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SOME NORWEGIAN CHARACTERISTICS.

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(From a painting by Tidemand.)
INTERIOR OF A NORWEGIAN HOUSE.



which Lord Tennyson has propounded in his charming song from "The Princess," yet I think, on reflection, we must admit there is a considerable element of truth in it.

The readers of THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER are at present enjoying the record of the travels of two London bachelors in the "false, fair, and fickle South," and I have no doubt the description of those scenes, in which nature and art combine to produce beautiful results, must make many who have not seen them, long to cross the icy wall which shuts out the northern barbarians from the land of Giotti, Raffael, and Michael Angelo. Still, I venture, notwithstanding all that, to direct the reader's thoughts in another direction, from South to North, from the land of vines and olives to the land of juniper and pine; from the fair, and often "false and fickle" Southern, to the rugged, dark, and honest Northman.

I ask you to come to the Northern land, to *Gamle Norge* (Old Norway), so loved by its sons and daughters, and to see something of its people, to learn something of their character, to sit with them in their homes, to listen to their music, not so much the finished classical works of men like Grieg or Halvdan Kjerulf (though they, and like composers, do not fail to reproduce many of the national characteristics), but rather the folk songs so typical of the land in which they have their birth; a music tinged with the sombre hue of their own rugged mountains, full oftentimes of the melancholy which seems always to exist amongst a people who live in a land where existence is more or less of a struggle against nature, and where there is more of gloom than sunshine.

But do not imagine that all is cold, and dark, and gloomy in the Northern land. The winter, it is true, is long, but the nights are made glorious in the far North by the aurora and by the moon, which, during the absence of the sun, never sets. And then the days come when the sun shines with warmth again, the snows quickly melt away, and summer (for spring can hardly be said to exist) comes in "by leaps and bounds," and transforms the land into a country of which it may truly be said, "there is no night there."

Such surroundings cannot fail to influence the character of those who live among them, just in the same way as the almost perpetual brightness of the

"... warm South, where Europe spreads her lands

Like fretted leaflets breathing on the deep," has affected that of the Southern nations. And so it is that we find the people of Norway influenced in no small and inconsiderable degree by the nature of the land in which they dwell. It is true they have changed more or less since the days of their forefathers. There is not now, perhaps, the same spirit of unrest and desire for adventure which marked the Norseman of the eighth and ninth centuries, whose fierceness sent up in the churches of

Northern France the piteous prayer: *A furore Normannorum libera nos, Domine*. Those wild days have come to an end. Nations, it seems, no less than individuals, have their *wanderjahre*.

The national misfortunes may have had something to do with it. The centuries which followed the days of Haakon Haakonsson, the union with, and subsequent dependence upon, Denmark, would have been enough to quench altogether the flame of national life out of less hardy breasts, and when the nation's renaissance came, the old heroic days had passed away, and other channels must be found for the courage and activity of the Norseman.

It is not always easy for summer tourists to form correct ideas of the national characteristics of the country they visit, but in Norway it is easier than most other European countries ordinarily accessible. The travellers are yet, comparatively speaking, so few, and the country so large, that you come more directly in contact with the people. You do not, as in Switzerland, find yourself surrounded by the same kind of people you will meet in Bond Street or the Park. Neither do you find the vast hotels, and luxurious mode of life common in the Swiss summer resorts. No, you are in a land where there is still plenty of "elbow room," and ample opportunities for studying the character of its inhabitants. It was, it is true, once the same in Switzerland, but those days are gone by, and one can only hope Norway may long retain the delightful freshness which is so characteristic of it now.

There is one point which must strike at once even the most superficial observer of Norwegian character, and that is its independence. There is very little of cringing servility in the constitution of the genuine Norseman. This independence is not the self-asserting independence which is generally supposed to be characteristic of the Yankee American. It is a grave, solemn affair. The man feels he is a free man, dwelling upon his own land, and that he has a right to be respected by those he comes in contact with. It will not do for the English tourist in Norway to expect that he can, by merely commanding, obtain what he wants. He must adopt another method. I have often seen this illustrated. If you do not treat a Norwegian properly, he will leave you to your own devices until you come to another frame of mind. If, on the contrary, you are properly polite, you will meet with as much kindness in Norway, or more, than in any other country. It would be wrong to blame them for this independence of character; on the contrary, it is one of those very qualities for which they are to be commended. It is an inherited quality, and has come down to them from the times when the King and the peasant met in the *Thing* to settle the affairs of the land.

Hand in hand with this independence goes very true courtesy. It is not fair to judge the national character by occasional unpleasant station keepers, whom tourists may chance to come across. Because such and such a man, at such a place, may have turned a deaf ear to your reiterated demand for three horses when, perhaps, he had only one, it is no reason to assume the Norwegians to be uncivil, and to feel it your duty to enter a long complaint on that score in the *Dagbog*. People who will, without a murmur, get out of their beds in the middle of the night to let you in and get you food, as I have often known them do, when the remuneration they receive is very small, sometimes next to nothing, are not an uncivil race. Any small present given to a Norwegian is invariably acknowledged in a way which makes you feel you are almost assisting in a religious ceremony. If you give your post-boy a few *öre*, he will take off his hat, and

shake hands solemnly with the whole party, and the same ceremony is gone through on the very smallest provocation by others. As you drive through the country, and pass the peasants at their work, they lift their hats to you, and expect you to do the same. This custom, I fear, will not long survive on the frequented roads, if tourists imagine, as many do, that the people are merely saluting them, as the village labourer touches his hat to the squire, and fail to return the salute.

After meals in a Norwegian family the guest is expected to shake hands with, or bow to, the host and hostess, and exclaim "*Tak for maden*," or "Thank you for the meal," and this is repeated on each occasion. And in some places when you meet your host, say in the street a week after, you exclaim "*Tak for Sidsst*," or "Thank you for the last occasion"—a form which recalls South's sarcastic definition of gratitude, "A sense of obligation for favours expected." The Norwegian is hospitable, and always ready to drink your good health with you; sometimes it is in the innocuous and pleasant currant wine, a favourite drink in the south; at other times it is in the *agua vit*, which to the uninitiated seems to be a compound of spirits of wine and caraway seeds, but is highly esteemed in the country. The custom is trying at times. I have had to attempt to drink a compound which professed to be a brown sherry, at 6 a.m., and to appear to enjoy it! It would never do not to respond to the kindly feeling which prompts such acts.

Travelling through Norway, one must be struck by the love of animals which the Norwegians display. Their horses or ponies are always kindly used, and they quickly resent any attempt on the part of a traveller to overdrive them. There is a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Christiania, and it has printed suggestions as to the way in which horses are to be driven in long stages, &c., which are very useful, and worthy of being carried out.

Birds are cared for as well as beasts. There is always a sheaf of corn put up in winter on a pole outside the barn, for the birds to eat. Norwegians are very fond of the little birds. In many places they fix boxes in the trees, to induce them to build there, or hollowed logs with a perch outside. These homes for their feathered friends are soon used by the birds, to the delight of the people who place them there. They take every care, also, that the birds will not be injured by cats, for around the trees in which these boxes are placed is often put a leather band with spikes in it, which, when puss attempts to climb the tree, quickly drives her back again.

The same care is shown with regard to other animals; dogs and cattle have their due share of the love of their Norwegian masters. It is very rare, I think, to find in Norway the same amount of cruelty which is practised with impunity in many countries of Europe. This love for animals may arise, I imagine, from the close contact in which the people live with them during the long winter months, when they must be fed and cared for at home, and, if left untended, would soon perish. It is a part of the sympathy which is natural between those who share the same hardships and perils.

In a former article in THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER, I said something about the honesty of Norwegians, which is a very remarkable characteristic of their race. It is a virtue which is, unfortunately, becoming rare nowadays, and one which may naturally be highly prized. How long they will continue to be marked above other nations for this quality will depend, I fear, on the amount of contact which they have with other people. Of course, one will meet with black sheep here and there, just as you will meet those who are

uncivil and grasping; but if we take them as a whole, I do not think there is any nation in Europe more conspicuous for the virtue of sterling honesty than the Norwegians. There are instances of persons having left purses behind them with considerable sums of money, which were restored to the owners, after being passed from hand to hand through the country, and reaching their rightful possessors without a single coin being missing. There is one thing which proves a severe trial to the honesty of the Norwegian *skydsgut*, or post-boy, and that is any kind of leather strap, especially neat little ones on knapsacks, etc. I don't know why this should be especially attractive, but I have had them taken more than once, and I have heard other people mention the same curious fact. It is certainly the only thing I have ever had "conveyed" from me in Norway.

The reader must not imagine that they are an altogether model people, entirely free from those failings which afflict humanity in other parts of the earth. They have their faults, it is true, but I do not think in what I have said there is a word which is not strictly accurate. There is, indeed, a singular charm in the homeliness, honesty, and simple religious feeling of these dwellers in the North.

I have alluded at the commencement of this article to their national music, and will conclude by a few words with reference to it. I do not think the Norwegians are what might be called a musical people. They have not as much music as their neighbours the Swedes, who have furnished us in recent days with two of our most famous queens of song. Nor, of course, can they compare for a moment with their German kinsmen. But if we consider the smallness of the population, and, until

recent years, the manner in which they were isolated and cut off from opportunities of musical knowledge, they have not been wanting in names well known in the musical world. The fame of the late Ole Bull, the great violinist, whose life has just been written, might well be called world-wide, and the modern composer, whose name I have mentioned at the commencement (Grieg), will show that the race of musicians is not by any means extinct.

One cannot say much for their ecclesiastical music. It consists, chiefly, of the long *chorales* common in Lutheran services; they are principally set in minor keys, and are rather doleful to listen to, though sometimes you hear a well known hymn from the land of Luther, like "*Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*." Part singing does not seem to be much practised, and even in churches like the cathedral in Trondhjem the music is very harsh and grating. But what it lacks in graceful rendering is made up for in heartiness, and it certainly does one good to hear everyone in the vast congregations, which fill to overflowing the large churches such as you may see in Trondhjem and other towns, joining in those old Psalm tunes which they have learned to love so well. Of the secular music indigenous to the country, the *Folkemelodier*, there is considerable variety, but through it all seems to run that wild, sad strain so characteristic of the land and the people. These songs you will chiefly hear in their festive gatherings, and at times when they are engaged in their work. Sometimes you will find the people ready enough to sing their national melodies for you. The boatmen, as they row you along their lakes and fjords, will often enliven the way with their national songs. I

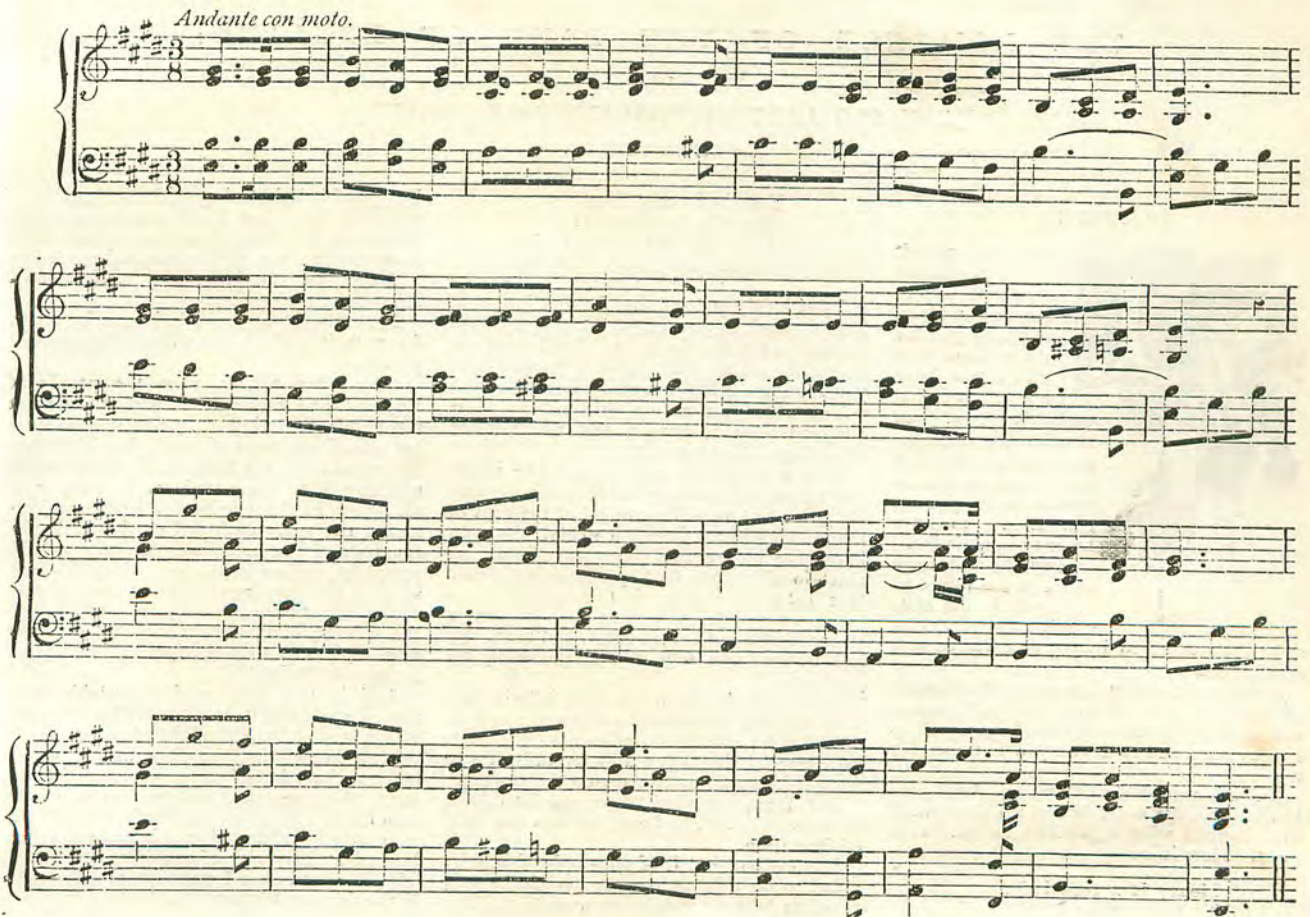
remember well, a few years ago, rowing across the Indvik Fjord, in the beautiful light of a Norwegian midnight, while *our three boatmen* sang that fine spirit-stirring song:

"Ja vi Elsker dette Landet
Som det stiger frem,
Furet Veirbidt over bandet,
Med de tusind Hjem."

I had an experience of a different kind upon another occasion. We were having a long and rather monotonous drive in a *stolkjærre*, and as our *skydsgut* was a very intelligent lad, we had had a good deal of conversation with him. Then it occurred to us that it would be very nice to hear him sing *some of the music* of his native land. The boy was shy, but we coaxed him to sing (not suggesting anything to him), but being pretty sure we should have one of his national melodies. What were our feelings you may well imagine, when the boy began, in a shrill treble, to sing "Hold the fort!" We did not ask him to give us any more music.

One Norwegian national air is very familiar to many of us. It has been arranged by Mr. Pearsall, and published in Messrs. Novello's "Musical Times," and is entitled "The hardy Norseman's house of yore." It is very popular in Norway, and is *often heard* there, though the one I have alluded to, "Ja vi Elsker dette Landet" ("Yes, we love this land"), seems in some parts more popular.

Very curious is the music of the *Hallingdansen*, a curious form of national dance, which takes its name from the Hallingdal district, a large valley, with several lateral ones, lying between Christiania and the Sogne Fjord. The people of that region preserve to the present day many of their old customs in a greater



degree than other parts of Norway, except, perhaps, some of the southern valleys, like the Sætersdal, etc. The movements accompanying this music are very wild and fantastic, and the music itself is equally strange. The following description of it, given by the celebrated Norwegian writer, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, in his "Life by the Fells and the Fjords,"* will give some idea of it:—

"The music struck up, everybody became quite silent, and he began. He squatted on the floor, hopped sideways in time with the violin, swung to and fro, crossed and uncrossed his legs under him several times, sprang up again, and stood as though he were going to take a leap, and then went on hopping sideways as before. The violin was played by a skilful hand, and the tune became more and more exciting. Nils bent his head backwards, and suddenly kicked the beam, so that the dust from the ceiling came scattering down upon the folks. They laughed and shouted around, and the girls stood almost breathless. The sound of the violin rose high above the tumult, constantly egging him on by wilder and wilder strains. He did not withstand their influence either, but bent forward, hopped in time with the music, stood up as if about to take a leap, but shirked it, and swung to and fro as before; and then, just when he seemed as though leaping was the furthest thing from his thoughts, leaped up and gave a thundering kick upon the beam again and again. Next he turned 'cartwheels' forwards and backwards, standing up quite straight after each. Then he would do no more. The tune passed through some wild variations, quiveringly

sank, and at last died away in one single long low note."

This description of Bjørnson's will bring before our minds this strange dance and the kind of music that accompanies it.

The love-songs and others have in all of them something of that strain of melancholy of which I spoke at the commencement, though very often the words do not always convey the same feeling. There is one very beautiful air which accompanies the words of a sort of duet between a certain Sveinung and his lady-love, Astri. They are in a kind of peasant dialect, and I had considerable trouble to get them translated into English; but at last a Norwegian friend of mine succeeded in procuring them for me. They are amusing and interesting, and I give them in the shape I received them. The form of the song will remind us of our own "Huntingtower." First the lover sings:—

SVEINUNG.

Astri, my Astri, the only one that cared for me,
Those days when you bestowed on me your friendship,
Those days when you shed tears whenever I left you,
Each Saturday night, as you may well remember,
Then I was the happiest man in the country;
I would not have changed with the priest or the bailiff.

ASTRI.

Those days when you loved none but Astri,
When you did not find Svanaug more lovely than me,
Those days when quickly on foot each Saturday night you came to me.

I would not have changed with the judge's daughter,
If thereby I should have lost you.

SVEINUNG.

Henceforth only Svanaug I woo—
She who is always so kind and gentle—
She who so cleverly plays the "Langeleik."
Svanaug the fair shall now be mine.
Twice I would die with the greatest pleasure,
If that would bring joy to my darling with the beauteous eyes.

ASTRI.

Now I care for none but the smart Torgrim;
Him alone I chose among many suitors.
Sveinung! oh, Sveinung! think not of my loving you any more.
Thrice would I die if my Torgrim were safe.

SVEINUNG.

But if I left Svanaug, and thought no more of her—
If my love for Astri returned once more—
If now I will swear to be true to you—
Astri! my Astri! what then would your answer be?

ASTRI.

More beauteous than the sun which shines behind the hill is Torgrim; of that I am sure;
And you are more wicked than the fiercest wizard—
More false to me than the foam of the sea.
But still I am your most faithful girl.
Only with you will I live and die.

The music wedded to these quaint words will be found on the preceding page.

* "Life by the Fells and the Fjords. A Norwegian Sketchbook." Strahan and Co., Limited, Paternoster row.

THE ROMANCE OF THE BANK OF ENGLAND;

OR,

THE OLD LADY OF THREADNEEDLE STREET.

By EMMA BREWER.

CHAPTER IX.



MUST not permit this my last interview with you to pass without thanking you for the patience with which you have listened to an old woman's story, and also for the opportunity you have afforded me of drawing the attention of the present generation to my home and public life.

It will be a pleasure to me in the future to meet you in my children's reception rooms,

and to be recognised by you as a trusted and faithful friend.

In our first meeting I gave you Mr. Punch's caricature of me. In this, my last, I present you with my likeness, sketched by myself as I think I am, and as I wish you to remember me.

There is a good deal of money about me; but I am not the worse for that if I use it well, as I learned when a girl from an old Saxon verse. Here it is:—

"Money is a consolation
To every man;

Yet shall every man
Liberally distribute it;
If he will that before God
Honour shall fall to his lot."

I feel lonely and sad that I am no longer to look forward to your bright faces in my bank parlour as the months go by. But I must not be swallowed up with regret at parting from you, for there is still something left undone.

You asked me at our first meeting how England came to have a debt which it has never been able to pay off.

It is a formidable subject, and one which the nineteenth century would call a dry one for girls; but we will try to get at the root of the matter without finding it weary. But you know the phrase that "eloquence is not so much in the mouth that speaks as in the ears that listen"; and so, if this subject is to prove acceptable, you must help me by a strong desire to know about it, and then, dry as it is, the knowledge will fall pleasantly on your ears.

You think that to be in debt is to be in a state of great discomfort and unrest; and so indeed it is; and, as an old woman with much experience, I say to you all—Avoid it, if you want to be happy and keep your self-respect.

But I am not asked to go into the subject of individual indebtedness, but into the debt of the nation.

It is curious that I, of all people, should be asked to do this, seeing that I might be supposed to take a one-sided view of it, as I live

by it, and it is bound up with every action of my daily life. But I will not disappoint the confidence you have placed in me, but endeavour to give you all the particulars clearly, and then you can judge for yourselves of its effect upon the country.

For a beginning to this interesting story, for such it really is, we will employ the old phrase—

Once upon a time, when the people of England had money over and above what was required for their daily wants, there were but one or two ways of employing it, if they desired to make the little more. One was by applying it to some trade or industry, and the other in the purchase of land, by which means the spare cash did good both to the country and the individual; for, says an old pamphlet, yellow with age, which I came across a few days ago, "The property of this nation consists alone in the profits arising from the industry of the inhabitants, and becomes more or less as they multiply and their gains increase or diminish."

And in this quiet and respectable way money was doing its work in and for the good of England and the English, when one day it became known that the Government, which is the nation's housekeeper, was dreadfully in want of money, and had no idea where to turn for it. It had no expectations; its funds were utterly exhausted, and it had not as yet learned an easy way of supplying its wants. This was just before I was born, and therefore in the reign of William III.