



HOW TO SPEND A CHEAP HOLIDAY IN NORWAY.

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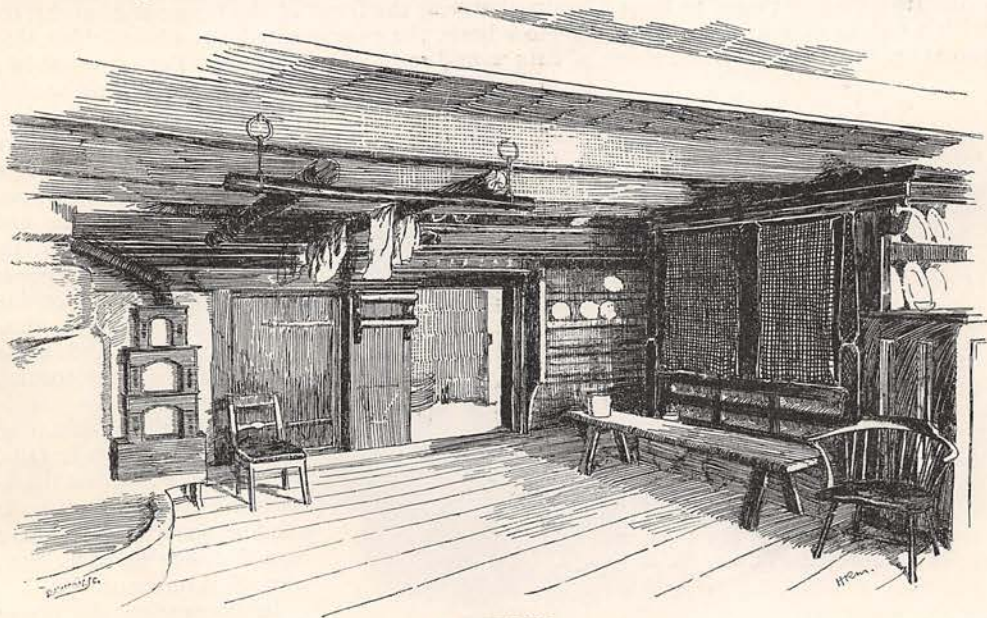
NORWAY as subject-matter for a magazine article is pretty well used up, if the country itself be the theme. We have all read about, and most of us are acquainted already with, its fjords, its midnight sun, its rivers, and its moors. If it were named something else, Finland for example, something might be done with it. But as Norway it is practically useless.

Yet if we take it from another point of view than a country, considering it, for example, as a pleasant and healthy holiday ground for women as well as sportsmen, far less expensive and much more enjoyable than English or Continental pleasure places, we may extract from it useful as well as entertaining matter. Norway sounds so far away to the traveller whose ideas have hitherto been bounded by the Rhine and Brittany, by Scotland and the most frequented parts of Ireland. Yet it is not. Many people, particularly sportsmen, wish it were, so that distance might prevent the yearly increasing influx of visitors. For my own part, I think the North Sea is a sufficient deterrent to the generality of people. So long as a forty hours' journey by steamer exists between England and the very happiest hunting-ground adjacent, that happy hunting-ground will not be overcrowded.

Disclaiming, then, the slightest intention of expatiating upon Norway as a whole, and with no desire to so much as mention a fjord, or a midnight sun, a snow-capped mountain, or the Arctic circle, coasting excursions in luxuriously fitted steamers, Polytechnic trips, and the British tourist, it remains only to be seen what the other points of view disclose, and what theme is left to the narrator who confesses that she knows next to nothing about it; that the only fjord she ever beheld was one of the commonplace kind that doesn't count with the traveller; that the only sun she saw was that which shines in the day-time instead of at night; that respecting the sole luxuriously fitted steamer with which she became acquainted, she would prefer, owing to the painfulness of her memories, to preserve an inviolate silence, while as to the Arctic circle she is lamentably ignorant, and from the time she set foot on Scandinavian soil to the time she left it, no British tourist, she records with gratitude, ever crossed her path.

Looking out of my window here in London, I see the self-same stars that I saw in Norway, when of an evening I used to stand upon the front door-step of the farmhouse that was my home for seven happy summer weeks. So that I know exactly, and can plan out in my own mind, how the land lies, how in front of me there is an orchard, and beyond it a meadow, and beyond the meadow the sea; how to my left the river runs; how to my right there is the garden gate, and beyond it the green uneven field about which the farm settlement is built, the carpenter's shed, the house of the farmer's brother, the peasants' huts, the village store, the white church; how, should I move from my position and stand in the middle of the green outside the gate, I should see more meadow beyond the farmyard, and beyond that again the rocky fjelds or hills,

horse-shoe in formation, that guard and shelter all. To-night is Saturday, and if I keep very still, and try to separate the sounds, I shall hear above the wind that is so soft and balmy, and the rustling of the trees, and the murmur of the river, and the low roar of the sea, the singing of the farm servants in the back quarters of the house, the mellow simple voices of the girls, the gruffer tones of the men, in the quaintly monotonous soothing songs of the Scandinavian peasantry. Inside the *spese-sal*, or dining-room, if I look, I shall see the *hus-fru*, her husband, his aged aunt, and perhaps, if to-morrow be the one Sunday in three that is kept in church, the good old priest who lives in the small fishing town fifteen miles away, and stays here when he comes to do duty, or to marry, christen, prepare for confirmation, or bury any one in the neighbourhood. Up stairs the children are asleep : four-year-old Lauritz, dreaming perhaps



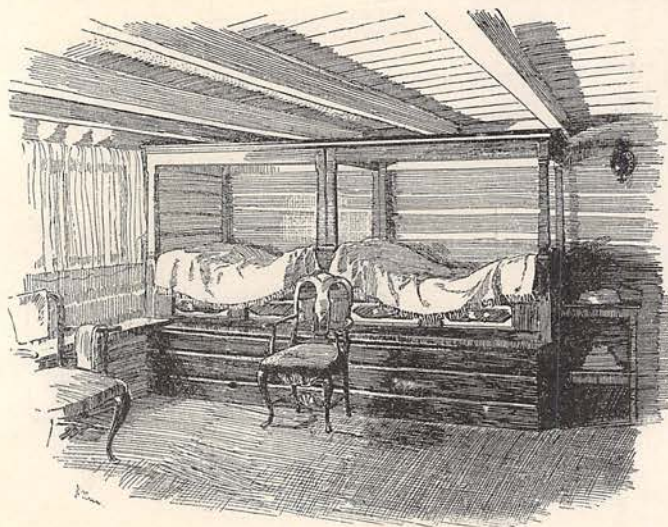
AN INTERIOR.

of the "storr fisk" he will catch with the rod his mother made him this afternoon—a primitive affair composed of a stick, a piece of string, and a dress-hook out of her work-box—with which he most diligently and solemnly whipped the river for a long time ; Maria, beautiful in sleep—Maria, our pride and joy, than whom we are persuaded no child of less than two was ever cleverer, for she can talk and dance, has a keen sense of humour, and is altogether the jolliest of small maids ; and, rending the air now and then with a wail, Paulina, the baby, soberer of countenance than either of the other two, and but seldom brought before the public.

In appearance the house in which we dwelt was not unlike a Noah's Ark, all of wood, painted a pure white, with green window-sashes, and a creamy brown front door that opened in two and was glazed half-way down. Entering this front door you found yourself in a small square room or hall fitted with a cupboard, in which the *Fru* kept glass, china, and the table-linen in daily use, and by the sides of which there ran a row of pegs upon the two walls, upon which every one kept their out-door gear, even down to Maria, whose pink cambric hat and quaint old-fashioned-looking cloak hung high up because of her shortness, and to the *Mindest*, or baby, who possessed a satin hood of melon-like proportions, and a long cloth cloak edged with pretence fur, which she very rarely donned, owing to her mother's prejudice against the open air for creatures of her tender age. Here also fishing tackle, consisting of lines, rods, waders, and sou'-westers, guns and their gear, umbrellas and sticks, found a home ; and there were chairs and stools upon which to sit when the weather was too wet or boisterous to make the bench outside a desirable resting place.

The age of this farmhouse is over a century, and as it is entirely of wood it is marvellous that it has not shared the fate of many others of a like description which have

been demolished over and over again. The spectacle of a burning town in Norway is by no means rare, and whoso would see any particular place must not delay his visit until next time if he would gratify his desire, for probably when that next time arrives the object of his curiosity will have disappeared. The ancient Norwegian was not fond of passages; in this house, which is a very large one for the neighbourhood, the two dwelling-rooms lead directly out of the entrance hall, and out of them lead again two smaller rooms used as bedrooms, while out of these lead respectively the pantry and another room, out of which come the kitchens, and so the ground plan of the house is complete, the living-rooms and the kitchens running parallel to one another. Leading from the big kitchen are some curious winding stairs, that take one to the upper regions, where there are more bedrooms; and if one were inclined to doubt their being there, as from a hasty glance at the front of the house one might, for with a single exception no windows show here, the exaggerated sounds of thumping footsteps or the hasty scatterings of cats would soon convince one. Perfect quiet in a



A BEDROOM.

house is perhaps an accompaniment of civilization, which, turning upside down a number of old-world practices and customs, makes noise outside and peace within the rule, instead of, as here, peace outside, where nothing wilder or noisier than Nature assails, and noise inside, where every footfall and movement is made evident by the medium of the wood on which it falls, and only the unusual thickness of beams and walls renders speech when heard at a distance no more than a muffled murmur.

In decoration the house was delightfully fresh; the walls in the sitting-room

were a pale aquamarine green, meeting a high dado of white, and in the dining-room of a shade or two darker, while the bedrooms were browns or terra-cottas, an evidence of the scrupulous cleanliness of their owner, who is always repainting his house, and making of it the delicious contrast it presents to the ordinary peasants' huts in the hills. It is furnished with simplicity, and to say truth, not according to luxury; for, whereas there are plenty of hard chairs and even hard sofas, there isn't a single easy-chair, or even a cushion, in the place; book-shelves and writing-tables are completely lacking, while only one bedroom musters a chest of drawers, and some are without washstands. The beds too were exceedingly odd; just boxes, with a queer pulling out contrivance that made them bigger than single size if necessary, with a liberal layer of straw at the bottom topped with a feather bed, and again a feather bed of less thickness as a coverlet, and perhaps a white knitted counterpane to overtop the rest. But the pillow-slips and sheets were exquisitely needled and monogramed, and lace often formed a finish to the towels, making one feel when one used them as if committing desecration upon some antimacassar or chair-back.

The usual stoves occupied positions in corners of the rooms, and behind and around them the walls were for a certain distance cemented, so that there was no risk of conflagration. The floors were not carpeted, but were closely boarded, and washed at least every other day. All the window-ledges were gay with growing plants, placed inside instead of out, and sometimes, even in that secure haven, blown down by the violence of the stormy winds that blew; and conspicuous among them, standing on the ground because of its mature height, was a myrtle-tree which had been nurtured from a slip taken from the housewife's bridal wreath. We burned oil and candles at night, and a gigantic lantern, of a primitive type, illumined by a candle, was provided

for those who wished to wander abroad over the rough fjelds and pathless meadows. I remember one evening noticing with astonishment that the lantern was with much circumstance prepared for the *Fru*, who wanted to go out and search for a lost button of Maria's. I thought she might have waited till the morning; but she was not of my opinion.

If, however, the dwelling parts of the farmhouse were modernized to a certain extent, the kitchen was the old original, and looked as if centuries had passed over it, leaving it unchanged. It was

rather tunnel-like in shape, and tunnel-like because what may have been its cornered contour was quite rounded off by the interposition of shelves, racks, and nooks everywhere. In

typical Norwegian dwelling-places the rafters are as useful as the walls, and form the receptacle of many things, such as books, knives, and tools; and in this typical kitchen of a thriving farmer, an endless number of pots, pans, spoons, strainers, and other cooking utensils found places in these crannies,



A KITCHEN.

which they had made their own for many decades, but which to the inexperienced eye looked heterogeneous indeed. As for the fireplace, it was a picture in itself, and often have I wished that I were gifted with the painter's art, to perpetuate its quaintness, and to reproduce the pretty *hus-fru* as she bent over it intent upon waffles or pancakes, the ruddy, fitful light catching her straw-coloured hair with its crisply curling nimbus, and contrasting with the yellow lamplight that on the other side beamed steadily upon her. But we were not welcome in the kitchen, upon which the mistress looked with a kind of scorn or patient displeasure—as on a place that couldn't be cured and must be endured; and the hasty sketches I was able to take of it were mental only, as the door between it and the *spese-sal* or dining-room opened, or upon the occasion of our last luncheon, when I was permitted to watch the making of *krumkage* and pancakes which were being prepared for a supreme delectation, and when I noted as microscopically as I could the wide open fireplace, the pans or caldrons, the pots and spacious places where three or four people could cook at once, one making pancake, another boiling potatoes, and a third preparing the stew. For fuel, coal is used, or wood, or heather, according to the food that is being cooked; *flad-brod*, our Scotch oat-cake, is made over heather or ling, as they call it, so that no disagreeable taste is given to it, and traditional custom is preserved. Here, as I dare say in most oat-cake producing places, *flad-brod* is made only twice a year, and all the women of the farm assist at its manufacture for three days. It is most extensively patronized by the farm labourers, who come into the house for their meals as they do in rural England, and partake of them in the second kitchen, where the *hus-fru's* precious but somewhat incongruous possession, a small oil stove, has its place.

During my stay, the domestic arrangements were topsy-turvy. There were several women-servants, and each appeared to have been hired with a view to a service of a special kind, and then told off to the branch that suited her best. Thomina, who was supposed to be the cook, evinced a leaning towards the work

of a housemaid, and was rarely to be seen over the fireplace; Bettina, the lady-help, hated housekeeping, the branch upon which her future fruit was expected to hang, and took up the position of parlourmaid; Martina, the nursery girl, was so strong that she was induced to follow the plough, while Kisten, the round-faced parlourmaid, ousted by Bettina, was, much to her own liking, installed in her place; indeed, every one in this upside-down arrangement seemed pleased, so all was well and as it could be wished. Bettina, who had been sent to learn domesticity from the *hus-fru*, a plan that obtains in Norway, and is an excellent one for teaching girls,



HOLIDAY DRESS.

wore a plain gold ring on the third finger of her right hand, which betokened her engagement to a swain on whose behalf she was being instructed in housewifely ways. She had a singularly unhealthy-looking complexion of the spotty type, and an abominable way of constant clearing what was probably a relaxed, and possibly uncomfortable throat. When this exercise happened at meal-times, it was particularly disagreeable, as was also her heavy breathing, and her objectionable way of uttering the simple word "melk," mean-

ing milk, which she did with a guttural scrape. But she was a good creature, and very willing, and will some day develop into a Dutch-doll counterpart of her stolid mother, who, one Sunday, came over to tea, and, according to a close observer, breathed hard, but spoke not a word throughout the entire ceremony. Bettina's square, solid, flat-faced personality was in striking contrast to that of Melina, a damsel of very attractive mien, who variously worked in the fields, waited at meals, washed floors, and walked forth to do shopping, clothed as if intent upon a visit to a town fourteen miles away, in a cloak, a hat, and gloves, and carrying an umbrella and a large basket, while in reality bound no further than the tiny store two hundred yards from the farm. Melina was in her way really pretty; she had bright brown hair, with the inevitable crisp little love-locks that adorn the coiffures of Norwegian beauties, and the brightly plaited knob at the back, brown eyes, a cream skin and pink cheeks. She was in the habit of wearing a green skirt and a light-coloured bodice, and, in common with the other maids, was capless.

Before I started for this out-of-the-way recreation ground, where I owned the proud distinction of being one of the only pair of Englishwomen who had ever stayed there, it was predicted that I should be intolerably bored and half-starved. But I was neither. Moreover, within walking and driving distance there were rare beauties to discover. Sometimes we used to ramble miles up our river into the fjelds, with a basket of sandwiches to sustain us, stopping to buy milk at some cottage, whose quaint house-room contained the family beds fitted into the wall, as in Scotch places. The people we invariably found hospitable and kind in the extreme. They are a pleasant race and highly intelligent, and are taught well in their schools—English among other subjects. The farmer with whom we sojourned spoke not only his own and our language, but German and French as well. He had travelled a great deal. His old aunt too, who never left the farm for a walk of over two hundred yards without putting on gloves, was an authority on Ibsen and Bjørnsen, and other Scandinavian authors whose names

were merely names to me. This knowledge in one who had seldom moved from that tiny out-of-the-way corner at first surprised me. I have since learned, however, that Norwegians are extremely loyal to their progress as a nation as well as individually, and that the ancient proverb of no man being a prophet in his own country does not obtain in this.

The peculiar and picturesque dress of the country folk is becoming rarer and rarer as a toilette of general use. But it is one that suits them admirably, and that shows off well their treasured silver ornaments, many of which, however, went to the melting-pot some years ago, when an appeal was made to the country to recruit the tottering national exchequer. An ancient dress that survives is that worn by the priest, which consists of a long black gown and snowy white ruff of stiffened lawn. He is a greatly appreciated member of society, whose room in the most important house of whatever place he visits is always kept ready for him, and whose ministrations are highly treasured, especially by the women. As for the men, I used to notice that they appeared in great numbers at the churchyard gate, but did not go further. Norwegian services are very long, and are mostly done sitting; the priest, however, has a great deal of exertion connected therewith, and if his parish is a very large one, as in the case of which I am cognizant, much journeying is entailed. On account of this, funerals may be conducted in the priest's absence by the people themselves, and when next he comes that way he concludes the last rites by appropriate prayer and exhortation. Funerals are very important ceremonials in Norway, and take a long time. First of all a messenger is sent round on foot to all the neighbours, to bid them to the obsequies, and until his message is delivered to the head of the house no refreshment may be offered or accepted, and no seat. For days before, grand cookings take place in the house of desolation, and those of the mourning friends, of a peculiarly unappetising compound, answering to the baked meats of former times in this country, and other viands. For one day in advance of that of burial there are feasting in the house of the deceased, not attended, so far as I could gather, by anything approaching orgie, but simply a reunion of old friends and acquaintance. On that of the funeral there is another gathering which accompanies the corpse and family to the grave; and the day after is also spent in company, the idea apparently being that consolation is thus afforded to the bereaved. I was not fortunate enough to be present at a wedding, which is, I understand, an occasion of much the same type, but of rejoicing instead of sadness.

As for our meals at the farm, we none of us ever fared better or more healthily. Of milk we had as much as we wanted; coffee and tea—a luxury in Norway—were served most liberally, and we enjoyed extremely our quaint breakfasts of eggs, and fish in all kinds of form—salted, marinated, dry, and fresh—German sausage cut in slices, meat in slices, and cheese pared extremely thin. For our lunches we depended chiefly on the aforesaid dishes of sliced meats of many kinds, and on fish of our own catching; while our dinners consisted of soup, fish and fowl, meat, and puddings of many and beautiful kinds. The cakes they made us—light confections of batter mixed with cream—were supremely delightful.

In conclusion, I have only to express my regret that I am unable to divulge the name of this particularly rural and out-of-the-way Norwegian paradise. Norway is becoming so crowded that precautions are needful, if one desires to depart from the beaten track in one's holiday, and to escape one's fellow Britishers. But research rewards, and I can assure every one who wants rest, and quiet, and no big bills, that they will profit by finding some such place as this. The best way to cultivate an acquaintance with a farmer in Norway is to go over there one's self, and look around for what one wants, and if one cannot become a guest on that visit to make prospective arrangements. It is worth some little trouble to do so. My expenses for the whole seven weeks of my holiday, including the steamer from England and back again, did not amount to the modest sum of five-and-twenty pounds.