-morrow before reading it," he says, with badly-concealed emotion.

"Well, on that condition you may have it," responds the artful minx maliciously; and the letter disappears in his pocket, to burn there like a red-hot coal.

Meanwhile the vicar has sorted the others—of which one is from his son-in-law. With a trembling hand he opens it, whilst his wife and children cluster around him, and the group they form is certainly a very pretty one. All seem for a moment to pause, in order to observe the old man as he peruses his letter. Quickly he scans the first few lines, the serious expression in his face disappears, and gives place to a beaming smile. Joyously he relates that everything is well, that Louise has a boy, "mother and infant doing on the whole well."

An expression of tenderness seems to pervade the souls of the grandparents, while the new-fledged aunts and uncle look at each other with rather a puzzled expression of countenance. They congratulate each other, and even the strangers participate from their hearts in their joy, for the old vicar and his family are greatly beloved by everybody. But grandmamma will hear the rest of the letter, and the children congregate with her around the vicar, to hear the remainder of the lengthy epistle.

The merchant opens his commercial letter, and the curate is soon deep in the perusal of "News from France;" whilst the poor tutor, who does not dare to read his *billet-doux*, attempts in sheer despair to interest himself in a newspaper.

The curate's face grows longer and longer, and the merchant's assumes a more and more serious air.

"It's sold!" the curate exclaims, jumping from his seat.

"At two shillings and sixpence!" growls the merchant, flinging his letter on the table.

"What is sold?" inquires the tutor, animated.

"The French Constitution. That upstart has usurped the power; it's shameful!"

"Codfish sold at two shillings and sixpence; it's shocking!" says the merchant indignantly.

The tutor laughs at their excitement, resumes his paper, and whilst thus scanning its columns, he finds the official intimation of the vicar's preferment.

"You have got the living, sir. Allow me to congratulate you," he cries, handing the newspaper to his senior.

Joy now reigns supreme, and for the present nobody cares to touch another scrap of paper.

And thus the long winter's night under the Polar Circle, with the terrific storm howling without, glides past as a minute; the news has given plenty of theme for discussion. The tutor is, however, not at his ease until the girls disappear to look after the supper, then he sneaks to his room, and reappears after a little while intoxicated with joy, but his eyes sweep the room searchingly to discover if his absence has been observed.

It was late before it became quiet in the vicarage that night. The vicar and the curate discuss the administration of the living during the vacancy, whilst his wife and the commercial factotum sift the important questions as to which of the cows shall be sold, and which left to figure in the inventory. In a corner the tutor and the girls are in an animated conversation; they have somehow discovered his temporary absence, and are now, with female generosity, teasing the poor fellow to make him confess to it. In despair he takes the offensive, and commences pointedly to bluster about the young cavaliers who will become frequent visitors in the vicarage down south, and probable results therefrom, and the result is that the girls retire blushing from the contest.

The only one who is not quite content is, however, little Fred. Of course he is proud of being uncle, and wishes his nephew all happiness; but why father will remove south, where there are no sailing boats, not to speak of such an interesting individual as Nils Postman, he cannot understand.

At last every one has gone to rest, and in their dreams the sentiments and thoughts of the sleepers are tossing as in a many-coloured kaleidoscope. Fred sails his boat over all the green fields he has been told of down south, whilst Nils sits at the helm, singing out, "Catch the claw, catch the claw!" and the merchant is breaking the neck of the buyer in Bergen. The curate is now Emperor in Lofodden, then *curé* in France; and the tutor dreams his sweetheart has emigrated to California. The girls dream of shaded walks and garden parties, of which they have heard so much and experienced so little; and the old parson and his good-wife stroll with each other in the garden of the vicarage as in the first days of their love, and when reaching the great lime on the lawn, they cut their initials in its hoary bark, as they did five-and-twenty years ago; but lo! there is a lovely baby's face peeping through the venerable branches: that is the little grandchild beckoning its grandparents from the chilly north to the sunny home of their youth.

CARL SIEWERS.