

A NORWEGIAN PEASANT WEDDING.

BY EDWIN GOADBY.



THE traveller in Norway may move to and fro a good deal and never see a Norwegian wedding, just as he may pass through reindeer regions and never see either reindeer or Lapp. There are good reasons for this rarity. It is possible to produce a dozen or two, but the most striking of all is that there are not many people to marry. The country is sparsely populated, the peasants are

careful and thrifty, the young people are gravely brought up, and they have usually too much to do to let their thoughts run too early upon married life.

Very little, too, in the way of courting is seen by the passing traveller, because most of the peasant girls are away up the mountains in the summer, at the *saters*, or milk farms; and in the winter, when fun and frolic abound, the observant foreigner is at home, studying weather-tables, and wondering when snow, sleet, frost, and east winds are likely to come to an end.

A Norwegian wedding is a very significant incident. There is really so much that precedes it. To the man it means that he has attained a certain position. There must be no doubt of his ability to keep a wife. If he is a *bonder*, or freehold farmer, he must have succeeded to the farm, or his parents must be willing to retire from active work and leave him supreme. If he is a houseman, or labourer, he must also have succeeded to the allotment on the skirts of the bonder's farm, consisting of a cottage and patches of land, or he must have attained his allotment in some other way. He pays rent, does work for the bonder at fixed wages, and has his land settled upon him and his wife. The miscellaneous persons hanging about a big farm-house are the housemen and their wives, who seem to English eyes to constitute almost one family.

To the woman, marriage is the beginning of a third term of existence. The first is girlhood, which ends with confirmation. Dress shows each stage. All the unmarried girls in Norway wear their hair in two plaits, and have short skirts until they are confirmed. This ceremony—a serious one, involving much preparatory training—takes place about fifteen with common folk, and until it is past girls do not usually go from home to work, or earn their own living, though they assist in the home fields. After confirmation, they wear long dresses, and are expected to take a serious view of life and its duties. Neither men nor women can be married without having been confirmed, and a pastor will

decline to marry a "happy pair" unless they can show evidence of ability to live.

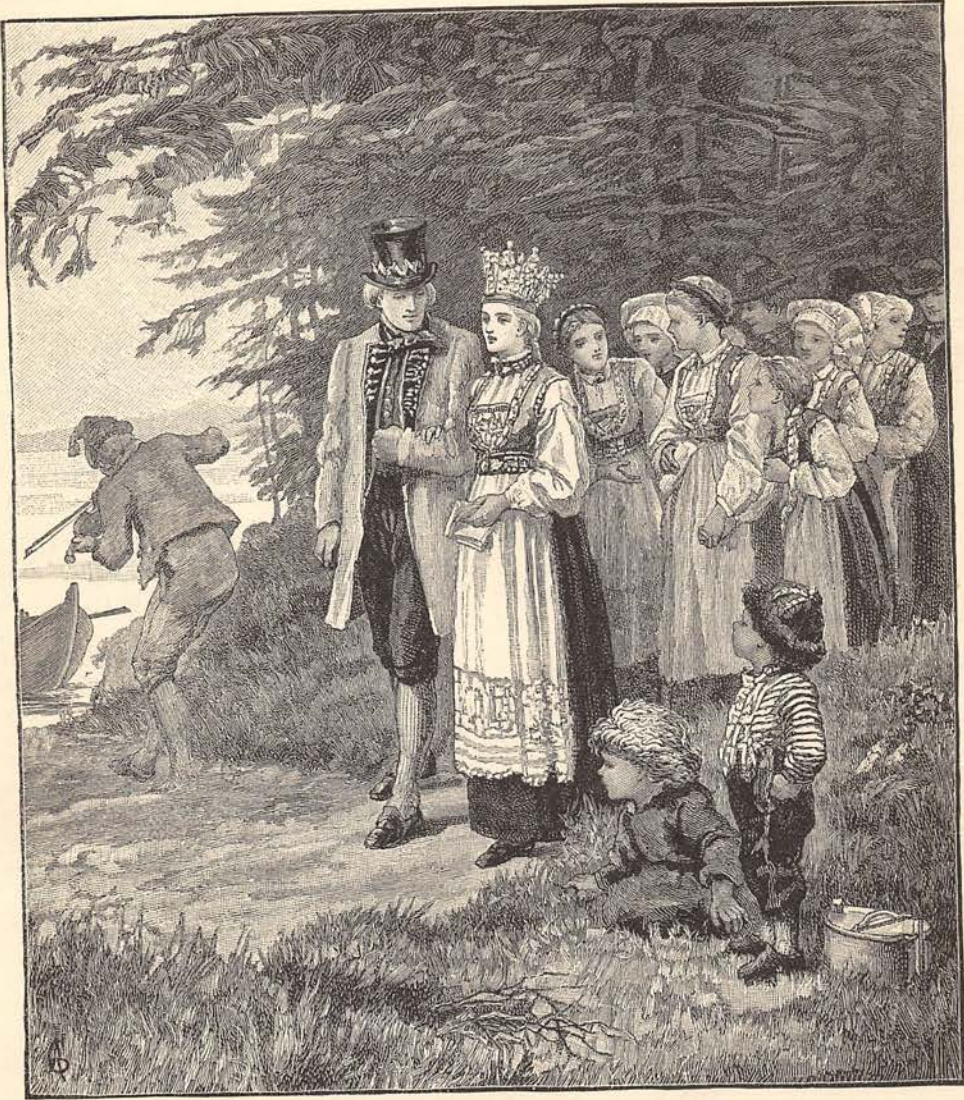
These details will confirm my remark that a Norwegian wedding is full of meaning. There is yet the betrothal to notice. It is really a preliminary wedding. The intending pair go to church, and, before the clergyman and their friends, indicate their desire to be betrothed. Questions are asked, rings of plain gold are exchanged, and the ceremony is completed by presents of jewellery and apparel that must be worn on the wedding-day.

It was a bright Sunday at V—. There was going to be a wedding, perhaps two. The pastor was not resident, and there was service in the church on alternate Sundays only. An immense sheet of water came up to the edge of the village, and around it were bold green hills, their lower edges dotted with farm-houses, painted a bright red, with door-posts, windows and window-frames, and barge-boards painted white; whilst the hill-tops were splashed with snow and tracts of pale green, with here and there a grey *sæter*, and an occasional smoke-wreath, to tell us of lonely maidens making butter and cheese, and spinning to fill up their leisure-time. It was from a small group of these lower houses across the lake that the wedding party was to come. A little crowd watched for the arrival. Presently the faint sounds of a fiddle could be heard across the water, and a cluster of boats, looking like a flock of swans, was visible.

Yes, there were to be two weddings, for two brides' boats could be seen, each with a sort of awning of red and white, under which bride and bridegroom were sitting in state. It was some time before anything like a procession could be made out.

First came the bride's boat—a huge thing, capable of holding a dozen persons. The fiddler sat on the prow, in a quaint short jacket, with a red worsted cap on his head, and a considerable knob to it. He was playing a soft, mild, monotonous air, with occasional breaks of liveliness in it, that made the occupants of the boat smile in a grave manner, as at the freaks of an original musician—for such they undoubtedly were. I believe they were produced by a second row of strings underneath the first. Bride and bridegroom sat under the awning, very demure, very much dressed, and very stately. The boat was rowed by six maidens, with white sleeves, red corsets, and bare heads. It was their white full sleeves that had made them look like swans. The other boats were rowed by young men and maidens indiscriminately.

When the two processions reached the rough landing-place, the boats were soon emptied, dresses were trimmed up a bit, the fiddler placed himself at the head of each party, and the procession wound its way under some pine-trees to the church. I had now time to study everything minutely. It was really a pretty sight, and a certain amount of subdued fun amongst



"THE PROCESSION RETURNED TO THE BOATS" (*p.* 666).

the younger persons in the groups made it enjoyable. Immediately behind the fiddler came the bride and bridegroom, arm in arm.

The bride was about twenty-three, I should say, with a ruddy complexion, good features, and large blue eyes. She had upon her head the bridal crown, without which few peasant women are married in Norway. I tried one on my own head on another occasion, and found it heavy. There is a brass rim to fit the head, and the open silver-work above it is often gilt in places with patches of gold, and embellished with garnets. Such crowns are kept as heirlooms; and it is no uncommon thing for the women of the same household to be married in a crown that has done similar duty in the family for one or two hundred years. The skirt was of black material, the bodice was snowy

white, with a corset of red and green, and an apron of white, with bands of embroidery hanging in front of it. Around the neck and the waist were squarely-made, dusky silver bands, looking like an eccentric collection of old buckles.

The bridegroom wore a "top hat," which seemed to have been kept in his family much after the fashion of his intended's bridal crown. He had a red waistcoat, very short in the waist, with brass buttons on it, and a singular kind of coat, very loose, with frontal ornament. There was just a suspicion of red piping down the side of the trousers. He was a muscular, sun-burnt, hardy-looking man of about thirty, though probably younger than he seemed to be. The white bodices and coloured skirts, the silver jewellery of the girls in the procession, and the snowy head-gear of the married women, with

crimped lappets hanging down the back, and V-shaped, made a brave show.

The second couple looked much older.

The brides had their wedding-rings already on their fingers, and each carried several handkerchiefs neatly folded up, of various colours. These handkerchiefs are usually presents given at the betrothal.

The ceremony was short. The service and communion were over before the bridal processions reached the church; and as they entered the two couples advanced to the altar, knelt down, and then placed themselves, with their friends, about the altar-rails. The pastor, in a black gown, with an Elizabethan ruff round his neck, addressed a few words to the groups, and then questioned bridegrooms and brides in turn. Each couple then knelt down, with their hands joined together, and the pastor pronounced them man and wife. A benediction concluded the service.

I learnt that the couples had been betrothed in the same church a year previously, and that they were to live on the same bonder's farm.

The procession returned to the boats in due course; the fiddler played a livelier tune, with more freaks than ever; an air of merriment passed over the whole party; and they rowed back over the lake to their festivities.

"Do they make much of their wedding festivities?" I asked of mine host.

"They make them last three days, and every one you have seen in the procession will be eating, drinking, and dancing until Wednesday."

"Could I see them at their fun?" I asked.

"M'm—yes—if you like. We'll row across to-morrow."

We did—a stiff pull of about four miles. Long before we reached the other side our object was guessed

by the villagers of B—. An old man, with merry twinkling eyes, came down to meet us, and mine host introduced me. "Always proud to see an Englishman," said the old man in Norwegian, translated by my companion. I found he was the master of the ceremonies. Dinner was over when we arrived. The younger husband had built a house, and his large room was the bride's-chamber, or meal-room, for the guests of the first pair. Tables and seats were placed all round, and at the top two conspicuous ones for the bride and bridegroom. They made their appearance, and the company sat round to eat porridge, cakes, bread and butter; but the company seemed to eat without much appetite. In another cottage was the store of eatables sent by neighbours or brought by friends for the festivities: huge cakes, piles of *flabva* or barley-cake, pots of butter, Indian meal, and other things. The largest room of another adjoining cottage was the dancing-room. Here we found our old friend the fiddler, reinforced now by a youth with a curious-looking flute.

When all the provisions are gone, and all the guests, who have been sleeping anywhere during the three nights of revelry, are tired out, the married pair begin the more serious duties of life.

The lights were twinkling in the cottage windows at B—the night following my visit, so that the wedding festivities were still on. In their rough, homely way, the peasants of Norway know how to keep a wedding; and as bride and bridegroom have their healths drunk and their hands shaken at and after every meal, they must feel that if happiness can come by much wishing, it is always sure. Whether all this health-drinking and dancing are appropriate is another matter; my task has been to describe what actually takes place at a Norwegian peasant wedding.

EVER TRUE!

JOYOUS at heart as a summer day
A lassie stands by the meadow way,
And looks at a face that is very dear,
And wonders in words that know nothing of
fear—

"Will you be true, love? will you be true?"

Will you love *me* as I love *you*?

Will love grow stronger as years roll on,

And be truest when youth and beauty have
gone?

Will you be true, love? will you be true?"

Joyous at heart on their wedding-morn
Husband and wife walk home through the corn,
And each seems to hear the old-time song
As, hand in hand, they wander along:

"Will you be true, love? will you be true?"

Will you love *me* as I love *you*?

Will love grow stronger as years roll on,

And be truest when youth and beauty have
gone?

Will you be true, love? will you be true?"

Joyous at heart when their hair is grey

Husband and wife together stray,

And hand clasps hand as they pass along,

And the heart of each is glad with song:

"You have been true, love! you have been true!"

Loving me well as I have loved you!

And time and change, and good and ill

Have linked us closer and closer still—

Hearts ever true, love! hearts ever true!"

GEORGE WEATHERLY.