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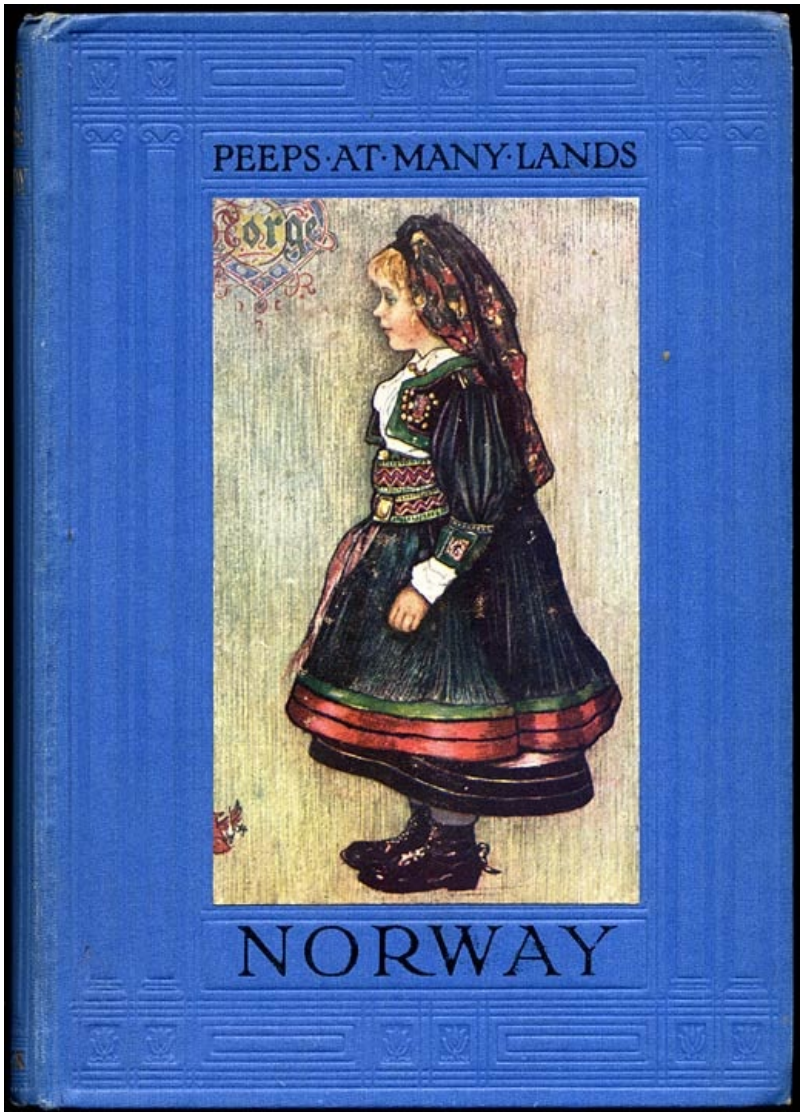

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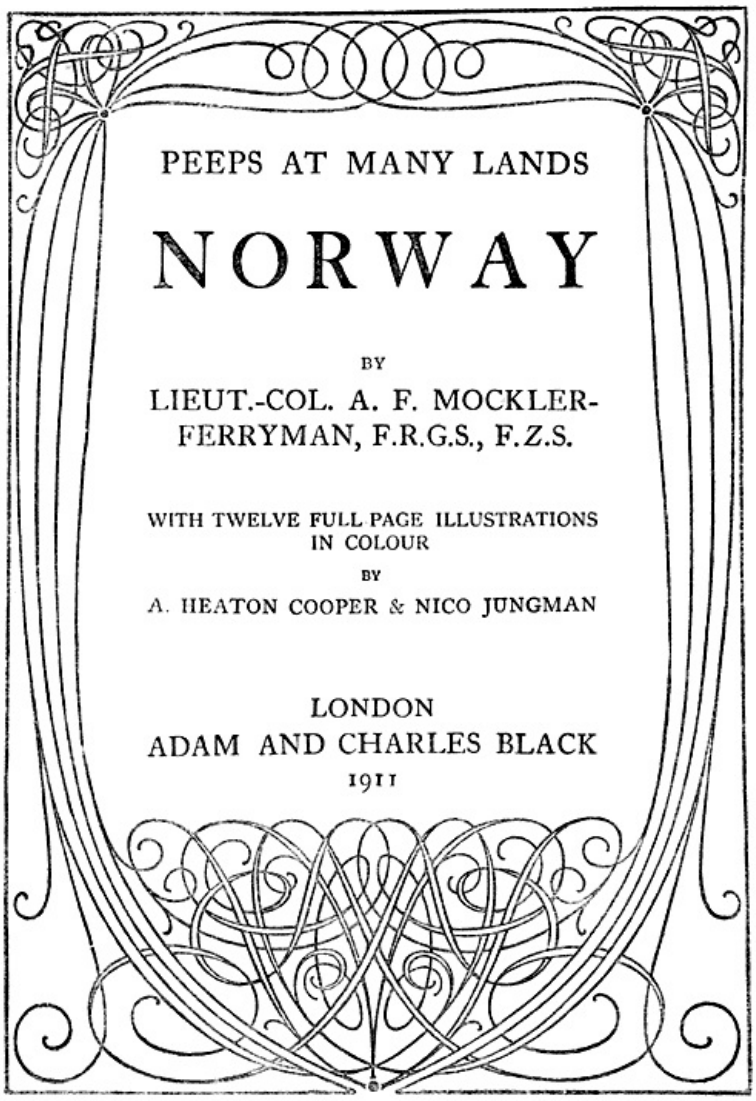

Peeps at Many Lands

Norway

By

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With twelve full page illustrations in colour

By

A. Heaton Cooper & Nico Jungman

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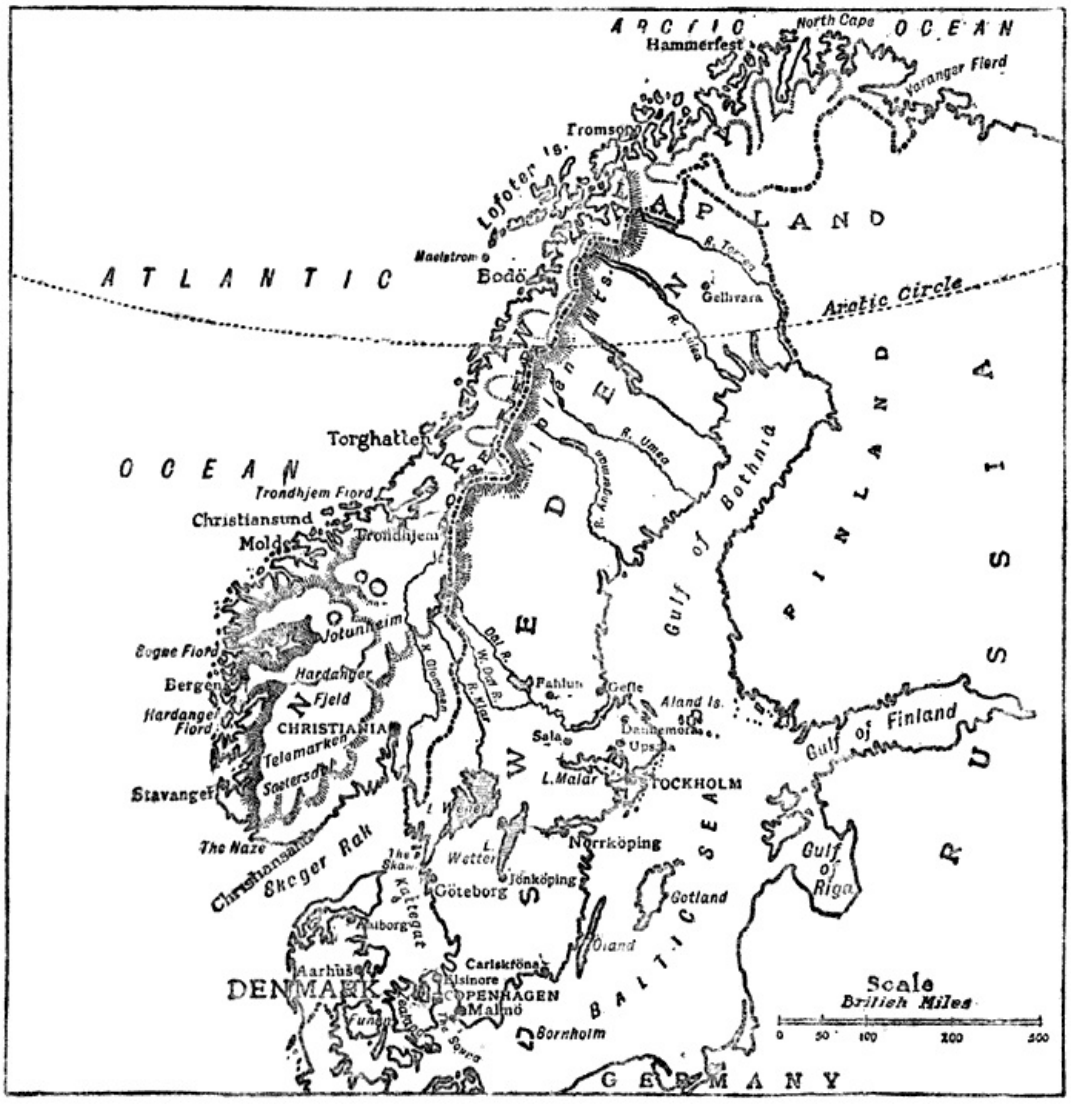

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Norway

Chapter I

The Land of the Vikings

Who has not heard of the Vikings—the dauntless sea-rovers, who in the days of long ago were the dread of Northern Europe? We English should know something of them, for Viking blood flowed in the veins of many of our ancestors. And these fierce fighting men came in their ships across the North Sea from Norway on more than one occasion to invade England. But they came once too often, and were thoroughly defeated at the Battle of Stamford Bridge, when, as will be remembered, Harald the Hard, King of Norway, was killed in attempting to turn his namesake, King Harold of England, off his throne.

Norwegian historians, however, do not say very much about this particular invasion. They prefer to dwell on the great deeds of another King Harald, who was called “Fairhair,” and who began his reign some two hundred years earlier. This Harald was only a boy of ten years of age when he came to the throne, but he determined to increase the size of his kingdom, which was then but a small one, so he trained his men to fight, built grand new ships, and then began his conquests.

Norway was at that time divided up into a number of districts or small kingdoms, each of which was ruled over by an Earl or petty King, and it was these rulers whom Harald set to work to subdue. He intended to make one united kingdom of all Norway, and he eventually succeeded in doing so. But he had many a hard fight; and if the Sagas, as the historical records of the North are called, speak truly, he fought almost continuously during twelve long years before he had accomplished his task, and even then he was only just twenty-one years of age. [2]

They say that he did all these wonderful things because a girl, named Gyda, whom he wanted to marry, refused to have anything to say to him until he had made himself King of a really big kingdom. He made a vow that he would not comb or cut his hair until he had conquered the whole country. He led his men to victory after victory, and at length fought his last great battle at Hafrsfjord (to the south of Stavanger). The sea-fight was desperate and long, but Harald's fleet succeeded in overpowering that of the enemy, and Sulki, King of Rogaland, as well as Erik, King of Hardanger, were slain. Then Harald cut and dressed his hair, the skalds composed poems in honour of the event, and for ever after he was known as Fairhair. He was truly a great Viking, and he did not rest content with the conquest of Norway alone; for he brought his ships across the North Sea and conquered the Isle of Man, the Hebrides, the Shetlands, and the Orkneys, and he lived to the age of eighty-three.

Then there are the stories of the two Olafs—Olaf Tryggvasson and Olaf the Saint, each of whom took part in many a fight on British soil, each of whom was the champion of Christianity in Norway and fought his way to the throne, and each of whom fell in battle under heroic circumstances, the one at Svold (A.D. 1000), the other at Sticklestad (A.D. 1030). To us it is interesting to know that King Olaf Tryggvasson, on one of his early Viking expeditions, was baptized in the Scilly Isles, that as his second wife he married an Irish Princess, and that for some time he lived in Dublin. To the Norwegians he is a Norse hero of the greatest renown, who during his short reign of barely five years never ceased to force Christianity on the heathen population, and who, at the age of thirty-one, came to an untimely end. His fleet was ambuscaded and surrounded, and when his men had made their last stand he refused to surrender. Neither would he suffer the ignominy of capture or death at the hands of his enemies; so, with shield and sword in hand, and in full armour, he leaped overboard, and immediately sank. For years afterwards his faithful people believed that he would appear again, and many fancied that, on occasions, their hero's spirit visited them. [3]

Everyone knows the old triumphant line, "London Bridge is broken down," yet few are aware that the words are translated from an old Norse song, and fewer still could say who broke down the bridge. The story goes that this was accomplished by the other Olaf, afterwards known as St. Olaf. He and his Vikings had allied themselves with Etheldred the Unready against the Danes, who held the Thames above London Bridge. The bridge itself, which in those days was a rough wooden structure, was densely packed with armed men, prepared to resist the advance of the combined fleets. But Olaf drove his stout ships against it, made them fast to the piers, hoisted all his sail and got out his oars, and succeeded in upsetting the bridge into the river, thus securing victory for Etheldred. But that was before Olaf gained the throne of Norway. What he did as King of that country would take too long to tell here. Every district of Norway possesses legends bearing on his visits when engaged in converting the people to Christianity, and describing his powers of working miracles. Everywhere the name of St. Olaf still remains engraven on the country. His death, however, was that of a soldier—on the battle-field; and the lance which Norway's patron saint carried in his last fight may even now be seen by the altar in Trondhjem Cathedral. [4]

It was St. Olaf's half-brother, Harald the Hard, who fell, as we have said, at Stamford Bridge, when attempting the invasion of England in 1066. But all this is history nearly a thousand years old, and the stirring tales of the Vikings are fully recorded, and may be read in the Sagas. Ten centuries have changed the order of things. To-day we have, in our turn, become the invaders, albeit full of peace and good-will; and over the same seas upon which once danced Long Ship, Serpent, and Dragon, our great ugly, smoky steamers now plough their way. [5]

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Chapter II

Modern Norway

“Norroway over the Foam,” as it used to be called, is a good land to go to and a beautiful land to look upon. It lies less than two days’ journey from our shores, so it is easy enough to reach. Away from the towns—and they are not many—everything is picturesque, grand, and majestic, and the country indeed looks (as the people firmly believed of it long ago) as if it might have been the playground of countless giants, who amused themselves by pulling up acres of land, letting the sea into the valleys, and pelting each other with mountains and islands. Thank goodness the giants have disappeared! But if they really did have a hand in fashioning Norway, they are to be congratulated on the result.

One of the first things one likes to know about a foreign country is its size. Well, Norway is just a little larger than the British Isles, and that part of it which forms the usual holiday touring ground of British and other people—*i.e.*, from Trondhjem to the south—is no larger than England. The remainder of the country consists of a long, narrow strip running up into the Arctic Circle, and ending in Lapland in the Far North.

On three sides Norway is washed by the sea; on the other side she has two neighbours—Sweden from the south right away up to Lapland, and then Russia.

Now let us see what sort of a land it is. First, there are the fjords, stretching often a hundred miles or more inland from the sea-coast, sometimes with delightful fertile shores, at other times hemmed in on either hand by rocky cliffs rising two or three thousand feet sheer from the water. Then there are the mountains, which are everywhere; for, with the exception of Spain, Norway is the most mountainous country in Europe. And on their summits lie vast fields of eternal snow, with glaciers pushing down into the green valleys, or even into the ocean itself. Again, from these mountains flow down rivers and streams, now forming magnificent waterfalls as they leap over the edge of the lofty plateau, now rushing wildly over their rock-strewn torrent beds, until they reach the lake, which, thus gathering the waters, send them on again in one wide river to the fjord. [6]

Such things lend themselves to create scenery which cannot fail to charm, and in one day in Norway you may see them all. Take, for instance, the famous view of the Nærodal from Stalheim, a place which every visitor to Western Norway knows well. Probably nowhere in the world is there anything to approach it in grandeur, for not only are there the great mountains forming the sides of the actual valley in the foreground, but away beyond appears a succession of other mountains, stretching far across the Sogne Fjord, even to the snowy peaks of Jotunheim.

People who live in such a land must needs be proud of it, and the descendants of the Vikings believe that there exists in the world no fairer country than their beloved Norge.[1] Maybe they are not far wrong. But these Northern people are not numerous, and they are not forced, for want of space, to spoil their landscapes by studding the country-side with little red-brick cottages, for all Norway contains not one-half the number of inhabitants found in London. Under such circumstances the feeling of freedom is great, and the Norwegians claim that, as a nation, they are the freest of the free. Recent events would seem to justify the claim. Only the other day Norway dissolved the Union with Sweden with little difficulty, and of her own free-will cast herself loose from the light fetters with which, for nearly a century, she considered that she had been bound. [7]

With Norway time has dealt kindly. In modern ages war has not ravaged her lands. The oldest living Norseman was born too late to fight for his country, and it is to be hoped that his grandsons and great-grandsons may continue to live in ignorance of the horrors which war entails. Yet are they all prepared to take up arms in defence of hearth and home, for each able-bodied man serves his time as a soldier, and doubtless, if occasion should arise, would prove to the world that the old Viking spirit within him was still alive.

It is, however, the sense of restfulness pervading everything that is Norway’s charm, and even the ordinary bustle of life is unknown outside the towns. In the summer the beaten tracks of the country are practically in the hands of the foreign visitors, whose money helps not a little to support many a Norse family. In the winter things are different, as, except perhaps in Christiania, very few foreigners are to be met with, and the Norwegians live their own lives. [8]

The towns are neither numerous nor large, and, with a few exceptions, are situated on the sea-coast. Perhaps a quarter of the whole population of Norway is to be found in the towns, the remainder consisting of country-folk, who live on their farms. What we term villages barely exist, and the nearest approach to them is a group of farms with a church in the neighbourhood.

Christiania, the capital of the country, is the largest town, and other towns of importance are Bergen, Trondhjem, Stavanger, Frederikstad, Tönsberg, and Christiansand, all busy seaports and picturesquely situated. But the interest of a

country such as Norway does not lie in the towns, which, with their wide streets, stately buildings, well-stocked shops, hotels, restaurants, places of amusement, and crowded dwellings, do not differ very greatly from other European towns, and a townsman's life in his town is much the same all over the civilized world.

Town-dwellers in all Norway number no more than the inhabitants of Manchester, and though force of circumstance necessitates their living in the towns, their thoughts are ever of the country—of the fjeld, the fjord, the forest, the mountain lake, or the salmon river. In the summer nothing pleases them better than to tramp, with knapsack on back, for days on end, in the wilderness of the mountains, obtaining shelter for the night at some out-of-the-way mountain farm or at one of the snug little huts of the Norwegian Tourist Club. In the winter they have their sleighs, snow-shoes, toboggans, and skates to assist them in taking air and exercise, and in a Norwegian winter one does not live in a state of uncertainty as to whether the ice will bear or the snow be still lying on the ground when one wakes up in the morning. [9]

So comfortable has travelling in Norway been made for foreigners that there is no difficulty in going anywhere. There is a railway from Christiania to Bergen, and another from Christiania to Trondhjem. There are regular steamers on all the fjords and along the coast, even up to the North Cape and beyond. Wherever there are roads there is a well-appointed service of vehicles and posting-stations, and wherever anyone is likely to go by steamer, road, or rail there are hotels.

Fishing Through the Ice on Christiania Fjord

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1 Pronounced Nor-gay.

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Chapter III

The People and Their Industries

The greater number of the people are country-folk, who gain a living by farming, timber-working, or, when living near the sea, by fishing. Then there are a certain number of men who are soldiers by profession, and more still who are sailors—not fighting sailors, but serving on board the 8,000 merchant vessels which Norway possesses.

Everyone who lives in a Norwegian town is connected one way or another with some sort of trade or profession; and, of course, in the seaports there are always ships coming and going, unloading and loading, and so providing plenty of work for a great many men. In the towns also there are, as in every civilized town, men who follow regular professions—clergymen, merchants, bankers, lawyers, doctors, hotel-keepers, shop-keepers, and others, as well as Government officials, learned professors, literary men, and artists. [10]

As a nation Norway cannot be considered wealthy, but the fact that she employs so many ships for trading purposes is perhaps a proof that she is fairly prosperous. There are few really rich Norwegians, and still fewer who are able to live as independent gentlemen on their estates; no man can claim the right to be called noble, for the nobility of the country was abolished by law nearly a century ago, and since then equality has been the birthright of every Norseman. But no one can prevent money made in trade gradually finding its way into the pockets of a few capable men of business, and thus class distinctions must be created. The majority of the Norwegians, however, are content to work and earn sufficient to maintain themselves and their families in fairly comfortable circumstances, and fortunately the products of the country enable them to do so.

The forests, covering as they do almost one-fourth of the area of Norway, are of immense value, and the timber trade is a source of income to a great number of the people. Much of it, of course, is used in the country itself, as the houses and bridges are mostly built of wood; but there is plenty left to be exported to England and other foreign countries, as anyone who visits the ports in the South of Norway can judge for himself. Between Christiansand and Christiania, for instance, one may see enormous stores of timber awaiting shipment, and one wonders how it will ever be shipped. Then, travelling among the forest-clad mountains, one finds the woodman busy with his axe, and the great bare tree-trunks being hauled down to the banks of the torrent or river, so as to float on the waters to the low country, and thence even to the sea-coast. Again, on lakes like the Randsfjord, the sight presented by the gathered logs, which have floated down from the mountains, and which are being rafted for their final voyage, is an extraordinary one. Acres and acres of floating timber cover the end of the lake, and the massive trunks are packed so close that you might wander about on them at your will for hours. [11]

But it is not only timber in a raw state that does so much for the prosperity of Norway, for a great trade is done also in matches as well as in wood-pulp. The latter is a comparatively modern industry, and its development has been rapid. Anyone who visits Christiania and has the opportunity of taking the little town of Hönefos in his travels, should not fail to pay a visit to the pulping works. It is said that in Chicago one may see a herd of swine driven in at the front gate of a factory and brought out at another gate in the form of sausages. At Hönefos trees go into the works and come out as paper, or very nearly so.

The waterfall, which gave a name to the place, is at the meeting of two rivers—one flowing from Spirillen Lake and the other from the Randsfjord, and was at one time beautiful. Now, however, its picturesqueness is marred by the presence of a barn-like structure containing the pulping works, while the fall itself is utilized to drive the machinery. And, it must be confessed, all this has been brought about by an Englishman, for here at Hönefos is made the paper upon which is printed *Lloyd's Weekly* and the *Daily Chronicle*. Neither is the fact concealed, but rather boasted of in large letters on the outside of the barn. But Norway can well spare this one scrap from its storehouse of scenery, and the works find regular employment for upwards of a hundred Norwegians. [12]

The process of pulping is simplicity itself; the trees are felled in the forests on the hillsides close by, and sawn into blocks. Aerial wires stretch from the felling ground to the works, and the blocks come swinging down in baskets, to be handed over forthwith to the mercy of the machinery. With the aid of heavy crushers and a certain amount of water the logs are soon reduced to pulp, which then floats away into sifters, to be eventually rolled out into flat sheets.

An immense amount of this pulp is exported to England in sacks, and is used for many other purposes besides paper-making.

Another thing which we get from Norway is ice. Most of those huge blocks of ice

which you see in the fishmongers' shops in the summer have come across the North Sea, and ice-cutting is a very important business in the winter months. The ice is obtained principally from the mountain lakes, and in the vicinity of Christiania long wooden chutes are erected from the mountain-tops to the edge of the fjord. Down these the huge cubes travel, direct from their homes to the deck of the boat, and thus save the cost of overland transport. They are sawn most carefully, the dimensions being about two feet each way; rope handles are then frozen into the blocks for facility of movement, and the cubes are stored in ice-houses until the summer, by which time they have lost almost half their original weight.

Next to timber, the chief export from the country is fish (including cod-liver oil). [13]
The great fisheries are round the Lofödden Islands on the North-West Coast, well within the Arctic Circle, and it is estimated that some 30,000 men and 6,000 boats are engaged in capturing the cod from January to April each year. The fishermen assemble from far and wide, and take up their residence for the season in temporary huts, clustered together on the shores of the islands. The work is arduous as well as dangerous, for storms and heavy seas are of frequent occurrence, and tides and currents among the islands most treacherous. And here, close to the fisheries, is situated the dreaded whirlpool, the Mælstrom of renown.

But it is the people's living, and in a favourable season they make immense hauls. An ordinary catch for an ordinary day is 500 cod per boat, and a good day will double that number, though in such a case the boat has to make a second trip to bring the fish ashore. A simple calculation will show that millions of cod are landed on the islands every day. Imagine the sight and imagine the smell!

The fish are split open and, after the roe and the liver have been removed, hung up on hurdles to dry. Some are sold to the fishing-smacks, which come to the islands to buy the fresh fish, and then salt it down in barrels, or take it away to dry elsewhere. Scores of bundles of dried cod, looking like slips of leather, may be seen for the remainder of the year on every wharf in Norway. Who eats it all is a mystery; but it goes to England and Spain in large quantities, and most of us have eaten it on Ash Wednesdays.

Cod's roe and liver are probably of more value than the fish from which they are [14]
extracted, and there are large factories for making cod-liver oil, not only at the Lofödens, but also at other places on the coast. At Hammerfest, which boasts of being the northernmost town in the world, the whole air is laden with the nauseous fumes issuing from the steaming caldrons of boiling cod-liver oil.

The fish trade of Norway is not, however, confined to cod and the Lofödden Isles, for in many other parts fishing is the chief industry of the people, and hundreds of thousands of barrels of salted herrings and sprats leave the country every year, while sardines and anchovies are tinned or potted in the factories at Stavanger and other large seaports. The salmon, also, for which the Norwegian rivers are famous, are brought over to England packed in ice, and well repay the owners of the rivers.

Even in the depth of winter a good deal of sea fishing goes on through the ice of the frozen fjords. The fisherman erects a shelter of some kind to protect him from the biting wind, and within view of this he breaks two or three holes in the thick ice. In each hole his baited hooks are dropped down, the other end of the line being fastened to a simple contrivance of pieces of stick, which begin to waggle when a fish is hooked. On the Christiania Fjord numbers of these sporting fishermen are to be seen at work all through the winter, and judging by the frequency of their visits to their different holes, they must take a quantity of fish. It is cold work, however, sitting and watching for the signal to come from the hole, and one cannot help admiring the men's energy and keenness.

It is only natural that, living in a country where fish is so plentiful, the people [15]
themselves should be great fish-eaters, and the daily fish-markets at Bergen and other places on the coast are most interesting sights. As a rule the fish are brought to market alive in half-sunken canoes, towed astern of the fishing-boats, and at Bergen all the bargaining is done between the buyers on the quayside and the sellers in their boats.

In proportion to the population the variety of occupations in Norway is certainly great, and there are other industries besides those already mentioned. There is, for example, a considerable trade in skins and furs, in condensed milk, butter, and margarine, and in certain minerals and chemicals. Employment is found also for many men on the railways—in road-making, in boat and shipbuilding, in timber-dressing, in mechanical engineering, in slate-quarrying, in stone-cutting, and in mining (principally in the silver mines at Köngsberg).

It would seem, therefore, as if there were plenty of work for the Norwegians to do,

and they are willing workers. Abject poverty, as we know the term, has no place in Norway at present, for the country can support its people, thanks, perhaps, to the fact that the desire to emigrate to America and Canada is strong.

Making “Fladbröd”—A Cottage Interior

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Chapter IV

On the Farm

Norway is not like England, where nearly every bit of ground is cultivated, for nothing will grow on bare rocks, and a good deal of Norway is barren land. In fact, except in the low country down in the south, the only land worth cultivating lies, as a rule, in the valleys near the fjords. There are situated all the farms, sometimes with small orchards of apples and cherries, but more often with potato plots, a little corn, and a great amount of grassland. As the mountains are always so close at hand, the fields are generally strewn with rocks and boulders, and are very uneven, so haymaking is not easy, and such a thing as a mowing-machine would be quite useless.

[16]

Every blade of grass that can be gathered has to be made into hay, otherwise the ponies and cows would starve in the winter, as they are often snowed up for weeks at a time. Haymaking is, therefore, a great business, and the amount of grass which the Norwegians contrive to scrape off their land is marvellous. At the best of times it only grows to a height of about six inches, but scythes and reaping-hooks find their way into every nook and corner, and grass that no English farmer would trouble to cut is all raked in with the greatest care. Parties go up the mountain-sides to ledges of the cliffs, and on to the tops of the mountains, to make sure that nothing is wasted, the grass being brought down to the farms to be dried.

Long wires may be seen stretching from the valleys away up, thousands of feet, to the tops of the mountains, and on these the bundles of grass are tied, to come swirling down to the farmstead. There is no time in the short Northern summer to make the hay as we make it, and there is usually so much rain that the grass would never dry at all if left lying on the ground; so long hurdles are put up in positions where they will catch the sun and the wind, and on them the grass is hung up to [17] dry, there remaining until it has made itself into hay. Afterwards it is stored in covered barns ready for winter use.

The corn, also, is dried in a peculiar manner. As it is cut it is made up into small sheaves, a number of these being tied, ears downwards, to a pole planted upright in the ground. This makes drying rapid, and, if wet weather sets in, the rain runs off freely. A field of these wheat-stacks has a very odd appearance at a little distance, and near the woods one sees similar, though somewhat larger, stacks of branches and leaves, on which the goats are fed in the winter.

Directly the snow has melted off the mountains the flocks and herds are sent up to the highland pastures (sæters), usually in charge of the younger women and girls of the farm, and there, throughout the summer, the dairy work is carried on. As in all mountainous countries, rich and sweet herbage follows the melting of the snow, and the cows and goats give an abundance of good milk, which is turned into butter and cheese, to be sold or consumed in the winter. Life at the sæter-hut, or mountain farm, is healthy and delightful, though much hard work has to be got through each day.

Children seldom go to the sæters until old enough to be able to do real work, but one often sees a girl of fourteen or so looking after a flock of goats. She will be out with them all day as they feed on the mountain-sides, and will do all the milking. When seen for the first time this is rather an amusing operation, and decidedly a practical one. The milkmaid seizes a goat, straddles her, with face towards the goat’s tail, and, stooping down, proceeds to milk. From a little distance all you see [18] is the goat’s hind-legs emerging from beneath a blue petticoat, which looks most peculiar.

But the children who are too young to spend the summer at the sæters find plenty to do at home, and they learn almost as soon as they can toddle that there is work for everyone. Quite small boys and girls manage to do a good day’s haymaking, and they can row a boat or drive a *carriole* before they have reached their teens. Such things they regard as amusements, for they have few other ways of amusing themselves, and their one ambition is to do what their fathers and mothers do.

In some cases the small farmers move their whole families up to the mountain pastures for the summer; and, in addition to the dairy work, they rent the fishing on some of the mountain lakes, which they net freely. The trout thus caught are split open and salted down in barrels, eventually being sent down to the markets in the towns, where they fetch a good price. And all these peasants possess rifles, and are keen sportsmen, so that when August comes they go in pursuit of the wild reindeer, and lay up a store of meat, which, salted and dried, comes in very handy in the hard times of winter.

As a rule the peasants eat very little meat, and what they do eat has probably been smoked and dried and hung up for several months. A good deal of salt fish is consumed; but the principal food is porridge (*gröd*), made of barley, rye, or oatmeal, and eaten generally with sour buttermilk, with the addition of potatoes, when plentiful. White bread is not found far from the towns, and the black, or rye, bread is a heavy compound, a taste for which takes an Englishman some time to [19] acquire. But even that is superior to the *fladbröd*, which in appearance and consistency resembles old boot-leather.

The well-to-do farmer lives more sumptuously. He occasionally has fresh meat and fresh fish, and the dried articles nearly every day. He also indulges in cheese, usually of the commoner kind, known as *prim*, or *mysost*, which is not unlike brown Windsor soap. There are two other native cheeses, but they are considered somewhat expensive luxuries. They are called *gammelost* and *pultost*, and are made from sour skimmed milk, being afterwards kept in a dark cellar for a year or so to ripen. The latter is the greater delicacy, and is stored, in a sloppy state, in wooden tubs. If you should ever chance to see one of the tubs being produced, do not wait to see it opened, or your nose will never forget it!

Verily, winter is the bugbear of the struggling Norwegian countryman’s existence. Like the provident ant, he spends the greater part of the summer in laying up for the winter, and he has not only himself and his family to think of, but also his cattle, for if the latter cannot be properly housed and fed he will be ruined. There are times, however, when he contrives to throw off the constant thought of the future, and when he can enjoy himself thoroughly. Sunday is a day of rest, with possibly a long row across the fjord to church, after which comes a good gossip

with the neighbours, and the chance of a feast at a friend's farm. There are also high-days and holidays, weddings and christenings, accompanied by plentiful food and drink, as well as by dancing and fiddling. [20]

But when the snow covers up the country the days are none too exciting, though the cattle have to be fed and many odd jobs attended to. Most of the men are handy carpenters, and can make such things as dairy utensils, while the women in many parts weave sufficient cloth to keep the whole family clothed. By the younger men, however, the season is looked forward to as a time of real enjoyment. Then it is that they get out their snowshoes and enter with zest into the grand sport of ski-ing, or, taking their guns with them, go off on their ski to shoot ryper or hares for the market.

Such is the life of the ordinary small farmer and peasant; but down by the fjords and on the beaten track of the foreign tourists the larger farmer has grasped the situation, and has discovered the value of having more than one string to his bow. So in summer he combines hotel-keeping with farming. His farm produce is consumed in his hotel, and if he is fortunate enough to have a salmon river flowing through his land, he can be certain of a good rent for it. Thus the prosperous farmer becomes a person of some importance in the district, and one day, perhaps, a Member of the Storthing, or Parliament.

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Chapter V

Manners and Customs

The religion of the country is the Lutheran, almost in its original form, for in some matters the Norwegians are most conservative. Though not, perhaps, what we would consider a religious-minded people, they are naturally good, honest, and kind, and they take their religion on trust. They pay tithes, and give Easter and Christmas offerings to their clergy willingly, since they regard the priest as a superior person, and hold him in high esteem. He is a man, like his fellows, and farms his own land, which appeals to the people in the country parts. Moreover, he is possessed of learning, and away from the towns he is mainly responsible for the national education. [21]

Often the journey to church is long, for the farms lie far apart, and when the church is distant ponies or boats are brought into requisition for the conveyance of, at any rate, the women and children. Down by the fjord on a fine Sunday morning the sight of the boats crossing over to a church is a picturesque one. Deep laden with men, women, and children, they come one after another; and when they reach the shore, the women take their clean white head-dresses and gay kerchiefs out of the compact little *tiner* (oval chip-wood boxes), and finish their toilets before going up to the church.

The Norwegian Sabbath begins on Saturday evening and ends at noon on Sunday, after which time the day is spent in simple enjoyment as a true holiday. Then in the evening the boats start for home, and across the still waters one may hear the women singing glees, as often as not to the accompaniment of the fiddle.

A wedding causes quite as much interest and excitement in Norway as it does in England, and in the olden time the festivities lasted for a week or more. Nowadays the merry-making has been somewhat curtailed, but the actual ceremony has lost none of its solemnity and little of its brightness. In the towns civilization has robbed the wedding of its picturesqueness. The men are clothed in their best "blacks," as if going to a funeral, and the ladies wear dresses of Parisian style. But away in the depths of the country one may still see a real Norwegian wedding, with the bride and bridesmaids, if not also most of the guests, dressed in the national costume, and it is a pretty sight. [22]

In front comes a *stolkjærre*, the pony being led by the master of the ceremonies. On the seat sits the bride in the full dress of the country, and wearing her bridal crown; by her side the bridegroom, also well adorned for the occasion; and, on the step of the cart, that most important person, the fiddler, working his bow with astounding energy. If the pony can bear the weight, perhaps a couple of the bride's relations will sit up behind, otherwise they will walk in the procession which follows; and there may be seen all the available peasants of the district—young men and maidens, grandfathers and grandchildren.

So they wend their way to the church; and after the service, if the good old

customs be kept up, the party proceeds to a green close by and enjoys a boisterous dance until it is time to go on to the wedding supper. Feasting and merry-making then continue for several hours—in fact, the sleepiness of the guests is the only thing that breaks up the entertainment for the night. Next day the festivities are resumed, and are possibly carried on into a third day. The fiddler is always busy, for without him there can be no real fun, the people's love of music being no less than their love of dancing. [23]

The violin is the one instrument which they know and understand, and it has been in use among the Norwegians for hundreds of years. Their most famous violin-player, Ole Bull, who died some few years ago, was looked on as a great composer and musician. But all over the country there are to be found men who can play after a fashion; and a century or so ago, when the people were still very superstitious, they fully believed that anyone who could play at all well had had intercourse with the fairies, who were supposed to be marvellous musicians and acquainted with an immense variety of beautiful tunes.

The food provided at a peasant's wedding feast is, of course, something out of the common, and the guests are supposed to bring a present of something good to eat, such as fresh meat, butter, old cream, cream porridge, or cheese, for the ordinary fare of the country folk is, as we have said, of the plainest.

With regard to the national costume, mentioned above, it is, unfortunately, a fact that it is gradually disappearing. There are parts, however, where there are no railways, no steamboats, and few tourists, and in such places the people still live much as they did a hundred years ago, even the men wearing clothes similar to those worn by their grandfathers and great-grandfathers, and some of these are quaint in the extreme.

Perhaps the quaintest dresses are those of the people of Sætersdal, a district in the South of Norway, between Christiansand and Telemarken; and, when properly turned out, the men are quite as "dressy" as the women. They wear a pair of trousers buttoned with half a dozen silver buttons tight round the ankles, and coming right up to the armpits. Several broad stripes adorn the legs from top to bottom. And the coat takes the form of a curious little cape, richly embroidered with silver, and having sleeves, fastened at the wrists with more silver buttons. Shoes, with buckles, white stockings, and a cut-down tall hat, gaily decorated with ribbons and embroidery, complete the costume. The women wear short skirts—only a little below the knees—of dark blue, with a bright trimming round the bottom; coloured stockings; a bodice laced with silver, and covered with silver brooches and other ornaments; a waistbelt, which is sometimes entirely of metal; a kerchief tied over the head, after the fashion of the bandana of West Indian negresses; and on occasions a shawl of many colours. [24]

A step farther north, in what is called Lower Telemarken, a similar kind of dress still exists, though the man's waistcoat-jacket is of a somewhat different pattern and colour, and the women wear their skirts a trifle longer. On Sundays and great occasions the latter also put on cloth stockings and gloves, embroidered tastefully with trails of flowers.

But such dresses as these are not the national costume of Norway. For that we have to go still farther north—to the Hardanger. If an English girl wishes to dress a doll as a typical Norwegian, the clothes would be those of the Hardanger, and they would be these: a dark blue serge skirt (to the ankles), trimmed with black velvet and silver braid; a white chemisette with full sleeves; a red flannel bodice embroidered with white, black, and silver, and glittering with brass saucer-shaped ornaments; and a waistbelt adorned with metal buttons. The effect is neat, bright, and decidedly piquant. The girls plait their fair hair in two long tails, wearing a handkerchief as a head-dress; but the married women have a most elaborate coiffure, something of the sister-of-mercy type, consisting of the so-called *skaut*, or hood, and the *lin*, or forehead band. It takes a considerable time to put on, as the snow-white linen has to be most carefully stretched over a frame, which is first fastened on the top of the head, and then so arranged that the numerous small plaits hang in a particular manner. This is the ordinary head-dress, though the country women coming in to church on Sundays often wear curious old-fashioned bonnets, which have the appearance of being heirlooms handed down from generation to generation. [25]

The men do not dress up to the women. They confine themselves to a rough trouser suit, generally of dark blue, and a black felt hat. Even amongst the older men of the Hardanger one seldom sees the knee-breeches and stockings which used to be worn.

A Hardanger Bride

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Chapter VI

School and Play

I am not certain whether Norse boys and girls are very good, or whether they are spoilt. You may travel all day on a steamer with a well-to-do family from the town, or you may live in a farmhouse with a peasant's family for a month, and the chances are that you will never hear the parents say "Don't." One thing I am sure of: the children who live in the country parts do very much as they please; in the summer they go to bed when they feel tired, sometimes not till nearly midnight; and they are not worried about getting their boots and their clothes wet, because no Norwegian troubles his or her head about such matters. Moreover, the life is such a simple one that perhaps there is little opportunity for real naughtiness.

[26]

These country children have a very easy time, as for the greater part of the year they have no school to go to, and they spend all the summer out in the open air, looking after the ponies, cows, sheep, or goats, or hay-making, or rowing about, or fishing, or something of the kind. In the winter they, as well as the town children, are all obliged to go to school, from the age of seven to fourteen or fifteen—*i.e.,* until their Confirmation, and until this takes place they receive religious instruction from the priest on Sunday afternoons, for there is no religious teaching in the schools.

There is a great difficulty about the country schools, because in some districts the farms are miles and miles apart, and it would be quite impossible for the children to walk to school and back in the day. In such districts the Government schoolmasters have to go about from place to place, and teach the children in their

own homes. If there should be two or three farms close together, one of the farmers provides a schoolroom in his house, and the schoolmaster lives with him as his guest for a time, and then goes on to another house. But the schoolmasters must give every child twelve weeks' schooling in the year. This does not amount to a great deal—only three months of school in the year! [27]

The wonder is that the children contrive to remember anything that they have learned, with nine long months in which to forget it. Yet they work hard while they are about it; they are inspected every year, and they are required to pass quite difficult examinations at the end. It is expected, however, that before long the twelve weeks' compulsory schooling will be increased to fifteen weeks.

In the towns the children are not forced to attend school for more than the twelve weeks in the year, but there are, of course, numbers of private schools, high schools, etc., to which parents can send their children, on payment, for a superior education. And at such schools the work goes on for a much longer period of the year—in fact, all through the year, except for two months in the summer and a week at Christmas and at Easter.

It is all much the same as our own arrangements in England. There is the Government school, where the education is free, and there are other schools, where a higher education is paid for. But the compulsory schooling does not end with the seven years at the Government schools referred to above, for there are continuation schools, at which the pupils have to put in a further twenty-four weeks.

In Norway there are no large public schools for boarders, so, in spite of their long holidays, the children do not have half the fun that English boys and girls have. [28] There is no cricket, football, hockey, golf, or any game of that sort, and there is not a racquet-, fives-, or tennis-court in the land. How then, you will ask, do they manage to amuse themselves?

It must be remembered that the winter is much longer in Norway than it is with us, and even if the boys wanted to play football they would not be able to do so, as the ground is covered with snow. At that season they have their various winter sports to keep them busy—ski-ing, skating, tobogganing, and the like, and they do not require any other games. In the summer, instead of playing cricket, they go for walking tours into the mountains, or they go fishing in the rivers and lakes, or sometimes shooting.

Though the Norwegians boast that ball games have been played in the country since Saga times, such games are of the most elementary kind, and would be scorned by any English boy. But for all that the Norse boys are every bit as manly as any other boys, because they enjoy many forms of sport which make them so; and they are strong, because they take plenty of exercise, and have physical drill in their schools.

This brings us to other games played by Norwegian children—not the games which are purchased in the shops in Christiania, Bergen, and other towns, but the games which are played without any of the bought things. Of course the girls have dolls and dolls' houses and dolls' tea-parties, like the girls of every land, and there are toys of every description in the shops. The peasant children, however, who live far out in the country, never see a shop, and have to provide themselves with things to play with; but it is wonderful what an amount of amusement they can get out of an old bone, or a block of wood, tied to a yard or two of string. [29]

As a rule their fathers are good hands at carving wood, so toys are easily made for the smaller children, and one finds everywhere such simple toys as wooden dolls, animals, miniature boats, sleighs, and carts.

But the real enjoyment of the Norwegian children—at any rate of the girls—is the outdoor game, played when the weather is fine, both in the town and in the country, wherever there are enough children to make a game. To see a bevy of these quaint little girls throwing heart and soul into their games is delightful, and they have scores and scores of different ones. In most of them dancing and singing play a great part, and the most popular form of game is what is called a "Ring Dance," in which, as the name implies, the players join hands and dance round in a circle.

Many of these ring dances have their counterpart in English games, and the tunes and words sung to them are almost similar. Whether we adopted them from the Norwegians, or they adopted them from us, is a matter which will probably never be decided, but several games of this kind are common to all Europe. "Blind Man's Buff," "Hunt the Slipper," and "Forfeits," for instance, are found nearly everywhere. Here is the Norse version of "Round and round the Mulberry Bush," which in some parts is called "The Washing-Maids' Dance," and in others "Round

the Juniper Bush”: [30]

> “So we go round the juniper bush, the juniper bush, the juniper bush,
> So we go round the juniper bush early on Monday morning.
> This is the way we wash our clothes, wash our clothes, wash our clothes,
> This is the way we wash our clothes early on Monday morning.
>
> “So we go round the juniper bush, the juniper bush, the juniper bush,
> So we go round the juniper bush early on Tuesday morning.
> This is the way we ring out our clothes, ring out our clothes, ring out our clothes,
> This is the way we ring out our clothes early on Tuesday morning.”

The washing operations proceed through the next three days of the week, with a verse to each day. Thus on Wednesday they hang up the clothes, on Thursday they mangle them, and on Friday iron them. Then on Saturday they scrub the floor, and on Sunday go to church.

With each verse the children dance hand in hand round the imaginary juniper bush, singing lustily, and illustrating the different actions of the washing operations. Finally, two and two and arm in arm, they promenade round, as if going to church, and generally prolong the walk while they sing the last verse a second time.

Another very favourite game is *Slængkompas*, which is perhaps best translated almost literally as Scatter-Compass. It is a rapid game, and full of excitement. The players grasp hands in a circle and gallop round, singing the refrain as they go:

> “Those who would join in *Slængkompas* must be tolerably quick!
> One—two—three—and four—and five.
> So comes *Slængkompas* again.”

[31]

When the counting begins the players let go hands, and, clapping to the tune, spin round separately until the word “five” is reached, when they should be in position ready to join hands again and continue to gallop round in the original circle.

The aim of the game is to keep things going until the verse has been sung three times, but, of course, the players often become giddy and lose their places.

There is not space to describe more of these ring dances here, but there are many of them, and a great many which our English children would do well to adopt.

Our good old street game of “Hop-scotch” you may see played almost anywhere in Norway under the somewhat curious name of “Hop-in-Paradise,” while in some parts “Cat’s Cradle,” though a milder form of amusement, is quite popular, and a large variety of figures is known.

Then the girls are very fond of dressing up as brides, with crowns and all, and having a mock wedding, with its accompanying procession and dancing. Above all things they love dancing, and their fathers and grandfathers play the fiddle for them for many an hour of a winter’s evening, while the mothers sing nursery rhymes to the smaller children. And, as with the games, these jingles are more or less the same as our own. They have “This is the house that Jack built,” with the malt, and the rat, and everything, only that they prefer the name Jacob to Jack. They have “Fly away, Peter, fly away, Paul”; and the baby on his mother’s knee has the joy of being shaken about to “This is the way the farmer rides, bumpety-bumpety-bump.”

A Baby of Telemarken

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Chapter VII

Some Fairy Tales

Norwegian children are just as fond of fairy stories as are any other children, and they are lucky in having a great number, for that famous story-teller, Hans Christian Andersen, was a Dane, and as the Danish language is very like the Norwegian, his stories were probably known in Norway long before they were known in England. But the Norwegians have plenty of other stories of their own, and they love to sit by the fire of burning logs or round the stove in the long winter evenings and listen to them. Of course, they know all about people like Cinderella and Jack the Giant-Killer, but their favourite hero is called by the name of Ashpot, who is sometimes a kind of boy Cinderella and sometimes a Jack the Giant-Killer.

The following are two stories which the little yellow-haired Norse children gloat over:

Once upon a time there was a man who had been out cutting wood, and when he came home he found that he had left his coat behind, so he told his little daughter to go and fetch it. The child started off, but before she reached the wood darkness came on, and suddenly a great big hill-giant swooped down upon her.

“Please, Mr. Giant,” said she, trembling all over, “don’t take me away to-night, as father wants his coat; but to-morrow night, if you will come when I go to the *stabbur* to fetch the bread, I will go away with you quite quietly.”

[33]

So the giant agreed, and the next night, when she went to fetch the bread, he came and carried her off. As soon as it was found that she was missing, her father

sent her eldest brother to look for her, but he came back without finding her. The second brother was also sent, but with no better result. At last the father turned to his youngest son, who was the drudge of the house, and said: “Now, Ashpot, you go and see if you can find your sister.”

So away went Ashpot, and no sooner had he reached the wood than he met a bear.

“Friend bear,” said Ashpot, “will you help me?”

“Willingly,” answered the bear. “Get up on my back.”

And Ashpot mounted the bear’s back and rode off. Presently they met a wolf.

“Friend wolf,” said Ashpot, “will you do some work for me ?”

“Willingly,” answered the wolf.

“Then jump up behind,” said Ashpot, and the three went on deeper into the wood.

They next met a fox, and then a hare, both of whom were enlisted into Ashpot’s service, and, mounted on the back of the bear, were swiftly carried off to the giant’s abode.

“Good-day, Mr. Giant!” said they.

“Scratch my back!” roared the giant, who lay stretched in front of the fire warming himself.

The hare immediately climbed up and began to scratch as desired; but the giant knocked him over, and down he fell on to the hearth-stone, breaking off his fore-legs, since which time all hares have had short fore-legs. [34]

The fox next clambered up to scratch the giant’s back, but he was served like the hare. Then the wolf’s turn came, but the giant said that he was no better at scratching than the others.

“*You* scratch me!” shouted the giant, turning impatiently to the bear.

“All right,” answered Bruin; “I know all about scratching,” and he forthwith dug his claws into the giant’s back and ripped it into a thousand pieces.

Then all the beasts danced on the dead body of the monster, and Ashpot recovered his sister and took her home, carrying off, at the same time, all the giant’s gold and silver. The bear and the wolf burst into the cattle-sheds and devoured all the cows and sheep, the fox feasted in the henroost, while the hare had the free run of the oatfield. So everyone was satisfied.

The other story is also about Ashpot, whose two elder brothers still treated him very badly, and eventually turned him out of his home. Poor Ashpot wandered away up into the mountains, where he met a huge giant. At first he was terribly afraid, but after a little while he told the giant what had happened to him, and asked him if he could find a job for him.

“You are just the very man I want,” said the giant. “Come along with me.”

The first work to be done was to make a fire to brew some ale, so they went off together to the forest to cut firewood. The giant carried a club in place of an axe, and when they came to a large birch-tree he asked Ashpot whether he would like to club the tree down or climb up and hold the top of it. The boy thought that the latter would suit him best, and he soon got up to the topmost branches and held on to them. But the giant gave the tree such a blow with his club as to knock it right out of the ground, sending Ashpot flying across the meadows into a marsh. Luckily he landed on soft ground, and was none the worse for his adventure; and they soon managed to get the tree home, when they set to work to make a fire. [35]

But the wood was green, and would not burn, so the giant began to blow. At the first puff Ashpot found himself flying up to the ceiling as if he had been a feather, but he managed to catch hold of a piece of birch-bark among the rafters, and on reaching the ground again he told the giant that he had been up to get something to make the fire burn.

The fire was soon burning splendidly, and the giant commenced to brew the ale, drinking it off as fast as it was made. Ashpot watched him getting gradually drunk, and heard him mutter to himself, “To-night I will kill him,” so he began to think of a plan to outwit his master. When he went to bed he placed the giant’s cream-whisk between the sheets as a dummy, while he himself crept under the bedstead.

In the middle of the night, just as he had expected, he heard the giant come into his room, and then there was a tremendous whack as the giant brought his club down on to the bed. Next morning the boy came out of his room as if nothing had happened, and his master was very much surprised to find him still alive.

“Hullo!” said the giant. “Didn’t you feel anything in the night?” [36]

“I did feel something,” said Ashpot; “but I thought that it was only a sausage-peg that had fallen on the bed, so I went to sleep again.”

The giant was more astonished than ever, and went off to consult his sister, who lived in a neighbouring mountain, and was about ten times his size. At length it was settled that the giantess should set her cooking-pot on the fire, and that Ashpot should be sent to see her, when she was to tip him into the caldron and boil him. In the course of the day the giant sent the boy off with a message to his sister, and when he reached the giantess’s dwelling he found her busy cooking. But he soon saw through her design, and he took out of his pocket a nut with a hole in it.

“Look here,” he said, showing the nut to the ogress, “you think you can do everything. I will tell you one thing that you can’t do: you can’t make yourself so small as to be able to creep into the hole in this nut.”

“Rubbish!” replied the giantess. “Of course I can!”

And in a moment she became as small as a fly, and crept into the nut, whereupon Ashpot hurled it into the fire, and that was the end of the giantess.

The boy was so delighted that he returned to his old tyrant the giant and told him what had happened to his sister. This set the big man thinking again as to how he was to rid himself of this sharp-witted little nuisance. He did not understand boys, and he was afraid of Ashpot’s tricks, so he offered him as much gold and silver as he could carry if he would go away and never return. Ashpot, however, replied that the amount he could carry would not be worth having, and that he could not think [37] of going unless he got as much as the giant could carry.

The giant, glad to get rid of him at any cost, agreed, and, loading himself with gold and silver and precious stones, he set out with the boy towards his home. When they reached the outskirts of the farms they saw a herd of cattle, and the giant began to tremble.

“What sort of beasts are these?” he asked.

“They are my father’s cows,” replied Ashpot, “and you had better put down your burden and run back to your mountain, or they may bite you.”

The giant was only too happy to get away, so, depositing his load, which was as big as a small hill, he made off, and left the boy to carry his treasure home by himself.

So enormous was the amount of the valuables that it was six years before Ashpot succeeded in removing everything from the field where the giant had set it down; but he and all his relations were rich people for the rest of their lives.

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Chapter VIII

The Hardanger Fjord

All that is grand, all that is beautiful, will be found in the Hardanger—the “Smiling Hardanger,” as the Norwegians themselves call it; and even if an English visitor went nowhere else, he would have seen typical Norwegian scenery of every possible kind.

The easiest way to go there is from Bergen, and most people bent on a tour in Norway make a start either from Christiania or from Bergen. Bergen itself claims [38] to be the most beautiful town in the country, and it really is a lovely spot, with its old wooden houses all around the harbour, full of picturesque shipping, and with its amphitheatre of bold mountains rising upwards almost from the centre of the town. But Bergen has its drawbacks, and the principal one is that it rains every day, or nearly every day.

To reach the Hardanger from Bergen, and to go from one end of the fjord to the

other, you take a passage in one of the comfortable little local steamers, and you begin your journey early in the morning. It is a very pleasant way of travelling, as you sit on deck all day and enjoy the scenery, and only go down to the saloon at meal-times. If you do not wish to go all the way to the very end of the fjord, there are numbers of pretty little places where you can break your journey. But if you like you can travel throughout the day and finish up late at night at Odda, or at Vik-i-Eidfjord, each of which is at the head of a branch of the Hardanger Fjord.

Let us take our tickets right through to Eidfjord, make a good long day of it, and see what there is to be seen. For some little time after leaving the harbour we see nothing of great interest, only a few graceful-looking barges in full sail, reminding us of the pictures of the old Viking ships, and flocks of seagulls fluttering and screaming round the stern of our boat. Then the steamer begins to pick its way through the scattered islands, some of which are mere barren granite rocks, others partially cultivated, and with neat little farmsteads lying snug in the valleys.

[39]

So we go on for an hour or two, occasionally stopping off a small group of farms, to land, perhaps, a farmer returning from the Bergen market, or a girl coming home from her situation in the town. Presently we come alongside a pier under an overhanging cliff, and we see the name of the place written up on a board, just like the name of a railway-station. This is Godösund, a favourite holiday haunt of the Bergen people. It is not a town or even a village, but just a châlet-like hotel of two or three buildings, standing on the side of a fir-clad hill, in the midst of a fairyland of creeks and wooded islets—as pretty a spot as one could wish to see.

Now we are nearing the Hardanger Fjord; we pass through the narrow straits known as the Löksund, and we enter the fjord. Glorious and ever-changing views open out before us, as hour after hour the steamer passes from one small station to another, dropping a mail-bag, and perhaps a passenger or two. We pass farms lying close to the shore, the wooden houses being in many cases painted red or white, and thus forming a brilliant contrast to the blue-black mountains and dark green forests which rise up behind them. We see every now and then a clean white wooden church, and, away up on the mountain-sides we can discern tiny specks, which, we are told, are the sæter dwellings.

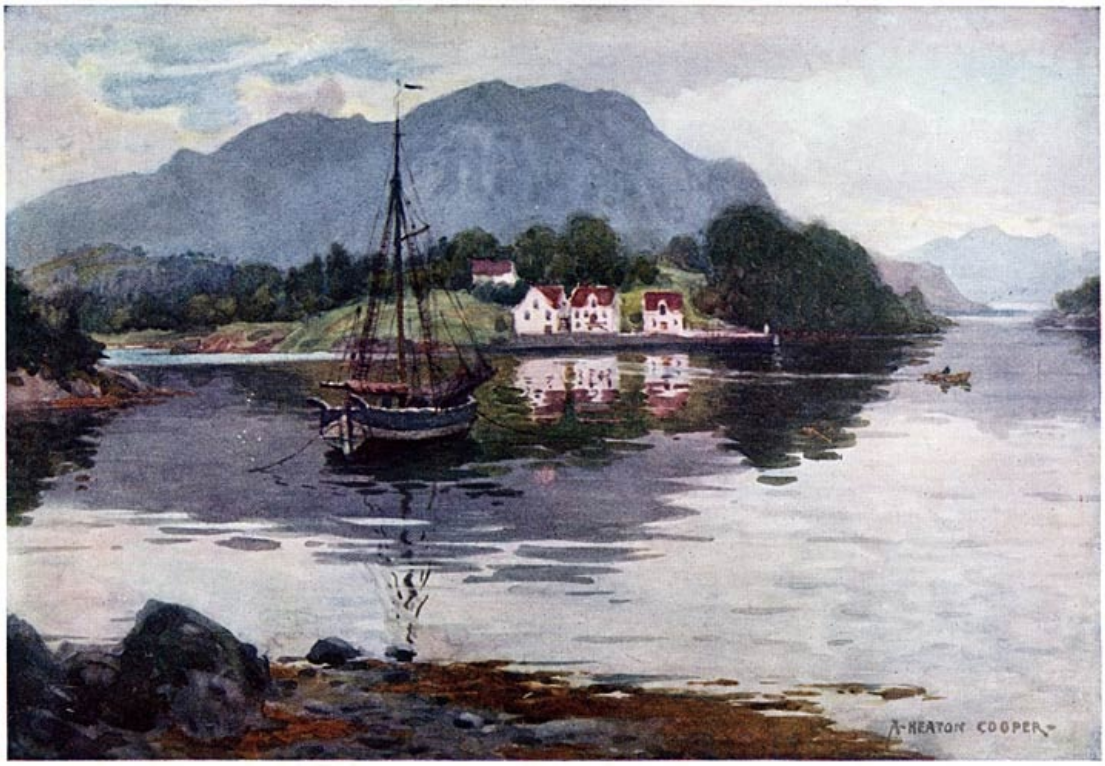
Sometimes the steamer is out in the middle of the fjord, which, in parts, is five miles or more in width, but at other times we find ourselves close in to a rocky precipice, and wondering how it will be possible to avoid grounding. Above us the mountain-side rises perpendicularly to a height of, it may be, 3,000 or 4,000 feet; [40] and, looking down into the clear water, we can see that it is ever so deep. As a matter of fact, the chart tells us that hereabouts it is a little more than 2,000 feet in depth.

Soon we reach the bay in which is Rosendal, where one could spend a very pleasant week or so, with trout fishing to be had in the streams and lakes, and mountain walks up to the edge of the great Folgefond snowfield. The steamer calls for a few minutes, and then goes on up the beautiful little branch fjord known as the Mauranger, at the extremity of which lies Sundal.

The scenery here is delightful, and especially so at the spot where the Bondhus Valley is seen stretching down to the fjord. Half-way up the valley a round-topped mountain appears to bar the way, and farther off a blue-grey glacier—the Bondhus Bræ—is seen falling from the white snowfield, and choking the head of the vale.

Those who have the mind to do so can wander up to the glacier, sleep the night at a sæter, and on the following day hire a sleigh, and career for miles over the vast field of perpetual snow, right across the headland to Odda. And great is the joy of plunging suddenly, on a hot August day, into the depths of winter.

But our steamer does not stay here long—only long enough to put some Norwegian passengers on shore, and take fresh ones on board. This occupies some time, however, for Norse people, and especially the ladies, refuse to be hurried. It is amusing to watch them starting on their travels. All their friends come to see them off, although it is quite possible that the traveller is only going to the next station on the fjord, not a dozen miles away. Each friend bears some small package—a pot [41] of cranberry jam, a basket of apples or cherries, a bag of cakes, or something of that kind. The gaily-painted wooden trunks and the *tiners* are stowed away on board; and then the “farvels” commence, with kisses and handshakes, and pats on the back, and many last words until the bell rings for the steamer’s departure, when a lady passenger suddenly discovers that she has left something behind. The wildest confusion follows, and away run all the friends to fetch it from the house, returning just in time. Then the good-byes begin again, and as the steamer finally departs, everyone shouts, “Farvel! farvel! farvel!” frequently and rapidly; hats are raised, and handkerchiefs continue waving until the boat can no longer be seen.



Godösund, Hardanger Fjord

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Returning down the Mauranger Fjord we steam out across the main fjord, and early in the afternoon call at several small places on the northern shore—Bakke, Vikingnæs, Nordheimsund—each with its spruce hotel, enticing the traveller to loiter and explore the country in the neighbourhood. A little later we enter the Fiksensund, a narrow branch fjord, and a wonder of wonders. For a distance of seven miles it wends its way amongst the mountains. In places the precipitous hillsides are within a hundred yards of each other, and in no part is this extraordinary fjord-arm a third of a mile in width. For thousands of feet sheer out of the water rise the bold walls of granite, with here and there a ledge thickly wooded with fir and birch. It looks as if the mountains had been torn asunder to admit the sea, and local legends say that a spiteful giantess did this and many other nasty things in the giant age. Half-way up the fjord the steamer fires a gun, [42] so that the passengers may hear the echo, and the sound comes back time after time from every nook and cranny. At the end is Botnen, with a road running away north to other farms, and eventually to the railway from Bergen to Vossevangen.

Again we return to the main fjord, and before long enter the Gravensfjord, wherein lies Eide, a kind of junction of the steamer-routes, and a very touristy place, as there is a good driving-road to Voss. The Bergen steamer continues its way up the Sörfjord to Odda, which is reached late at night; but we, who are bound for Eidfjord, change into a small branch steamer, and are soon rounding a mighty headland, and, if there is any wind, getting a tossing for a few minutes, the fjord just here being wide and open. The head of a seal may occasionally be seen bobbing up and down, and large flocks of duck are always swimming about at a respectful distance from the steamer. And what a view we have across the expanse of water! The never-ending mountains stretch away one behind the other, to be crowned in the distance by the dazzling white snowfield, lighted up by the fast sinking sun.

And when the sun goes down the scenery, as we steam on, changes each moment. In the twilight the granite cliffs stand out black and uninviting, and the country looks cold and grey. It may be that we are tired of the long journey, for with the growing darkness comes the feeling that something to eat and bed would be pleasant things. Then the steamer’s whistle makes us spring to our feet, and, peering ahead, we see lights on the Vik jetty and in the hotel close by. In a few [43] minutes we are in Næsheim’s comfortable dining-room, enjoying our well-deserved supper after a day of days on Norway’s most glorious fjord.

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Chapter IX

A Glimpse of the Fjelds

“Fjeld-weather” is the Norwegian term for fine, warm, bright days. It implies that the weather is suitable for a tour on the mountains. But, alas! it is not the weather that is always encountered there, for even in the summer the climate of the high plateau is ever varying, and though there may be a long spell of fine, hot weather, with a glorious crisp air, yet at any moment a change of the wind may bring a week of soaking rain, sleet, possibly snow, and a fall of temperature by twenty degrees. That is no time for the fjelds, and the traveller is better off in a fjordside hotel.

Given fine weather, there is no more splendid touring ground than the highlands of Norway, where, at a height of anything up to 4,000 or 5,000 feet above the sea, stretch thousands of square miles of wild and uninhabited moorland, cut up with numerous large lakes, and clothed only with a dwarf vegetation. Such parts usually lie off the beaten track, and to reach them means an expedition—heavy, uphill walking for two or three days, with the baggage carried on the backs of ponies.

If you were going to undertake an expedition to these high fjelds, you would probably make a start from the lowlands by following some well-worn track [44] leading to a sæter. In nine cases out of ten the track will be running by the side of a river, at first wide and flowing lazily through the valley, but soon narrowing, until its upper waters become a rushing mountain torrent, swishing between mighty boulders. After a while you find that the path gradually begins to ascend by zigzags up the mountain-side, and the scenery, whenever you pause to look down, is magnificent. In time you reach the upland pastures, with here and there a sæter-dwelling, and this is the end of the first stage of your journey, for you probably will have climbed some 2,000 feet and walked a dozen miles or more. Thus you will be glad enough to accept the hospitality offered to you by the simple peasants.

All these sæter-huts are much alike, though, of course, they vary in size and in the way in which they are fitted up; but as they are only occupied during the summer months, luxurious fittings are not considered a necessity. The outer walls are constructed of fir-trunks, let into one another at the corners on the log-hut principle, and the interior is lined with boarding. In some parts, however, where timber is scarce the buildings are of stone.

The roof consists of rough planks, on which is placed a layer of birch-bark to fill in the cracks; and on the top, again, are laid sods of earth to a thickness of about a foot. Grass and weeds soon cover the roof, binding it together and keeping the rain out.

The door opens into a dark hall or chamber, which serves as a receptacle for rubbish of all kinds—fishing-nets, tools, skins, empty milk-pans, and the like; and in the corner is a roughly-built fireplace for boiling the milk and for cooking. On [45] one side of this hall is the door into the sole living apartment, which possesses a window at one end, and against one of the side walls a couple of bunks, wherein three or four dairymaids sleep.

Sometimes there is a separate room, or even a detached hut, for the dairy work; but there is generally only the one room, the milk being set in large, shallow wooden vessels on a number of shelves fixed against one of the walls. Everything is scrupulously clean, and the cattle women are working hard all the long daylight hours. Periodically a man from the farm in the lowlands comes up to the sæter with a couple of ponies and takes down butter and cheese, and such visits are the only excitement in sæter-life.

If you have time to linger here for a day or two you will be made welcome, and you will find plenty to interest you. The views down into the deep valleys and away to the fjords in the distance are always delightful, and there may be a stream with pools holding trout worth trying for. The tiny rivulets which trickle down from the hills are lined with ferns and forget-me nots, and elsewhere may be seen flowers of every hue—red Alpine catchfly, blue meadow cranesbill, hawksweed, wild radis, and a score of other pretty things.

But the greatest joy of all is the sight of a wide marsh covered with the delicious *multebær*, whose luscious, yellow fruit and gold-red leaves brighten the country-side. This is the cloudberry, found in Scotland and in the North of England, and to come on a stretch of this fruit after a long, hot walk is a thing worth living for. Besides this best of all Norse wild fruits, the fjelds produce many excellent berries, [46] such as crowberries, whortleberries, marsh whortleberries, bearberries, dewberries, cranberries, and others. The children of the country parts all over Norway spend much of their time in feasting on these little fruits, and during the

summer and autumn months their hands and faces are generally well stained with the dark juice.

Upwards, beyond these pleasant pastures, when you have left behind the last sæter-shanty and the last thicket of birches, you reach a world where, except for the scattered Tourist Club huts and their summer caretakers, you cannot count on coming across either dwelling or human being.

Wandering far afield, you may meet a couple of Lapps with their herd of reindeer, and down by one of the tarns you may chance on a rough stone shelter, inhabited for the time being by two Norwegian fishermen, whose nets are laid in the mountain lake.

All over this lofty wilderness the snow lies deep for several months of the year, but as soon as it begins to thaw it disappears rapidly, when, as in Switzerland, Nature's garden immediately blossoms forth in all its glory. It must be confessed, however, that the carpet of Alpine flowers on the Norwegian high-fjelds cannot compare with that of Switzerland. On the great mountain plateau of Norway everything gives way to the lichen-like reindeer moss, and the flowers are merely in patches, or growing in masses only in those swampy parts where the moss does not thrive.

The fjelds furnish a recreation-ground for the Norwegian townsman. There he can lead the life that he loves best, and one week of the wilds will set him up for the [47]
remainder of the year. Even though he cares nothing for shooting or fishing, the sense of freedom as he does his daily tramp delights his soul. And his wife or his sister as often as not will accompany him, for the Norwegian ladies are brave walkers, and know how to rough it.

But the majority of Norsemen are good sportsmen and good fishermen, and in most seasons there are plenty of fjeld-ryper to be shot and good hauls of trout to be made in the mountain lakes and connecting streams.

But what is the country like up here on the very summit of everything? It is called a plateau; but that does not mean that it is absolutely level, for, as a matter of fact, there is no part of it level enough to be made into a football ground. It is all up and down, and every here and there are low hills, with occasionally great prominent, rounded mountain-tops, rising to a height of 500 or 600 feet above the plateau. Then there are chains of lakes, often several miles in length, acres of swampy ground in every direction, shallow ravines filled with a jumble of rocks and boulders, and constant sand mounds, partly overgrown with grass and dwarf juniper. And up here are the snowfields, about which we shall have more to say presently.

It is all weird and wild and wonderful, and if there be no wind the silence is intense, and only broken by the bark of an Arctic fox from some rocky hillside or by the plaintive call of a golden plover.

Why, it may be asked, should anyone wish to go to such a desolate place? Only to shoot or to fish, to gather in a store of the purest air in the world, or perhaps to [48]
enjoy a period of calm and quiet solitude—world-forgetting, by the world forgot.

A Sæter, Vetle Fjord

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Chapter X

Wild Nature—Beasts

In a country like Norway, with its vast forests and waste moorlands, it is only natural to find a considerable variety of animals and birds. Some of these are peculiar to Scandinavia. Some, though only occasionally met with in the British Isles, are not rare in Norway; whilst others (more especially among the birds) are equally common in both countries.

There was a time when the people of England lived in a state of fear and dread of the ravages of wolves and bears, and the Norwegians of the country districts even now have to guard their flocks and herds from these destroyers. Except in the forest tracts of the Far North, however, bears are not numerous, but in some parts, even in the South, they are sufficiently so to be a nuisance, and are ruthlessly hunted down by the farmers. As far as wolves are concerned civilization is, fortunately, driving them farther afield each year, and only in the most out-of-the-way parts are they ever encountered nowadays. Stories of packs of hungry wolves following in the wake of a sleigh are still told to the children in Norway, but they relate to bygone times—half a century or more ago, and such wild excitements no longer enter into the Norsemen’s lives.

[49]

Yet less ferocious animals give the people trouble enough, and amongst these may be mentioned the lynx and the wolverine, or glutton, each of which will make his supper off a sheep or a goat if he gets the chance. Of the two the lynx is perhaps the worse poacher, and his proverbial sharpness renders him difficult to catch. Not so the glutton, who, if he succeeds in crawling through a hole in the fence of a sheepfold, stuffs himself so full that he cannot get out again. I think that most of us would rather be called lynx-eyed than gluttonous, and certainly a lynx is a much handsomer beast than a glutton.

With the exception of the rabbit, all our English animals are found in Norway—the badger, fox, hare, otter, squirrel, hedgehog, polecat, stoat, and the rest of them. But besides these there are little Arctic foxes and Arctic hares, with bluish-grey coats in the summer and snowy-white ones in the winter. This change of colour is a provision of Nature, rendering these particular animals, and some birds also, almost invisible among the snows. The ermine is another instance of this. In summer he is just an ugly little brown stoat; but in winter he comes out in pure white, with a jet-black tip to his tail, a skin worth a lot of money.

Of all these small Norwegian animals perhaps the most interesting is the lemming, who, for some reason best known to himself, does not trouble to put on a white coat in the winter, but keeps to his stripy jacket all the year round. He lives everywhere—up on the mountains and down in the valleys, and is hardly as large as an ordinary rat; but woe betide the dog that brings him to bay, for if he finds his road to escape barred, he will sit up and fight to the death, and he knows how to [50] bite. Yet he would much rather run away if he could, as in ordinary life he is quite peacefully inclined, and feeds on nothing more than grass and herbs and roots.

But there is a peculiarity about the lemming which makes the country-folk of Norway more afraid of him than of any other animal. In most years you may wander about the country for weeks and never see a lemming, but occasionally there comes what is called a “lemming-year,” when more young lemmings are born than usual, and then the trouble begins. They eat up everything round about their homes, and they begin to wander in search of food in packs of thousands, like swarms of locusts. The farmers try to destroy them, but they soon give up the attempt, as for days and days the lemmings come on in great waves, eating up the grass and the crops wherever they pass. Except the sea, nothing will stop them when once they have made a start; they come down the mountain-sides, swim the rivers and streams, rush through the forests, and, eating as they go, devastate the farm-lands. They do not wander hither and thither, but keep to the same direction straight ahead, until they eventually reach the sea. Whether they think that it is only another river to be crossed, or whether they think that they have done enough damage for one lifetime, nobody knows; but into the sea they all plunge madly, and, of course, are soon drowned.

This, however, does not end the nuisance, for thousands of them die as they sweep over the country, leaving their dead bodies to poison the water, and thus making the people ill with what they term “lemming fever.” So the pretty little lemmings [51] are on occasions more to be dreaded than are even bears and wolves, but fortunately “lemming-years” do not come round very often, and the whole country is not visited by the pest at the same time. They made their last big raid in several districts in 1902, and they may come swarming down from the mountains again any summer.

I must now say something about the wild animals which are helpful to the people in that they provide them with food and bring money to their pockets. Foxes and other fur-bearing animals will always fetch good prices. There are also the hares, especially the white ones, which are shot and snared in winter-time in great quantities, and sold all over Europe. You may see them hanging up in the poulterers’ shops in London. Then there is that huge beast, the elk, almost as big as a small horse, who roams about the forests like his Canadian brother, the moose, and is hunted and shot for his flesh, skin, and massive flat horns. Red deer there are also in some parts of Norway; but the animal of greatest interest is undoubtedly the reindeer.

Up on the great mountain plateaux there are still plenty of wild reindeer roaming about in large herds, and numbers of them are shot every autumn by the farmers, who sell the skins, and dry the meat to be eaten in the winter months. It is, however, the so-called tame reindeer which are so invaluable to the people of the North. Without them it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the Laplanders to exist, and without them thousands of Norwegians would be poor indeed.

It is a popular idea that, in the winter, reindeer draw the sleighs all over Norway. [52] As a matter of fact, it is only in the extreme North, among the Lapps, that reindeer are employed for this kind of work; and very few Europeans ever have the opportunity of enjoying a drive in a reindeer “pulk,” as the queer sleigh is called. That the experience is most exhilarating and exciting is certain. In the first place, there is only one trace, connecting a kind of shoulder harness with the forepart of the sleigh; again, there is only one rein coming from a collar round the deer’s neck, and consequently driving a reindeer as we drive a horse is, of course, out of the question. All that it is possible to do is to head him in the required direction, and hope for the best. A jerk of the rein sets him going; and, as often as not, he starts at a frantic gallop, kicking up the snow into the driver’s face until he is almost blinded, and careering right and left at his own sweet will until he is tired. There is no difficulty about keeping to the road, because there are no roads—only miles and miles of snow, and the reindeer knows pretty well which way to go, since the camping-places and habitations in these regions are limited.

Imagine what it would be like to jump into a boat-like “pulk” all alone—for there is only room for one—twist the rein round your wrist, give it a flick, and so away over the waste of snow, watching the great antlers of the deer in front of you, and flinging yourself from side to side to prevent capsizing. And, if you do happen to upset, you must hang on to the rein like grim death and be dragged over the snow, otherwise the reindeer will either fly like the wind and be lost, or he may turn on you and attack you with his fore-hoofs. [53]

These are the animals which are called the tame reindeer, but their tameness only consists in the fact that they are kept in herds together, and watched by men and dogs. They graze wherever they choose, and the men and the dogs have to follow them. When they are wanted for driving, to be milked, or to be killed, the Lapp has to lasso them over the horns, from a distance of thirty or forty yards, for no reindeer is ever sufficiently tame to permit a man to walk up to him.

The wealth of a Laplander depends on the number of reindeer which he possesses. They carry his baggage and draw his sleighs when encampments are moved; they provide him with milk and cheese, and, when killed, with excellent meat. Their skins keep him warm at night, and out of them are made boots, shoes, and leggings, as well as every kind of article of leather which the Lapp has a use for. Horns, hoofs, and bones all have their value, and not so long ago the women did all their sewing with needles and threads made out of reindeer's bones and sinews. Moreover, after supplying their own wants, the herdsmen can sell the surplus meat and skins, and thus obtain the wherewithal to buy other necessaries or luxuries.

Cows, horses, sheep, goats, or pigs would be out of place in Lapland, and would find nothing to eat. But the "camel of the Arctic Desert," as the reindeer has been called, thrives in the cold without care or shelter, and subsists on the moss, which he obtains by scraping deep holes in the snow. Small wonder that he is a valuable beast to the Laplander, who, however, repays him only with blows and lashes.

Farther south, on the Hardanger Fjeld and elsewhere, herds of tame reindeer have [54]
now been established by Norwegian companies as a new industry. Lapps are hired to look after them, and the meat is sold in great quantities in many parts of Europe, especially in Paris. A good trade is done also in the skins, for glove-making and other purposes. It is by no means difficult to have a look at one of these herds, and any visitor to Norway who finds himself within a day's climb of the mountains whereon a herd is known to be grazing should do his utmost to see the reindeer. He will find them not, like the deer in Richmond Park, waiting to be looked at, but timid and restless, and ready to take flight at the slightest provocation. Only the Lapp herdsmen and their dogs are able to control these wild children of a wild land.

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Chapter XI

Wild Nature—Birds

What a place Norway must be for birds'-nesting! There, if one went at the right time, and did not mind roughing it, one might find eggs which one could never come across in England, although laid by birds which are called British. But the Norwegians protect a great many of their birds by law in the same way as we do, and if this had only been done a hundred years ago the Great Auk would not have disappeared for ever.

Most of our British birds are found in Norway at some time of the year, and many of our rarer birds are almost common in Norway—golden eagles, snowy owls, ravens, ring-ouzels, and crested tits, for instance. As with us, there are resident [55]
birds and migratory birds. Nearly all the kinds of birds which come from the South in the summer months to nest in the British Isles also go farther North and nest in Norway. You will find swallows, martins, cuckoos, warblers, and others of our summer birds all nesting over there, and you will find some varieties of southern birds which do not come to England, but go straight up from Eastern or Central Europe to breed in the cool of the North. Amongst these may be mentioned the blue-throated warbler, ortolan bunting, Lapland bunting, shore lark, red-throated pipit, tree warbler, and many others.

Then there are birds which are common enough in England in the winter, but which mostly go away to Norwegian breeding-grounds, such as geese, ducks, woodcock, and snipe; while bramblings, fieldfares, and redwings are birds of the North, and never nest in Great Britain. Besides these, there are a certain number of birds which have no claim to be termed British, and which are found in Norway all the year round—the nut-cracker, several kinds of woodpecker, the ryper (the game-bird of the country), and others. And, on the other hand, some of our common resident birds migrate from Norway in the winter.

The house-sparrow is as much at home in Norway as he is in every other land, but

in winter he sticks close to the habitations, and were it not for the fact that the people are bird-lovers, sparrows would have a poor chance of picking up a living at this time of the year. Towards the end of autumn it is a general custom to erect near the house a sheaf of corn on a pole, so that the small birds may have something to eat when the hard weather comes. And the ceremony of putting up [56] the pole is made the occasion for a feast for the children. They are thus not likely to forget the birds, and even in the towns one sees these bundles of corn hanging outside the windows.

It is, perhaps, a little disappointing to find that robins in Norway are not associated with Christmas, but the fact remains that they are not brave enough to risk starvation, and though a few of them are said to stay in the country, the bulk of them leave in September. But the wren takes the place of the robin as far as tameness and impertinence are concerned, as in winter he attaches himself to the peasant's cottage and makes himself quite at home, being known either as "Peter-of-the-Afternoon" or as "Tommy-round-the House." Magpies also are great favourites with the country people at this season, as they become quite tame, and hop in and out of the cottages. They are regularly fed, and no one would dream of molesting them.

The Norwegians have several quaint old legends connected with some of their birds. This is the story of the gold-crest, known in Norway as the "bird king":

"Once upon a time the golden eagle determined to be publicly acknowledged as king of the birds, and he called a meeting of every kind of bird in the world. As many of the birds would come from tropical countries, he appointed a day in the warmest month; and the place he chose was a vast tract called Grönfjeld, where every species of bird would feel at home, since it bordered on the sea, yet was well provided with trees, shrubs, flowers, rocks, sand, and heather, as well as with [57] lakes and rivers full of fish. So on the morning of the great congress the birds began to arrive in a steady stream, and by noon every description of bird was represented—even the ostrich (though how he contrived to cross the seas the story does not say). The eagle welcomed them, and when the last hummingbird had settled down he addressed the meeting, saying that there was no doubt that he had a right to demand to be proclaimed their king. The spread of his wings was prodigious, he could fearlessly look at the sun, and to whatever height he soared he could detect the slightest movement of a fly on the earth. But the birds objected to him on account of his predatory habits, and then each in turn stated his own case as a claimant for the kingship—the ostrich could run the fastest, the bird of paradise and the peacock could look the prettiest, the parrot could talk the best, the canary could sing the sweetest, and every one of them, for some reason or other, was in his own opinion superior to his fellows. After several days of fruitless discussion it was finally decided that whichever bird could soar the highest should be, once and for all, proclaimed king."

Bondhus Glacier, Hardanger Fjord

“Every bird who could fly at all tried his best, and the golden eagle, confident of success, waited till last. Eventually he spread his wings, and as he did so an impudent little gold-crest hopped (unbeknown to his great rival) on to his back. Up went the eagle, and soon outdistanced every other bird. Then, when he had almost reached the sun, he shouted out, ‘Well, here I am, the highest of all!’ ‘Not so,’ answered the gold-crest, as, leaving the eagle’s back, he fluttered upwards, until [58] suddenly he knocked his head against the sun and set fire to his crest. Stunned by the shock, the little upstart fell headlong to the ground, but, soon recovering himself, he immediately flew up on to the royal rock and showed the golden crown which he had assumed. Unanimously he was proclaimed *fuglekongen* (king of the birds), and by this name,” concludes the legend, “he has ever since been known, his sunburnt crest remaining as a proof of his cunning and daring.”

In those parts of Norway where the gold-crest is rarely seen the same story, omitting the part about the sun and the burnt crest, is told of the common wren, who is said to have broken off his tail in his great fall. And to this is applied a moral, viz.: Proud and ambitious people sometimes meet with an unexpected downfall.

Besides the three British woodpeckers, there are four other kinds resident in Norway, and of these the great black woodpecker is the largest. The woodmen consider it to be a bird which brings bad luck, and avoid it as much as possible. They call it “Gertrude’s Bird” because of the following legend: “Our Saviour once called on an old woman who lived all alone in a little cottage in an extensive forest in Norway. Her name was Gertrude, and she was a hard, avaricious old creature, who had not a kind word for anybody, and although she was not badly off in a worldly point of view, she was too stingy and selfish to assist any poor wayfarer who by chance passed her cottage door. One day our Lord happened to come that way, and, being hungry and thirsty, he asked of Gertrude a morsel of bread to eat [59] and a cup of cold water to drink. But no, the wicked old woman refused, and turned our Saviour from the door with revilings and curses. Our Lord stretched forth His hand towards the aged crone, and, as a punishment, she was immediately transformed into a black woodpecker; and ever since that day the wicked old creature has wandered about the world in the shape of a bird, seeking her daily bread from wood to wood and from tree to tree.” The red head of the bird is supposed to represent the red nightcap worn by Gertrude.

Legends of this description were doubtless introduced in the early days of Christianity in order to impress the new religion on the people, and several have been preserved. Thus the turtle-dove is revered as a bird which spoke kind words to our Lord on the cross; and, similarly, the swallow is said to have perched upon the cross and to have commiserated with Him; while the legend of the crossbill relates how its beak became twisted in endeavouring to withdraw the nails, and how to this day it bears upon its plumage the red blood-stains from the cross.

Yet one more Christian legend—about the lapwing, or peewit: “The lapwing was at one time a hand-maiden of the Virgin Mary, and stole her mistress’s scissors, for which she was transformed into a bird, and condemned to wear a forked tail resembling scissors. Moreover, the lapwing was doomed for ever and ever to fly from tussock to tussock, uttering the plaintive cry of ‘Tyvit! tyvit!’—*i.e.,* ‘Thief! thief!’”

In the old Viking times, before Christianity had found its way so far North, the bird which influenced the people most was the raven. He was credited with much [60] knowledge, as well as with the power to bring good or bad luck. One of the titles of Odin was “Raven-god,” and he had as messengers two faithful ravens, “who could speak all manner of tongues, and flew on his behests to the uttermost parts of the earth.” In those days the figure of a raven was usually emblazoned on shield and standard, and it was thought that as the battle raged victory or defeat could be foreseen by the attitude assumed by the embroidered bird on the standard. And it is well known that William the Conqueror (who came of Viking stock) flew a banner with raven device at the Battle of Hastings.

But the greatest use of all to which the sable bird was put was to guide the roving pirates on their expeditions. Before a start was made a raven was let loose, and the direction of his flight gave the Viking ships their course. In this manner, according to the old Norse legends, did Floki discover Iceland; and many other extraordinary things happened under the auspices of the raven.

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Chapter XII

Waterfalls, Snowfields, and Glaciers

A really fine waterfall is a most fascinating thing. Long before you reach it you hear the roar of the water, and see the spray ascending like steam from a boiling caldron. Then when you stand before it, you gaze in wonder on the never-ending rush of water, hurtling in one great mass from top to bottom of the lofty cliff, or [61] leaping in mighty bounds from ledge to ledge.

Nowhere in Europe can one see such a variety of waterfalls as in Norway, for every district has its *fos*, and in some districts the cascades are innumerable. In the Romsdal, for instance, an English traveller once counted within a mile no fewer than seventy-three waterfalls, “none of which were less than 1,000 feet high, while some plunged down 2,000 feet.” But the majority of these would only consist of a single thread of water, not of that great, broad sheet which is the feature of the more famous falls.

Which of Norway’s many waterfalls is the finest is a matter of opinion. Some people give the palm to the Rjukanfos (Telemarken), some to the Skjæggedalsfos[1] (or Ringedalsfos), some to the Vöringfos, while others maintain that the Vettifos, the Tvindefos, and the Tyssedalsfos are without rivals. The fact is that each of these (and other falls which could be named) has its own particular charm, and the last one visited always seems to be the best. A great deal also depends on the time of year, and on the amount of snow which has fallen on the mountains during the preceding winter. For, it must be remembered, it is the rapid melting of the snow in the spring that gives to most of the Norwegian waterfalls such a volume of water in the early months of the year.

But the summer rainfall on the high fjelds is always heavy, and even after all the snow of the year has melted, an immense amount of water has to drain away to the lowlands, and so to the sea. At first it collects in the tarns which fill the hollows of [62] the mountain plateaux, but these, overflowing, soon send their surplus water by certain channels away over the cliffs.

The greater waterfalls, however, are those which indirectly carry off the water from the snowfields, the mountains capped with perpetual snow; for, except during the frost-bound months of winter, these falls are always full.

The snowfields are of themselves of immense interest, but so intimately are they connected with the glaciers that we shall speak of the two together. A snowfield may exist without a glacier, but a glacier cannot exist without a snowfield—that is to say, the glacier is made by the snowfield.

How snowfields came into existence nobody knows for certain, but it is generally supposed by learned people who have studied the matter that, thousands of years ago, after what is called the Great Ice Age, Norway gradually put off her mantle of ice and snow and became what she is now; but the snow on the higher parts of the land has never yet had time to melt right away, because fresh snow is always falling and adding to the pile. And it is the weight of all this fresh snow on the top of the accumulation of centuries which produces the glaciers.

The Folgefond, in the Hardanger district, is the snowfield which most people who visit Norway see sooner or later, and since it covers an area of 120 square miles, at a height of about 5,500 feet above the sea, it is visible from a great many points of view. It forms a background to many a picture of the varied scenery of the Hardanger Fjord, and it has the advantage of being easily accessible. [63]

Of course, the belief in the old popular legends is dying out even in Norway, but there are still some aged grandfathers and grandmothers living near the great snowfield who can tell the tales as they were told to them. Thus they relate that where the Folgefond now lies was once a fertile and well-peopled valley, called Folgedalen, and that in one night its farms, forests, people, and cattle were buried in snow as a judgment for some great sin. One story ascribes the misfortune to the curse of a gipsy woman, who had been refused alms by the priest; while another relates that the valley was overwhelmed because the inhabitants had murdered their liege lord, the petty King of the district.

But why it happened and how it happened does not really much matter, for there the vast field of snow is to-day, and there it will doubtless remain for many centuries to come. As has been said, you can go up to the top of it and sleigh across a portion of its summit, or you can potter round about it and examine its many glaciers.

The two largest glaciers of the Folgefond are the Buar Bræ, near Odda, and the Bondhus Bræ, near Sundal, and to spend a day at either of them is a real treat. But it is not wise to visit these glaciers without someone who knows them, for one

might easily fall into one of the great fissures in the ice, known as crevasses, especially if lately-fallen snow had hidden the opening of the mighty crack.

A glacier, as most people know (now that everyone goes to Switzerland, if not to Norway), is nothing more than a river of ice; not a nice, clean, smooth sheet of ice, but a rough mass of frozen billows, almost blue in colour, and generally covered with sand, dust, and stones of all sizes. Wherever, beneath the edge of a snowfield, the country shapes itself into a valley, there you will find a glacier. [64]

If you make a snowball, and keep pressing and kneading it in your hands, you will soon convert it into a solid lump of ice. That is just what the sun does to the snowfield. It keeps melting the new snow, and this presses down into the old snow, so that the weight of the whole thing squeezes out the frozen snow into the valleys in the form of glaciers. And, as this process goes on year after year, the glacier would naturally keep going lower and lower down into the valley were it not for the fact that the point (or snout, as it is termed) of the glacier very frequently breaks off, and disappears into the torrent of ice-water which flows away from it. So some glaciers, although always moving, never grow any longer, but others creep a little bit farther down each year.

Lærdalsören

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There are many other interesting things about a glacier. One of them is the moraine, which consists of heaps of rocks and stones broken off from the edges of the valley by the great river of ice as it pushes its way imperceptibly forward. These rocks are embedded in the ice or borne on its surface, and are only given up when the extremity of the glacier melts away into the torrent. Some of the rocks thus transported are of immense weight, and the torrent is powerless to move them; year by year, therefore, the jumbled heap of boulders and rocks is added to until it often grows to an enormous size. [65]

Another fine snowfield in the Hardanger district is the Jökul, a splendid white dome, whose melting snows help to swell the Vöringfos. The Jökul does not possess many large glaciers, but one of them has, in past years, been a great source of trouble to the people who live near it. This is the Rembesdal glacier, at the far end of the Simodal Valley, near Eidfjord.

The Simodal is a beautiful and fertile valley, with farms on either bank of the river, which rushes through it to the fjord. This river comes from the glacier, but not directly. The head of the valley is choked by a high cliff, over which tumbles a grand waterfall, and this issues from a large mountain lake, into the opposite end of which descends the snout of the glacier, with a continuous stream of milky water flowing from it. So far there is nothing peculiar in all this, but the peculiarity lies higher up.

Some little distance up the glacier, and almost at right angles to one side of it, is a rocky hollow or small valley, and into this the water begins to pour in the spring as soon as the sun is strong enough to begin to melt the snow. The great glacier

blocks up the end of this hollow with a thick dam of ice, and before long a huge lake is formed.

What used to happen every two or three years was that the pressure of the water in this dammed-up lake became so tremendous that the glacier at last could resist it no longer. Away went the side and lower part of the glacier, and with one mighty crash the water escaped. Down into the lower lake, and over the waterfall, the wall [66] of solid water, several feet in height, descended into the valley. There it carried destruction far and wide, sweeping away crops, cattle, farm buildings, bridges, and everything that came in its way. The loss of life also was often considerable, for there was no warning other than the roar of the water as it burst into the valley.

A few years ago, however, some Norwegian engineers devised a means of averting these terrible floods by enabling the upper lake to empty itself gradually. They constructed under the glacier an iron-lined tunnel, connecting the upper lake with the lower, and in this way the water escaped at once. So the people of Simodal can now sleep in peace.

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1 Frontispiece.

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Chapter XIII

Driving in Norway

Like Switzerland, Norway has splendid roads. No difficulty in road-making seems to be too great for the Norwegian engineers to overcome. One frequently sees miles of road cut out of the solid rock of some mountain-side, and skirting the edge of a fjord or long lake. Again, a road may wind its way through a narrow gorge, with precipices a thousand feet high on either hand, and down in the depths a wild torrent, crossed every here and there by massive stone bridges; or, over the open mountains a road will zigzag upwards to a pass in long loops, like the famous “Snake Road” near Röldal.

And the surface of all these roads is hard and kept in good repair—at any rate, in [67] the summer months. In the winter they are, of course, thick in snow, which, when beaten down by the sleigh traffic, forms a new surface, which takes the wear and tear off the actual roadway for several months.

But we are now writing of the summer, after the snow has all melted, the snow-ploughs put on one side, and the roads recovered from the havoc wrought by the streams of melting snow. Then the sleighs have been hidden away in the innermost recesses of barns and outhouses, and the driving season begins.

Driving is one of the greatest enjoyments of Norwegian travel, though too much of it is perhaps wearisome. The best plan is to arrange a tour, so that some of it shall be by railway, some by steamer, some walking, and some driving, and this is generally easy to manage. The particular charm of driving is that the traveller can take his own time, go his own pace, and stop when and where he chooses. In this manner the scenery is capable of being more fully appreciated.

Until quite recently there were very few railways in Norway, and there are not many now. There are, however, plenty of excellent roads, and a well-organized system of posting. The posting-stations are situated about ten miles apart, and consist usually of a small inn or farmhouse, where the traveller can demand food and lodgings, as well as a change of conveyance and horses. The *skydsgut* (literally post-boy, but frequently an old man, or even a woman), accompanies the conveyance from his station to the next, and returns with it, though nowadays it is more usual to engage a vehicle (if not also a horse or pony) for a whole day’s journey, which has the advantage of avoiding the perpetual rearrangement of [68] one’s luggage.

There are four kinds of conveyance in general use: the *calèche*, drawn by a pair of horses, and something like a heavily-built victoria; the *trille*, a light, four-wheeled trap with two horses; and the *stolkjærre* and the *carriole*, the last two being the most popular and convenient vehicles for quick travelling.

The *stolkjærre* is a rough, box-like cart, with a seat for two persons, and another little seat behind for the *skydsgut*. It has the advantages of ample room for luggage, and economy when travelling two together, the hire of one *stolkjærre*

being less than that of two *carrioles*; but, having no springs, it jolts and jars its occupants most unmercifully.

The *carriole* may be considered to be the national vehicle of Norway, and is certainly the most comfortable. In appearance it resembles a miniature buggy, and it holds one person, who can stretch his legs in a long, narrow trough between the seat and the splash-board; or, by straddling the trough, the occupant can rest his feet on two conveniently-placed iron steps. The luggage is strapped on to a board behind, and the *skydsgut* sits on it. A day's drive in a *carriole*, if the weather be fine and the pony a good one, is a real pleasure, and an intelligent *skydsgut* will enliven the journey with his amusing babble, as well as with scraps of information about the country traversed.

The ponies are generally about thirteen hands in height, good-tempered, sure-footed, strong, and hardy, and think nothing of doing thirty or forty miles a day, if given an occasional rest. Driving them requires no great skill, and it is best to [69] leave them as much as possible to their own devices, since reins and bit have very little influence over their movements. One may haul on to the reins for half an hour without inducing the pony to pull up, but the magic sound of the "burr-r-r" uttered by the *skydsgut* will cause the little beast to stop dead. And he will not go on again until he hears the peculiar click of his master's tongue. So the stranger in the *carriole* or *stolkjærre* will do well to hold the reins for the sake of appearances, and allow his *skydsgut* to do the rest.

One word of comfort to the adventurous driver: Do not be alarmed if you notice that the harness is dropping to pieces. Your henchman (up behind) will soon put matters right with some scraps of string and a few bits of stick.

But the actual drive—how lovely it all is! Now you are passing up a valley among the hayfields and orchards which border the river, and by the roadside you find a profusion of wild flowers—great purple gentians, blue harebells, yellow mountain globe flowers, and other blossoms of varied colours. Butterflies there are also in abundance, and, if you be an entomologist, your heart will rejoice at the sight of such rare English insects as the Camberwell Beauty, the Northern Brown, and others. Now you enter a dark pine-forest, to find yourself before long emerging on to an open stretch of wild moorland; and so you cross the col, and commence to drop down into another valley, narrow and shut in by towering mountains. Waterfalls sparkle in the sun as they tumble over the cliffs, and the still unmelted snow stands out white and glistering on the distant hill-tops. The road swings from [70] side to side of the valley, crossing the torrent in its bottom by stout timber bridges, and at last you reach the margin of the great lake, where stands the neat little inn ready to provide you with your midday meal.

The organized tours, however short they be, always include a drive of this description, and no Englishman would consider that he had visited Norway unless he had driven through a part of the country. Even in a week one can cover a deal of ground. One can go by steamer from Bergen up the Hardanger Fjord to Eide, and thence drive across the neck of land to the Sogne Fjord, through the finest and most varied scenery imaginable, returning to Bergen, if needs be, by steamer down the Sogne Fjord. Or, if there be a few days to spare, one can steam across the head of the Sogne Fjord from Gudvangen to Lærdalsören, and thence again take *carriole* or *stolkjærre* to the Fillefjeld, and so visit the wildest of Norway's mountain districts, the Jotunheim—the Home of the Giants.

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Chapter XIV

Arctic Days and Nights

Everyone has read of the midnight sun and of the sunless winter of the North. They are features of all tales of Arctic exploration. Yet, in order to see the sun shining at midnight or to experience pitch-dark days, it is not necessary to be actually a seeker after the North Pole. Sunny nights and black winter days may be [71] enjoyed, or otherwise, even in Norway, but only in the Far North—within the Arctic Circle.

It is not quite easy to realize what things are like right away up in the North, as it were, on the top of the world, and why things are as they are is difficult to explain without entering into a host of scientific details. We will, therefore, avoid a long discussion about the movements of the earth and suchlike matters, and merely mention certain facts. At the North Pole itself there is continuous day for six

months of the year, and continuous night for the other six months, while on the line known as the Arctic Circle the sun shines at midnight once, and once only, in the year, and during one entire day of twenty-four hours in the winter it does not rise above the horizon at all. South of the Arctic Circle there is no such thing as midnight sun or as a day without sunrise.

As far as Norway is concerned, a considerable tract of country lies within the Arctic Circle—in fact, an area rather larger than that of Ireland—so it is not very difficult to find a place where the midnight sun can be seen for a period in the summer-time, and where in the winter some of the days are really dark. Of course, to see the midnight sun it is necessary to be at the place selected at the right time, and even then there is always the chance of the sky being clouded over, and no sun visible. For the latter reason travellers with plenty of leisure endeavour to go as far North as possible, so as to be almost certain of seeing the great sight.

Nowadays everything is made easy for everybody, and steamers take passengers to the North Cape throughout the summer for the sole purpose of enabling them to [72] see the midnight sun from the very best point of view. Here, provided that the sky is clear, the midnight sun can be seen from May 13 to July 31. Between those dates it does not set, and it would be a bad summer indeed if the clouds hid the sun for so long a time.

To reach the North Cape takes a good deal of time, and many people dislike a lengthy sea voyage; but even if one starts from Bergen and goes all the way by sea, there is something of interest to be seen every day, as the steamer keeps close to the coast, threads its way among the innumerable small islands, and calls at many places with beautiful scenery in the background, more especially Molde and Christiansund.

A little farther on you come to Trondhjem; but if you would curtail the sea voyage it is not necessary to take the steamer from Bergen, since Trondhjem can be reached by rail from Christiania or by a driving tour right through the country from various places. Onwards from Trondhjem, however, you must go by sea, unless you are prepared for a long and rough overland journey.

Trondhjem, the ancient capital of Norway, is a place of historic interest, and contains the finest cathedral in Scandinavia. Its name means “throne home,” as the old Kings of Norway used to reside there, and it was the place where the coronation ceremony was always performed. Though no longer the capital of the country, it is still a flourishing town, and the present King (Haakon VII.) was crowned there a few years ago.

Now the real sea voyage to the North Cape commences, and with luck you may [73] reach your destination in five days, but on every one of the five you will stop somewhere or see something which will be worth seeing. The town of Namsos is of no great interest, but the coast and island scenery now becomes stupendous and grand, with great giant rocks rising up out of the sea. The most remarkable of these are Torghatten and Hestmanden.

The peculiarity of Torghatten lies in the fact that there is a hole or tunnel straight through the massive rock, which itself is some 800 feet in height. As you sail past it you see daylight through the hole, and if you land to examine it you will find that it is nearly 200 yards from end to end, and that its almost perpendicular sides vary in height from 60 feet at one end to four times that height at the other end. No man can account for this remarkable tunnel except by quoting the local legend, and in this the Hestmand (the other extraordinary rocky island) is mixed up.

A Lapp Mother and Child

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Hestmanden, the “man on horseback,” is a wonderful mass of rock, the outline of which, allowing for a little imagination, resembles a man on a horse. And this is the legend:

Not far from Torghatten is an island called Lekö, on which, in the age of the giants, there lived a beautiful maiden. In those days the Hestmand was a real live giant, and he fell desperately in love with the Lekö maiden. But the latter, who was only half a giantess, was afraid of the great monster, and would have nothing to do with him. So the Hestmand flew into a rage, and one day chased the object of his affections, who fled for her life. The giants did not do things by halves, and the [74]
Hestmand was so angry that he meant to kill the maiden, and he shot at her with a giant arrow, which was a fairly large fir-tree. Now, just at the moment that he shot his arrow, the maiden’s brother, who was another giant, realized what was going on, and flung his hat between his sister and the arrow. The maiden was saved, but the arrow pierced the hat. Then the sun suddenly appeared above the horizon, and the actors in the tragedy were instantly turned into stone. Hestmanden is the wicked giant on his horse; Torghatten is the hat which was pierced by the arrow; the arrow itself may be seen, as a great stone pinnacle, on a neighbouring island; while Lekömoen, the mountain on Lekö, is the beautiful maiden who caused all the trouble.

But to continue the voyage. Immediately after passing Hestmanden the Arctic Circle is crossed, and a few hours later a call is made at the little town of Bodö. Thence to the Lofödden Islands is no great distance, and after they have been visited and the wonderful cod drying-grounds inspected, the steamer wends its way to Tromsö, and then to Hammerfest, which we have already referred to as a great place for the manufacture of cod-liver oil. Beyond this the rocky coast presents a succession of rugged and wild capes and promontories until the object of the voyage at length comes in sight.

The North Cape, the northernmost point of Norway, is a rocky headland on Magerö Island—the end of all things, rising a thousand feet above the deep blue Arctic sea. The climb up the steep, zigzag pathway from the spot where the

steamer lands you is arduous, and you will be glad of the rest by King Oscar's column. You would have been glad if a score of other passengers had not been with you, and still more glad if you had come here half a century earlier, before the hand of man had marked the spot, and before all your distant friends expected you to post them a postcard from the North Cape. [75]

Still, something of romance remains as, gazing northwards, you remember that, except, perhaps, for a corner of Spitzbergen, nothing intervenes between you and the North Pole—only that barrier of ice which, so far, has defied all penetration. But this is mere sentiment, and you have come to see something else—the merging of sunset with sunrise. Du Chaillu well describes the scene: "The brilliancy of the splendid orb varies in intensity, like that of sunset and sunrise, according to the state of moisture of the atmosphere. One day it will be of a deep red colour, tingeing everything with a roseate hue, and producing a drowsy effect. There are times when the changes in the colour between the sunset and sunrise might be compared to the variations of a charcoal fire, now burning with a fierce red glow, then fading away, and rekindling with greater brightness.

"There are days when the sun has a pale, whitish appearance, and when even it can be looked at for six or seven hours before midnight. As this hour approaches the sun becomes less glaring, gradually changing into more brilliant shades as it dips towards the lowest point of its course. Its motion is very slow, and for quite a while it apparently follows the line of the horizon, during which there seems to be a pause, as when the sun reaches noon. This is midnight. For a few minutes the [76] glow of sunset mingles with that of sunrise, and one cannot tell which prevails; but soon the light becomes slowly and gradually more brilliant, announcing the birth of another day, and often before an hour has elapsed the sun becomes so dazzling that one cannot look at it with the natural eye."

Such is the wondrous sight, and all through the summer, even before and after the period of the non-setting of the sun, the nights are almost as light as day. Indeed, all over Norway, far to the south of the Arctic Circle, the summer nights are remarkably short—not altogether an unmixed blessing to those who find it difficult to sleep in daylight.

But what a change comes over these northern lands in winter! At the North Cape the sun sets on November 18, not to rise again until January 24, and everywhere within the Arctic Circle there is a time of continuous night. To us, who have no experience of such a state of affairs, it seems as if life must be bereft of all its pleasures. Yet the dwellers in the Arctic regions think nothing of it. To them even the dark winter has its charms, for, as has been said of a certain gentleman, it is not really as black as it has been painted.

In the first place, there is the snow, covering everything, and even at the darkest time of year there is sufficient light, if the sky be clear, to see to read for an hour before and an hour after midday. Then there is the light given by the moon and stars, and lastly the cheering glow of the aurora borealis,or northern lights. It is [77] not, therefore, always dark, though when snow falls or the clouds block out the sky the darkness becomes intense. At such times the picture is truly a melancholy one.

To say that the light given by the aurora borealis does duty for sunlight is not true. Magnificent spectacle as it presents, this marvellous phenomenon produces no light of any real value, and only occasionally for a few minutes does it illumine the landscape. Tales of sleighing over the wastes of snow by the light of the aurora borealis have no foundation in fact, for seldom, if ever, has it sufficient power to obliterate the stars, and never does the moon pale before it. On the other hand, it is certain that these northern lights, streaming up into the heavens on every clear night of the long winter, must bring feelings of pleasure to the inhabitants of the Polar regions. The form, the intensity, and the colour of the light is ever varying, and thus, in watching it, there is always expectancy. We in England are accustomed to see these lights on autumn nights, but the display is feeble in comparison with that of the Arctic winter.

No one knows for certain what the aurora borealis really is, and even the most scientific people can tell you no more than that they suppose it to be "a phenomenon of electrical origin"! [78]

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Chapter XV

Laplanders at Home

Although Lapps are occasionally seen in charge of reindeer herds on some of the southern mountain tracts of Norway, their real home is in the Far North, not only of Norway, but also of Sweden, Finland, and Russia, and the country which they inhabit is known as Lapland.

That portion of it which belongs to Norway covers only some 3,000 or 4,000 square miles, while the whole of the Land of the Lapps has an area of something like 35,000 square miles. But statistics show that in Norwegian Lapland there are a great many more inhabitants than there are in Russian, Finnish, and Swedish Lapland put together; and the people, whether they be under the rule of Russia, Sweden, or Norway, are all of the same race—Asiatics and Mongols—totally unlike Europeans in appearance.

In the first place, they are dark, and what we consider ugly, though it is quite possible that in their eyes we ourselves are hideous. Then they are short—a five-foot Lapp would be almost a giant—but what they lack in stature they make up in sturdiness; for, although spare of body, probably no men in the world can do a longer day's work, or survive greater hardships. Dirty they are certainly, since they never change their clothes and seldom comb their hair; yet, for all that, they are perfectly healthy and happy.

They have gradually split up into three groups, known as Mountain Lapps, Sea Lapps, and River Lapps, the first being nomads, or wanderers, and the other two [79] settlers, by the sea or river, who have abandoned the original mode of life of their race.

Mountain Lapps are the most restless individuals it is possible to imagine. Winter and summer they are always on the move, and three days are seldom passed in one place. Time does not enslave them, for they do not trouble about it. Routine is nothing to them: they eat and drink when they feel inclined, and they sleep when a favourable opportunity occurs. In such matters, as well as in many others, they resemble wild animals. But in some respects they are methodical: they work by the seasons, and in their wanderings take the same lines each year. In the summer months they are down by the sea; during the remainder of the year they are on the mountains, though at Christmas-time they usually arrange to encamp somewhere in the vicinity of a church; for Christmas is a great event in the lives of the Lapps, since they profess Christianity, and if they are able to go to church at no other time of the year, they make a point of doing so at this season.

To-day these people are law-abiding and peaceable, but they are a strange mixture of good and bad. They are kind and hospitable, and of a cheerful disposition; at the same time they can be cruel, cunning, and selfish, while their love of money is no less than their love of drink—when they can obtain it.

For one thing only does the Mountain Lapp live—his herd of reindeer. They provide all his wants—food, clothing, and the wherewithal to purchase luxuries. They are his wealth; his very existence depends on them, and, in consequence, his [80] mode of living has to be accommodated to the habits of his reindeer. Whither-soever they choose to graze, their owner has to follow; and he deems it no hardship to pitch his rough tent on the snowy wastes in winter, or even to sleep out under a rock, with the thermometer at seventy degrees below zero. It is his life; from earliest childhood he has known none other; he is content with it. And it is not only the men who pass their lives thus; for the Lapp family is to some extent a united one, and the women and children thoroughly enjoy the wild, free life, apparently suffering no ill effects from the rigours of the climate.

Skiers Drinking Goosewine

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A Lapp baby starts life in a very queer way. Until it is able to walk it is kept in what is called a *komse*, a kind of cradle made of strips of wood covered with leather, and just large enough to take the baby. The little creature is rolled up in sheepskin and put into the cradle, which is then stuffed with moss, and the leather covering laced securely all around, so that only the baby's face is seen. To protect its head the *komse* is provided with a wooden hood, like most cradles, and there is generally a shawl, which can be thrown over the whole thing in severe weather; in fact, when the baby has been properly done up in its *komse*, it might go by parcel post without coming to much harm. It is a very excellent arrangement, because the family is incessantly moving about, and the mothers have their work to do, so cannot always be bothering about their babies. A thong of leather stretches from head to foot of the *komse*, which the mother can thus sling on her shoulder when going about, and by this thong the baby can be hung up to a tent-pole or to the [81] branch of a tree if its mother is busy. But as often as not the *komses* are just stuck up on end in the snow or against a rock while work is going on.

As soon as the child can walk and has finished its cradle existence, it is dressed in clothes similar to those of his or her father or mother, and looks most quaint. And the life which these children lead is devoid of much amusement. From the beginning they are helping to pack up and move the tent, and to look after the reindeer; they are nothing more than little old men and women; their toys are miniatures, or models, of such things as they will have to use later in life—lassoes, snowshoes, sleighs—and their games are restricted to learning the use of the same. They are treated by their parents more or less as if they were grown up, and allowed to do much as they please. Consequently, they become self-willed, and have little respect for their elders.

After all, the mode of life of the Lapps does not differ very greatly from that of our own gipsies, though of the two the Lapps are certainly the better people. The wandering spirit is inherent in both, but a portion of each sooner or later shakes it off, and leads a more settled life. Some there are, however, who will never be anything but wanderers, so long as there remains a free country wherein they are at liberty to roam.

Let us now see the kind of place which the Mountain Lapp calls "home." It cannot be anything very elaborate or bulky, as it has to be packed up and moved about nearly every day, and it has to be carried on the backs of the reindeer in summer, or drawn by them in sleighs in the winter. So it is nothing more than a most [82] unconventional form of tent, not altogether unlike the wigwam of the Red Indian, or the dwelling of many other nomadic people. A few long poles are stuck up on a circle, with their ends fastened together to form a sort of cone, and over this framework is stretched a covering of coarse woollen material. At one side there is a loose flap, forming a door, and the whole of the top part of the tent round about the ends of the poles is left open, to admit light and to allow the smoke from the

fire to issue forth. The diameter of the tent is about twelve or fifteen feet, and the height in the centre eight or ten feet. This is the kitchen, larder, store-room, drawing-room, dining-room, and bedroom of the family—men, women, boys, girls, babies, dogs and all.

A few branches of trees are spread on the ground, and in the middle, immediately under the opening in the roof, is the fire, which is kept alight day and night. Around it the inmates sit on the ground by day, and sleep by night. There is no furniture of any kind, and only a few cooking-pots, with some wooden bowls, and spoons of wood or of horn. Beds and blankets and suchlike luxuries are also absent, so undressing, dressing, washing, and absurdities of that kind are not indulged in. When the time has come to go to sleep, those who are in the tent just roll themselves close up to the fire, and sleep quite comfortably in the clothes which they probably have not taken off for a year or two. The whole family is not likely to be in the tent at the same time; some members of it must always be looking after the reindeer, as the herd can never be left to its own devices; consequently, there is generally plenty of room. [83]

Meals are free-and-easy affairs; there is no dinner-bell and no fixed time for eating. But food is always ready, hanging in a pot over the fire; and when anyone feels inclined to eat, the hand is plunged into the pot, and a piece of meat pulled out and devoured. In addition to reindeer-meat—of which the Lapps consume a great deal—the food consists of cheese, and sometimes a kind of porridge; while for drink they have water, melted snow, reindeer-milk, and, on occasions, coffee. The latter they are very fond of, but few families can afford to drink it often; so also with spirits, which, however, they only manage to obtain in the towns.

Thus live the Mountain Lapps year in year out. To-day a family is in one place, to-morrow a dozen miles away; now and again other families are met with, and received hospitably; but for the most part the family and its herd keep to themselves, since to do otherwise might lead to difficulties about grazing. The rain floods their tent; the snow buries it; the wind blows it down; yet they survive, and glory in their free life.

The Sea Lapps, though much more numerous than their brethren of the mountains, are not so interesting. They live by the coast in huts built of wood or of sods, and obtain a livelihood by fishing. The River Lapps, on the other hand, are both herdsmen and fishermen. Residing in small settlements on the banks of the rivers, they keep reindeer as well as a few cows and sheep, and they do a little in the way of farming the land round the settlement. Many of them are even intellectual, and the advantages of having their children properly educated in the schools are gradually becoming appreciated. [84]

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Chapter XVI

Winter in Christiania

Cold it is, of course—bitterly cold, and always freezing hard; but it is a dry cold, and you hardly notice it. The streets are all one sheet of frozen snow, and great care is taken to keep them in good repair, gangs of road-menders being always at hand to fill up ruts by the simple process of picking up the hard snow of the roadway and then sprinkling a little water on the top, which at once produces a solid surface. No wheeled traffic is now to be seen; everything is on runners, from the carriage of the King to the doll's perambulator. One no longer hears the rumble of the *carrioles* and *stolkjærres* over the rough flags, and the silence is broken only by the jingling of the sleigh-bells.

It is a strange sight indeed, this winter city, with its fur-clad men and women, and snow-covered houses and gardens, its keen, crisp air and pale blue sky. What a change from the fogs and dampness of our English climate!

Christiania is gay at this time of year, for it is the "season." The members of the Storthing, with their wives and families, are in town for the session, and all sorts of gaieties are in progress. But all those Norwegians who have leisure to enjoy themselves turn their attentions to the real pleasures of winter—sleighing, ski-ing, tobogganing, and skating. The boys and girls are thoroughly happy. Directly school is over away they go, with their skates, snowshoes, or toboggans, to have a right good time in their different playgrounds. The hill on which the palace stands is given up to these little revellers, and in the evenings dozens of them of all ages may be seen descending the slopes face downwards on their *kjælker*, or racing [85]

through the trees with their long ski on their feet. The public gardens also are flooded to form a rink for the sole use of the infant skaters, and, judging by their rosy cheeks, the outdoor exercise in the cold, dry air makes them as healthy as any children in the world.

But grown-up people consider skating feeble sport in comparison with ski-ing, which may be called the national sport of Norway. Not so many years ago it was restricted to that country; but now the sport has become a favourite one in Sweden, Switzerland, and in other parts of Europe where the snow lies deep. Yet, to see perfection in the art, one must go to Norway—the real home of the great long wooden snowshoe. From earliest youth the Norwegians of both sexes are accustomed to go about the country in the long winter months on these strange contrivances, for without them it would be absolutely impossible to move off the roads. Children are taught in the schools to use them; soldiers wear them at winter drill and manoeuvres; farmers, milkmaids, cowboys, all may be seen daily in the country parts going from place to place on them, and so keen are the young rustic lads on becoming proficient ski-runners that all over Norway are to be found ski clubs, formed for the purpose of encouraging snowshoeing as a pastime, and for [86] sending competitors to the great annual meeting at Christiania.

These snowshoe competitions are most interesting and exciting; and the pluck, endurance, and daring which they bring out are remarkable. They take place on the hills just outside Christiania, and are attended by every man, woman, and child who can reach the spot. On the first day is held the long-distance race, and on the second the jumping competition, only winners in the former being allowed to enter for the latter.

Every English boy knows what it is to take part in a cross-country run of half a dozen miles. The Norwegian test is something more formidable—about fifteen miles of rough, mountainous country, over hill and dale, through forests, and as often as not down rocky precipices, all half buried in snow; in the runner's hand a staff, and on his feet his ski, six or eight feet long. The course is carefully marked out beforehand by tying pieces of coloured rag to branches and rocks, and it is a point-to-point race throughout. Every district sends its champion, and there are frequently as many as eighty competitors, who are started one after another at intervals of a minute. Except, however, for expert ski-runners who can follow the course, it is not an interesting race to watch, as one only sees the start or the finish, to learn subsequently who covered the distance in the shortest time.

The appearance of the men as they come in is sufficient proof of the terrific nature of the test. So bathed in perspiration are they that they might have been running a "Marathon" race in the height of summer; and so parched are their tongues that [87] they can scarcely speak. Lucky the skier who, during his run, chances on an unfrozen forest pool whereat he may quench his thirst by deep draughts of what the Norwegian terms "goosewine"—our "Adam's ale."

But the second day's sport is of a different kind; the whole thing is visible to the spectators, who from first to last are subjected to thrills of wild excitement. The ground selected for the contest is the side of a somewhat steep hill, and the snow must be in proper condition—deep, and not having a hard-frozen crust. The competitors assemble on the summit, and at the bottom of the slope—perhaps a hundred yards from the starting-point—is a large enclosed space, around which stand the spectators. Half-way down the hillside, a horizontal platform, well covered with hard snow, has been built out, so as to form the "taking-off" point for the long jump; and close by it is the box for the judges and committee. The soldiers on ski, keeping the ground, give the signal that all is ready; in another second a bugle-call resounds from the top of the hill; and the first man has started.

Down the slope he comes at the top of his speed, his fists clenched, and determination in his face. Gathering himself together as he nears the "take-off," he bends slightly on his ski, and, with a frantic bound, flies forward into space. For an instant a breathless silence falls on the crowd, and then, as the *ski-löber* lands at the bottom, and struggles in vain to keep his feet, cheers mingled with laughter fill the air. Number 2 is no more successful than his predecessor; but Number 3 lands on both feet with much grace, continues his way on level ground, and, wheeling [88] round, receives the well-merited applause of the onlookers. Others follow in quick succession, some making brilliant leaps, some having awkward spills; yet one and all racing down to the platform with almost abandoned recklessness. What with the delay caused by accidents, and the time taken in measuring the successful jumps, the contest occupies some hours. Then the judges declare the names of the prize-winners, together with the length of each man's leap; and, prodigious as it may seem, it is no unusual thing for the champion to accomplish 100 feet, measured on the slope from the "take-off" to the landing-point.

Such are some of the winter sports of Norway. Can anyone wonder that the men who enter into them with so great a zest have earned for themselves the name of

“Hardy Norsemen”? Can anyone wonder that Dr. Nansen, in his younger days the champion *ski-löber* at one of these great meetings, should have defeated all others in the race for the North Pole?

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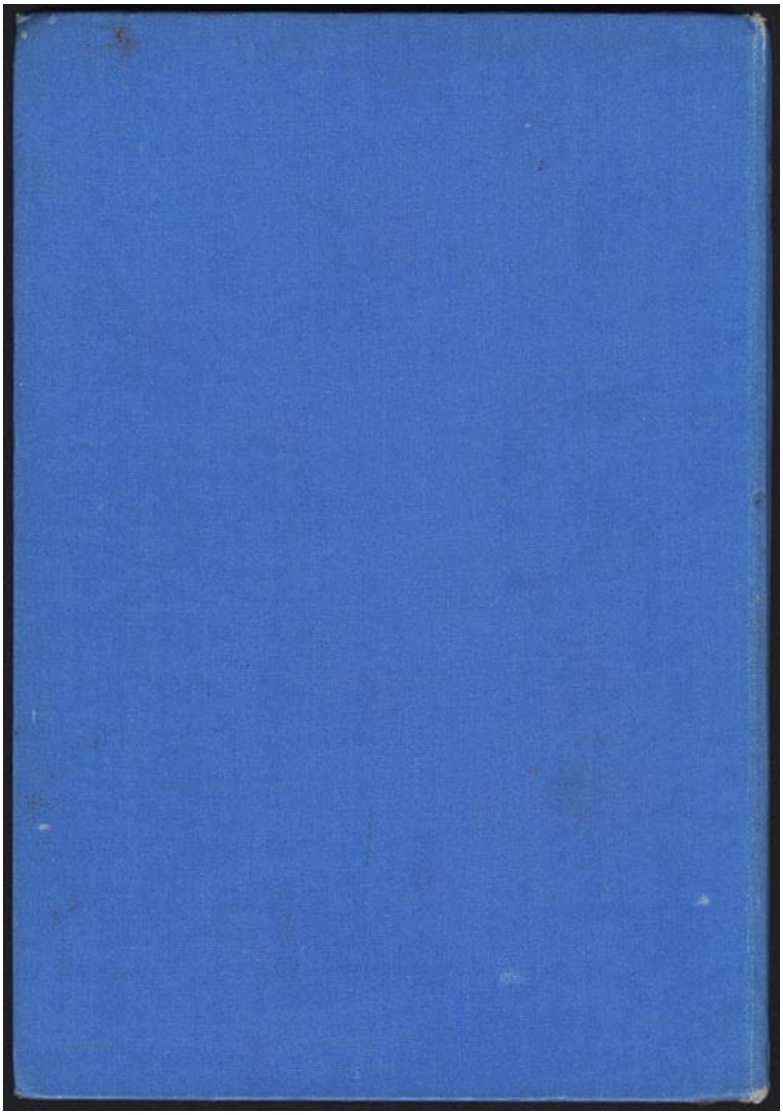

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