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MARI
Our Little Norwegian Cousin

THE

Little Cousin Series

(TRADE MARK)

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L. C. PAGE & COMPANY
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Boston
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Preface

LONG before Columbus discovered America, there were brave men in the north of Europe who dared to sail farther out upon the unknown waters of the Atlantic than any other people in the world. These daring seamen were called Vikings. Their home was the peninsula of Scandinavia, now ruled over by one king, although divided into two distinct countries, Norway and Sweden.

It was along the shores of Norway, with rugged mountains fringing its deep bays, that the Vikings learned command of their curious, high-prowed ships, and overcame all fear of wind and storm. Their strong nature shows itself to-day in the people of Norway, who patiently endure many hardships while trying to get a living on the rough mountain-sides or along the rocky coasts. [vi]

Many of our Norwegian cousins have come to America to make a new home for themselves where the sun shines more warmly and the winds blow less keenly. Their fair-haired children are growing up amongst us, showing us the qualities their parents most admire. Be brave, be honest, be kind to all creatures, be faithful to every little duty,—these are the lessons they have been taught from babyhood, as well as their brothers and sisters who have not as yet ventured far from the land they love so well,—the land of rapid-flowing rivers, deep, dark bays, and narrow valleys.

Come with me to-day to the home of one of these blue-eyed cousins and join her for a while in her work and play.

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MARI
Our Little Norwegian Cousin

CHAPTER I.

THE FARM

[9]

"Come, Mari, my little daughter, and you shall help me make the cakes," called her mother.

Mari stood in the middle of the big farm-yard with a flock of hens around her. She was scattering grain among them from a big bag on her arm; not a sound could be heard except once in a while the scratching of the hens' feet. They were too busy to notice each other or the big dog that sat on the door-step.

[10] The little girl laughed quietly as she watched them. "They are so happy; they love this pleasant summer-time as much as I do," she said to herself.

But the moment she heard her mother's voice, she turned quickly toward the house without stopping a moment longer to see whether her pet hen, Biddy Wee, or cross old Yellow Legs got the most dinner. Mari never in her life thought of answering her parents by saying:

"Why, papa?" or "Why, mamma?" or "I'll come in a moment."

Mari lives in Norway, and Norwegian parents train their children to obey without delay.

The little girl was only too glad to come now, however. Her mother had promised she should learn to make flat-bread to-day. She was pleased that she was old enough to be trusted with this important work. Why, she could keep house alone when she had mastered this necessary art, and her mother could leave her in charge.

[11] Mari remembers when she was such a tiny tot that her head barely reached above the table. Even then she loved to watch her mother as she sat at the big moulding-board, rolling out the dough until it was nearly as thin as paper.

This dough was made of barley-meal which was raised here at the farm. It was rolled out into sheets almost as wide as the table itself, for each cake must be about a half-yard across. Then came the cooking. The cake was lifted from the board to a hot flat stone on the fireplace, where it was quickly baked. How fast the pile grew! and how skilful mother always was. She never seemed to burn or break a single cake.

Wherever you go in Mari's country you will find flat-bread. You can eat quantities of it, if you like, yet somehow it will not easily check your hunger, and it gives little strength.

[12] "Now, dear, be careful not to get a grain of dust on the floor," said her mother, as Mari stood at the table ready for directions.

The child looked very pretty, with her long, light hair hanging down her back in two braids. The snowy kerchief was tied under her chin just as it was when she came in from the farm-yard. She had no need to put on an apron before beginning her work, for she already wore one. She was never without it, in fact, and hardly thought herself dressed in the morning until her apron had been fastened around her plump little waist.

Her cheeks looked rosy enough to kiss, but such a thing seldom happened, for mothers in Norway believe that is a bad habit. They think that it often leads to the carrying of disease from one person to another.

"Shake hands with the baby and the children," they would say, "but please don't kiss them." They are wise in this,—don't you think so?

[13] Before Mari had rolled out six cakes, her cheeks grew rosier yet. It was hard work, although it had seemed easy enough when mother was doing it.

The first three cakes had to be rolled over and over again because they would stick to the board. Then the lifting was not such a simple thing as Mari had supposed before she came to do it herself. But she kept trying. Her mother was very patient and encouraged her with loving smiles and kind words. At last the little girl made a really *good* cake and landed it all by herself on the stone, without doubling, or even wrinkling, it.

"Good, good," said her mother, "you will soon be a real helper, Mari. But now you have worked long enough for the first time. I will finish the baking while you take the baby and give him an airing."

[14] And where was the baby, bless him? Mari knew, for she went at once to the other side of the room where a pole was fastened into the wall. A big basket was hanging down from the end of this pole, and in the basket was a little blue-eyed baby, cooing softly to himself.

Mari's mother was a very busy woman. There was always something to do, either inside the

house or out-of-doors. She had very little time for holding a baby. So when Mari and her brothers were away at school, and mother was left alone, that dear little rosy-cheeked fellow sometimes began to cry in a very lively manner. The cooking and the cheese-making and the spinning must go on just the same, and time could not be spent in holding a baby.

But he must be amused in some way. So the strong pole was fastened into the wall, and the cradle attached to the end. Do you wonder what fun there could be in staying up in that basket, hour after hour? The baby enjoyed it because the pole would spring a little at every movement of [15] his body. As long as he kept awake, he could, and did, bob up and down. That was amusement enough.

He was glad to see Mari now. She was a perfect little mother, and soon had his hood and cloak fastened on. They were hardly needed, for he was already done up in so many garments, it didn't seem possible he could be cold, wherever he went.

The living-room, where Mari had been working, was large and high. The beams were dark with age, but the floor was white from the many scrubbings Mari's mother had given it.

On one side of the room was the big fireplace where all the cooking was done. During the long winter evenings the family and servants sat in front of the blazing logs and told stories of the famous sea-captains of the olden times. Or perhaps they talked of the fairies and giants, in whom [16] Mari firmly believed. Her mother laughed at the idea of these wonderful creatures. Yet, after all, it was not more than a hundred years ago that they seemed real to many grown-up people.

Wonderful creatures who made themselves seen from time to time dwelt in the mountains, the fields, and the rivers. This is what Mari's great-grandma had believed, and was she not a sensible woman? It is no wonder, therefore, that our little cousin loved to think that these beings were still real. When she went to sleep at night, she often dreamed of the gnomes who live far down in the earth, or the giants who once dwelt among the mountains.

When she was very little she sometimes waked up from such dreams with a shiver. "O, don't let the cruel giant get me," she would cry. Then she would jump out of her own little cot into the big bed of her parents. She felt quite safe as soon as her mother's loving arms held her tightly, and [17] she was sound asleep again in a minute.

That big bed certainly looked strong enough to be a fortress against the giants or any other of the wonderful creatures of fairy-world. It stood in the corner of the living-room, where Mari's mother worked all day, and where the family ate and sat. It was so high that even grown people did not get into it without climbing up the steps at one side. It had a wooden top, which made it seem like a little house. It was not as long as bedsteads in other countries. No grown person could stretch out in it to his full length. He must bend his knees, or curl himself up in some way, for he certainly could not push his feet through the heavy wooden foot-board.

Mari's people, however, never thought of its being uncomfortable. All Norwegian bedsteads are made in this way, so they became used to it as they grew up. But sometimes English [18] travellers had stayed at the farmhouse all night when they had been overtaken by a storm. They would be sure to get up in the morning complaining. They would say:

"O yes, this country of Norway is very beautiful, but why don't you have beds long enough for people to sleep in with comfort."

The farm where Mari lives lies in a narrow valley half a mile from the sea. The cold winter winds are kept off by the mountain which stands behind the houses. No one but Mari's family and the servants who work on the farm live here. Yet I spoke of houses. This is because the little girl's home is made up of several different houses, instead of one large farmhouse, such as one sees in America.

Mari's father thinks that two, or perhaps three, rooms are quite enough to build under one roof. He settled here when he was a young man. Mari's mother came here to live when they were married. At that time there was but one house. It contained the living-room and the storeroom. [19] After a while another house was built close by, for the farm hands to sleep in. Still another little building was added after a while for the winter's supplies, for there is no store within many miles of the farm.

Mari's mother never says, "Come, my child, run down the road and buy me five pounds of sugar," or, "Hurry, dear, go and get two pounds of steak for dinner." It would be useless for her to think of doing such a thing. All the provisions the family may need must be obtained in large quantities from the distant city, unless they are raised here on the farm.

The storehouse was built very carefully. It was raised higher than the other buildings so that rats and other wild creatures should have hard work to reach the supplies. There is not a great deal on hand now, for it is summer-time, but in the autumn the bins will be full of vegetables, and [20] large quantities of fish and meats will hang from the rafters. There will be stores of butter and cheese and a large supply of coffee, for Mari's people drink it freely.

CHAPTER II. [21]

VISITORS

"Mother, mother, I hear the sound of wheels," cried the little girl, as she came hurrying into the house, panting for breath. The baby was such a big load it is a wonder she could hurry at all.

"Could you see what is coming?" asked her mother.

"Yes, there are two carriages, I know, for I saw a cariole, and I could hear another gig, although it was still out of sight round the bend of the road. They must be in a hurry, for I could hear the driver of the cariole clucking to his horse to make him go faster."

"IT WAS A SORT OF GIG WITH VERY LONG SHAFTS."

"Run right down to the rye-field, Mari, and tell your father to send Snorri up with the horses. Leave the baby with me."

Mari hurried away, while her mother went out into [22] the yard to greet her visitors who had now drawn near.

The first carriage was a cariole, as Mari had said. It was a sort of gig with very long shafts. It had a seat in front just wide enough to hold one person, with a small place behind, where the post-boy sat. A lady rode in this cariole and drove the sturdy little horse.

Behind her came a second carriage, which could not be very comfortable, as there were no springs and the seat was directly over the axle. Two people were in this, also, a gentleman and the driver.

"We are in great haste to reach the next station by afternoon," the gentleman tried to explain to the farmer's wife. He spoke brokenly, for he seemed to know but few Norwegian words.

"He must be an American," Mari's mother said to [23] herself. "Those people always seem to be in a hurry." She dropped a deep curtsy to the lady, who seemed to be the gentleman's wife.

"Won't you come into the house while you wait for the carriage?" she asked. The lady smiled, and followed her into the living-room.

"What a lovely big fireplace you have!" exclaimed the visitor, as she sat down. "And what good times you probably have here in the long winter evenings. Indeed they must seem long when the daylight only lasts two or three hours."

Mari's mother smiled. "Yes, and the summer days seem long now that there are only two or three hours of darkness in the whole twenty-four," she answered. "At least, they must seem long to you who are a stranger," she went on. She spoke in good English, of which she was very proud. She had learned it when she was a girl in school, and was already teaching Mari to use it. [24]

"Is that your spinning-wheel?" asked the visitor, as she looked around the room. "Excuse me for asking, but I do wish I could watch you spinning. In America everything we wear is made in the mills and factories, and a spinning-wheel is not a common sight nowadays."

"I make all the clothing for my family," answered Mari's mother. "It is so strong it lasts nearly a lifetime. Look at my dress; I have worn it every working-day for many years, and it is still as good as new."

"Dear me! what a smart woman you are. If you don't mind, I should like to examine the goods. I suppose that is what people call homespun. And I suppose the wool of which it was made came from your own sheep, did it not?"

"Yes, indeed, and my husband raised every one of the flock himself," was the answer. "I will [25] gladly spin some of the wool for you now. But see! the carriages are waiting, and your husband looks impatient."

"Then I must not keep him waiting, for we have a long journey before us. So good-bye. Perhaps we may stop here again on our way back from the north. Thank you very much for your kindness."

The lady went out, and Snorri helped her into the cariole and himself jumped up behind, and away they went. The lady's husband followed in another carriage in the same manner they had driven into the yard. The ones that had brought them here had gone away as soon as the travellers stepped out. Their drivers would take them back to the station where they belonged.

"Mother, why is our house a posting-station?" asked Mari, when the travellers had gone. "I think it is a great bother. No matter how busy father and the men are, they must stop their work [26] and harness up the horses to carry strangers along the road. They don't get money for it, either,

do they?"

"That is the way your father pays his taxes," her mother answered. "You know what good roads we have in our country, Mari. You know, too, that many other things are done by the government to make this country a fine one. Of course every one must share in the cost of these things. As we live on a farm and have horses, your father is allowed to pay his share in work. That is, he agrees to carry the travellers who come this way to the next station. After all, it isn't very much bother," she said, thoughtfully. "But come, dear, set the table; it is near dinner-time, and your father will soon be here."

The table did not stand in the middle of the room. It was in the corner nearest the fireplace. A [27] wide bench was built round the two sides of the room nearest it, so that most of those who gathered around the table could sit on these benches.

Mari's mother soon had a steaming junket ready, besides a dish of smoked salmon, plenty of boiled potatoes, a large, dark-coloured cheese which looked like soap, and last, but not least, a plate was piled high with flat-bread.

"May father have the cakes I made?" asked Mari.

"Sure enough, little daughter. He will eat them with pleasure, I know."

In a few minutes the farmer and his helpers appeared. All gathered around the table together.

"What a fine junket this is to-day," said Mari's father, as his wife helped him to another plateful.

The junket was made of milk, barley, and potatoes, and was a dish of which he was very fond. [28]

"Dear me! how good the flat-bread is, too. And only to think that our little Mari made it all herself," continued the farmer. "She will soon be a woman at this rate."

Mari's rosy cheeks grew redder still at her father's praise.

"I shall be glad to see Gretel back again," said the little girl's mother, after a while. "I miss her very much, though Mari is a good little helper. But Gretel is having a good time with Henrik, I'm sure."

Gretel and Henrik had gone up on the mountain to the summer-house, where the cows were pastured during the two warmest months of the year. Henrik was now fourteen years old, and his father felt that he could be trusted to care for the cows as well as he could do it himself; while Gretel could make good cheese and butter, although she was only thirteen. This boy and girl [29] were now living together all alone up on the mountain-side, but they were not the least bit lonely.

Every Saturday afternoon Henrik brought down the butter and cheese his sister had made during the week. He had so many stories to tell of their good times, that Mari would say:

"Oh, dear! Henrik, I wish I could go back with you."

"I wish you could, little sister, but mother must not be left alone, you know." And Henrik would put his arms around her and kiss her lovingly.

"Where is Ole?" asked the farmer, as the family finished eating their dinner. "He should not be late to meals and give you trouble, good wife."

"He went up to the river on a fishing trip. I told him I should not scold if he was late this time," said his mother. "I was glad of the thought of having some fresh salmon."

"Very well, then. But come, my men, we must get back to the field now. The noon hour has [30] passed." And the farmer led the way out of the house.

But before he rose from the table little Mari said:

"Thanks for the food, dear father and mother," while she went first to one, then the other, and gave each of them a loving kiss.

Then the workmen rose and went in turn to the farmer and his wife and shook hands, to show they, too, were thankful.

It was very pleasant and cheerful in this farmer's house, you can plainly see; and it was all quite natural for these simple country people to show how kindly they felt for each other.

"There comes Ole, now," said the farmer's wife. "I can hear his call. Run, Mari, and see if he has met with good fortune."

"O, mother, mother, see what I have here," cried Mari, a few moments afterward. "Ole has a [31] fine string of fish, and that will please you, I know. But do look at this young magpie. It was snared in his trap while he was fishing. He says I may have it for my very own. May I keep it, please?"

"It seems as though you had enough pets now, Mari. You have your own pony and your dog Kyle. But I hate to refuse you, my dear. Yes, you may have it, but you and Ole must keep it out of mischief. Magpies are sometimes very troublesome birds, for they notice shining objects and carry them off if they get a chance."

Mari's mother now turned to the string of trout which she hastened to put away in the storeroom. Ole had cleaned them nicely before he brought them home. He now ate his dinner as quickly as possible, after which he and his sister went out into the yard to make a cage for their new pet. [32]

"In a little while he will get tame so he will follow us around," said Ole, as he cut the wooden bars for the cage. "Then we shall need to shut him up only when we wish."

"Isn't he a beauty," exclaimed Mari, as she stroked the magpie. "Look, Ole, at the green and purple feathers in his wings and tail. They are very handsome and glossy."

"Be careful, Mari, or he may bite you. That hooked bill of his is pretty sharp, if he is a young bird. See him look at you with his bright eyes. They say that magpies will grow fond of one in a very short time."

"Did you ever see a magpie's nest, Ole?"

"Yes, I passed one this morning as I went through the woods. It was way back in a thick bush. I crept up and looked in. The mother bird was away, and I saw five pretty green eggs dotted with little purple spots." [33]

"What did you do, Ole? I hope you did not touch them."

"At first, I thought I would, Mari, because, you know, those pretty eggs will sometime hatch out, and the five magpies will fly away to harm smaller and more helpless birds. Besides, they go into the grain-fields and pick the grain. Father isn't very fond of magpies, I can tell you.

"But after thinking for a moment I said to myself, 'No, mother magpie sha'n't be made unhappy to-day by coming home to find her nest empty.' Then I went away, and ended my morning's sport by trapping this young fellow."

Ole kept on working while he talked. He did his work so cleverly that one could see he was quite a carpenter. He was a tall boy for twelve years, and looked healthy and happy. [34]

You might possibly have laughed at his clothes, for he wore a pair of his father's old trousers, and they were gathered in at the waist to keep them in place. They must have been cut off at the knees so that they should not be too long for the boy. That was the only change made. His mother said:

"There, those trousers are too much worn for my husband to use any longer. They will do very well for Ole as he runs about on the farm. I will not take time to cut them any smaller. On holidays the boy shall wear his fine clothes, of course."

It is no wonder the good woman had to be careful of her time, for she not only spun, wove, and made their clothing, but she also spun the yarn and knit their stockings. Ole's stockings are often patched with leather to make them last longer. But his feet are not tender, and he does not mind it in the least. [35]

"What kind of a nest did the magpie have?" asked Mari, as Ole finished the cage and they placed the bird inside.

"It was lined with wool and hair and had a sort of roof over it. The opening was very narrow; I really don't see how the mother-bird could get in and out."

"I suppose the roof is to protect the young birds from enemies, don't you, Ole?"

"Yes, Mari; but come, let us go and find some worms for our bird. He must be hungry."

CHAPTER III. [36]

THE CHRISTENING

"O MOTHER, I have something to tell you. I have just been down to the village, and I heard there that neighbour Hans's wife has a new baby. It is a boy. Every one says he is a fine little fellow," said Mari, one beautiful afternoon.

"Dear me! dear me! that is fine news, truly," said her mother. "I must make her a dish of my best porridge and take it to her in the morning."

"Did everybody remember you when I was born, mother?"

"Yes, dear, the people of the village seemed to vie with each other in preparing a dish of flödegrod. It did taste so good! It was hard to tell whose was the best. You must learn how to make this cream porridge now, Mari; you are quite old enough. You will never be thought a good housekeeper if you cannot make smooth flödegrod." [37]

"The baby is to be christened next week. Everybody will be there, of course, mother."

The farm was only half a mile from a little fishing village on the shore of a deep bay. Such a

long, narrow bay is called a fiord. There are many fiords in Norway.

There were only about a dozen cottages in the village, but in their midst was a tiny little church and a small building used as the schoolhouse. But school was not kept there all the year round. Half of the time the master taught in this place, and the rest of the year he spent in another little village a few miles up the coast. Neither of them was large enough to pay for a teacher the whole year round. The children, however, were glad to work hard while he was among them. They loved their teacher and their school, and they learned quickly. [38]

Every one in the place was busy now, getting ready for the christening. At last came the great day, as bright and sunny a one as could be wished.

All the work on the farm was stopped and every one in the family was dressed in his best. Mari had a fresh white linen kerchief tied under her chin, and also a finely starched apron. Her plump little arms were bare. Her stomacher was worked with bright beads on scarlet cloth. She had embroidered it all herself and she could not help being proud of it.

But perhaps you do not know what a stomacher is. It is a piece of cloth worn as an ornament on the waist and over the stomach. Mari's mother wore one also, but hers was sparkling with silver trimmings that had belonged to her great-grandmother.

How fine the father looked in his short coat and knee-breeches. He wore a bright red vest, over which hung his long light beard. [39]

But Mari's mother was the prettiest sight of all. Her muslin apron was trimmed with three rows of lovely open-work. Her scarlet waist was finished with bands of black velvet, with the beautiful stomacher in front of that. She had loose white linen sleeves, and such an odd cap. You never saw one like it, I am sure. It was made of crimped white muslin with a wide rim over the forehead, with a narrow band beneath that hid her hair. The corners fell down behind nearly to the waist.

Her silver ornaments must also be mentioned. They were really beautiful, and were hundreds of years old.

Ole looked fine, too, in a suit much like his father's and a little round cap, fitting tightly to his head. You would scarcely have known the family in their holiday dress.

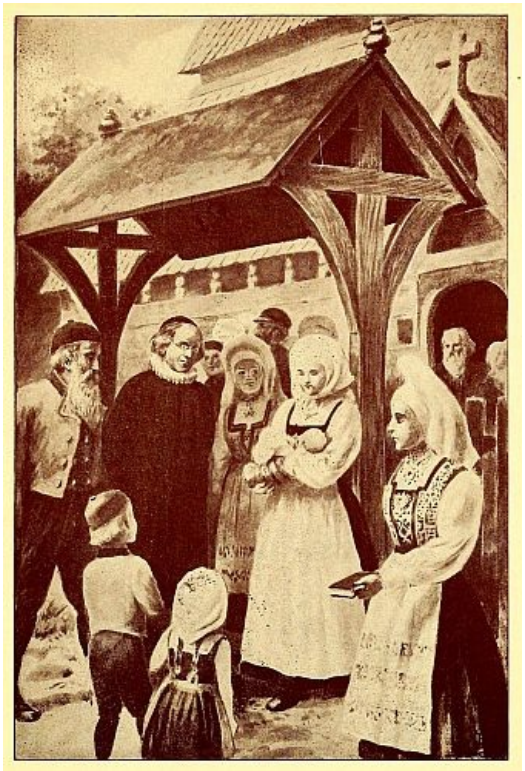
They stepped off gaily, and soon reached the village. They arrived at the church just as the christening party reached it. [40]

"Do look at the dear baby, Ole," said Mari. "Isn't he lovely?"

The nurse was carrying him. He was so swaddled in his fine clothes that you would have almost thought he was an Indian pappoose. Only his face could be seen. The swaddling bands were of many colours,—red, green, and white, and there was a large white satin bow, of course. Every Norse baby wears such a bow to its christening.

And now the flock of people followed the minister into the little church. They passed up to the front and gathered around the altar.

"The baby behaves finely, doesn't he?" whispered Ole. "I am real proud of him because he is to have the same name as myself. Did you hear the minister say *Ole*, Mari?"



THE CHRISTENING.

"Yes, but look now. The baby's father and mother and his godparents are all going up behind the altar. What is that for?" [41]

"They are laying presents there for the minister. Of course they want to thank him for the christening. I declare, Mari, our baby was christened only last year, and you have forgotten what people do at such times."

"I was so excited then, Ole, I don't believe I noticed it. But come, everybody is going out of the church. Now we shall have the best time, for you know we are invited to the party."

The building was soon empty, and all the people started gaily for the home of the new baby. The minister went with them, of course. He looked very dignified in his long black gown, with a great white ruff about his neck. He loved his people, and took part in all their merry-makings. Ole and Mari were very fond of him. They ran to his side as soon as they got outdoors. Ole took one hand and Mari the other. [42]

It was only a few steps to the little home of the fisherman. Everything had been made ready for

the company. The table was spread with the good things that the Norse people love best.

In the centre of the table stood the old silver bowl from which every one must drink to the health of the new baby. This bowl was the most precious thing in the simple home. It had not been used before since the parents of the baby came here and held their wedding-feast.

There is much eating, and frequent handshaking. It seemed as though the company could only show how loving they felt toward one another by the hearty shakes which they gave so often.

When every one had eaten so much that he could hold no more with comfort, the table was [43] quickly cleared, and a young man brought out a fiddle from the corner of the room.

"Now for some of our Norse songs," cried one of the company.

"Good, good," cried all, and soon the room was filled with lively music. The new baby behaved very well, and went to sleep in the midst of it.

But Mari's baby brother, who had come to the party with the rest of the family, was having too good a time to shut his eyes for a moment. It was not until the dancing began that his little head commenced to nod and his eyes could keep open no longer.

The older folk and children sat against the wall and talked together while the younger people waltzed around the room.

"Gustav, we want to see you and Frigga in the Spring Dance," said one of the party after a while.

"O yes, Gustav, you can both do it so well," cried another. "We must see it before we go home." [44]

Gustav stepped out into the middle of the room and was followed by the young girl whom he was soon to marry. Her cheeks grew rosy as every one looked at her. She was a pretty girl, and her long, fair braids reached way below her waist.

And now the fiddler started up again with a lively tune. Who could keep still now? Surely Gustav could not. He took hold of one of Frigga's hands, and away they spun around the room. But it was not a simple waltz such as you have seen. The young girl held her other hand above her head and showed her grace as she kept moving around Gustav; she kept perfect time and step as she did so.

Other odd dances followed the Spring Dance. Ole's and Mari's eyes were wide open with delight as they watched their older friends. Whenever one of the dances came to an end, there [45] was a general shaking of hands in which the children joined with a right good will.

The time to go home came all too soon. But as it was near the middle of summer, it was not dark even now at ten o'clock in the evening.

"Gud nag, gud nag," cried every one, after they had drunk again to the health of the baby and his proud parents, and the hands of all had been heartily shaken once more.

CHAPTER IV. [46]

THE LOST PIN

"Mari, Ole, come here to me at once," called their mother.

It was the morning after the christening. The two children were sitting with their pet magpie under a tree near the house.

"What can be the matter, mother speaks so quickly?" whispered Ole, as he and his sister hurried to obey.

"Have you seen the silver brooch I wore at my throat yesterday?" said their mother, as soon as they came into the house.

The good woman seemed nervous. Her words came quickly, which was not a common thing, for she was a slow speaker, like other Norse people.

"Why, no, mother, of course not," said Mari. "Didn't you put it away in the box where you [47] always keep it?"

"Certainly, my child, but I did not lock the box as usual. I found it open just now. Can it be possible that a thief has been here? It does not seem probable. Besides, my other ornaments are there safe. A thief would have taken all."

"I shouldn't wonder if I could guess who took the brooch, mother," said Ole. "It's the magpie. You know you said magpies like all kinds of shining objects."

"You handsome little mischief, have you done it?" said the boy, as he looked at his pet.

The magpie had kept his seat on Ole's shoulder when the children came into the house. He looked from him to the boy's mother with bright eyes, as much as to say, "I could tell all about it, if I wished."

"It seems as though the bird understands what we are talking about, but of course he doesn't. [48]
Still, I believe he has done something with your brooch, mother," said Mari.

"It may be so, indeed, children. The box was possibly left open, although I am generally so careful. If that is so, Ole and Mari, you must find it. Unless you are able to do so, you cannot keep your pet any longer."

You may be sure the children were anxious to find the brooch now. All that day they searched in every nook and corner of the house and yard.

"You know, we let him fly around for a long time this morning," said Ole, when night came and still the brooch could not be found. "If it was carried up into some tree, we may never see it again."

Ole had crawled out upon the limbs of all the trees near the house, and his legs were pretty tired.

"You can't do any more to-night, children," said the farmer, when supper was over and the [49]
family were gathered on the porch to talk over the trouble. "Go to bed, and do not fret. In the morning, let the magpie out of the cage, and allow him to go where he pleases. Watch him, and perhaps you will find he has some hiding-place where he stores his treasures."

Those were wise words. The next morning the children did as their father had directed, and the magpie was set free. Five minutes afterward he flew out of the house, and away he went toward the barn.

Now it happened that a pole stretched out from under the low roof of this building. In winter-time a bundle of grain was fastened to this pole from time to time. It was placed there to give food to the hungry birds that came that way. They might starve during freezing weather, if kind people did not think of them.

A bunch of the old straw was still fastened to the pole. The magpie flew to it, and alighted. [50]

"The brooch may be stowed away in that straw," said Ole. "I'll get a ladder and see, anyway."

A moment after, the boy was shouting in delight.

"I have it, I have it, Mari. How glad mother will be. O, you naughty magpie. We will be careful that you don't get any more brooches of my great-grandmother's."

Delighted indeed was the mother when they came in with the lost brooch.

"You may go down to the shore, and spend the afternoon," she said. "You can have a fine time with your playmates in the village."

A half-hour later Ole and Mari were playing barefooted on the edge of the bay, or fiord, as, you remember, Mari calls it. But there was no beach of smooth sand here, for rocks and ledges [51]
covered the shore. There was only one little nook where it was easy for boats to land.

The village was built at the head of this narrow bay, as it reached far into the land. It was a long sail out to the open ocean. Mari had never yet seen it, although she had lived so near the water all her life.

It was a wonderful sight that the children looked upon this afternoon. Great cliffs rose high up from the water on each side of the bay. They were so straight and tall, they seemed to join it to the sky above.

A waterfall came rushing down from the top of one of these cliffs. It made a whirlpool in the spot where it fell into the bay. But everywhere else the water was very quiet. It was so still, that as you looked up to the steep mountains on each side, it would have made you almost fearful, it seemed so lonely and apart from the rest of the world.

"I climbed way up that cliff by the waterfall last spring," Ole told his sister, as the children sat [52]
down upon a rock to rest.

"Weren't you afraid?" she asked, as she looked at him proudly. Then she added, quickly, "Of course you weren't. I never knew you to be afraid of anything in your life. But why did you do it?"

"I was after down for mother's cloak. The eider-ducks build their nests in the crannies of the rocks. I found three of them that day, I remember. It seemed almost too bad to rob the nests, but still you know there is nothing so soft and warm as the down. And I shall be proud when mother has enough to line her cloak and finish it."

"Those ducks have a queer habit of plucking the softest feathers from their own breasts to line their nests. Don't you think so, Ole?"

"Yes, birds are a great deal nicer than we are apt to think. You know the mother-bird covers [53]
the eggs with this down before she flies away for food. She seems to understand that they must be kept warm, and the father-duck doesn't help her by bringing her food or taking her place

while she is away. She has all the care on her own shoulders, poor thing.

"If her nest is robbed of the down, she will pluck more feathers from her breast and line it again. If it happens the third time, she flies to her mate and takes enough from him to fill their place. But after that her patience is worn out, she goes away and seeks another place in which she can build a new nest undisturbed."

"She certainly is a wise little creature, for she wouldn't be warm enough if she robbed herself too much," said Mari. "Mother has been to the city of Bergen, and she says cloaks lined with eider-down are sold in the stores there, and that they are worth a great deal of money." [54]

"Of course, Mari. Some men make a business of robbing the nests of eider-ducks. It must be hard work, too. But see, there comes the postman. Let's go to meet him."

The children looked down the bay, and what do you think they saw?

At first it seemed as though a pine-tree standing up on the water were sailing straight toward them. But no! one could see as it came nearer that the tree was fastened into an odd little boat with a high curved bow. The tree must be taking the place of a sail, for the man inside was not rowing, yet the boat came steadily onward.

"Is it rough outside?" asked Ole, as the boat drew near.

"Yes, the wind was blowing so hard I did not dare to put up the sail. But right in here it is quiet and calm enough to suit any one."

When the postman had carried his letters up to the office, in the leading house in the village, [55] he came back to the shore and sat down for a few moments' talk with the children.

"This is a wonderful country of ours," he said, as he looked at the shadows of the great mountains in the water. "And we who live here belong to a noble and a mighty race. Never forget that, Mari, will you, my child?"

"O no, Olaf, I love to think of the grand old times when the Vikings sailed out of these bays and travelled all over the world. They were the ones who discovered America, weren't they? Although I have heard it said that the honour is given now to Columbus, the Italian."

"Hundreds of years before Columbus lived, Mari, our great seamen crossed the ocean. Many of our people went with them and settled in Iceland. But they did not forget their native land and [56] the wonderful stories that had been handed down for centuries from father to son.

"At last a wise man said, 'I will gather together these stories of the Norse people. I will write them down, and our children shall have them for ever.' In this way the 'Eddas' came to be written. They are dearer to us now than any other books except the Bible. Is it not so, children?"

"Yes, yes, Olaf," cried Mari and Ole together.

And Mari added, "We are so happy when father reads to us from the 'Eddas.' I hardly know what story I like best."

"I have sometimes heard strangers in the land speak about our boats," Olaf went on. "They call them old-fashioned and say they remind them of the ships the Vikings sailed in a thousand years ago, they have such high curved prows and are so broad. But what do we care if they do call [57] them old-fashioned? We like it, children, for the old ways were good ways."

"I wish I had lived in the time of the Vikings," said Ole. "I should like to have gone with them on their daring voyages. But why were they better sailors than any other people at that time, Olaf?"

"In the first place, they were strong and brave. They loved the sea and spent their lives upon it. They trained themselves from boyhood to bear cold and hardships. And, besides all these things, these deep bays were good places for sailors to learn their craft.

"But I have stayed here longer than I thought; I must go home. This was the last village where I had to deliver letters or I could not have stopped with you so long. I will try sailing back, but if I find the wind still strong when I get outside the fiord, I can easily take the sail down. Good-bye." [58]

The postman was soon far down the bay. He passed several fishermen in their boats just coming back from their day's catch. Ole and Mari waited till they came in.

"What luck, what luck?" cried the children.

"I have had such a good haul," said Gustav, who was the first to touch the shore, "that here is a fine large haddock to take home to your mother, Ole."

"Many thanks, Gustav, my mother will be much pleased," answered the boy, as he received the gift. Then the two children trudged homeward, clasping hands and singing one of the songs they had learned at school.

CHAPTER V. [59]

THE BIRTHDAY

"TEN years old, my daughter. Do you believe you have grown any taller since last night?" said Mari's mother, when she called her that morning.

"It seems so, anyway," answered the little girl, as she watched her mother making the birthday cake.

"Bring the citron and currants from the storeroom, Mari. I have sugar enough, I think. This must be a beautiful cake for my daughter. The frosting shall be thick. Here comes Ole now with the flowers."

Ole's arms were full. "Do you think I have enough to decorate your cake, Mari?" He laughed as he spoke.

"We can't use half of them, of course. Look at the quantity of fruit mother is using. There! see how yellow the dough looks since she put in the saffron. Won't it be lovely when it is done?" [60]

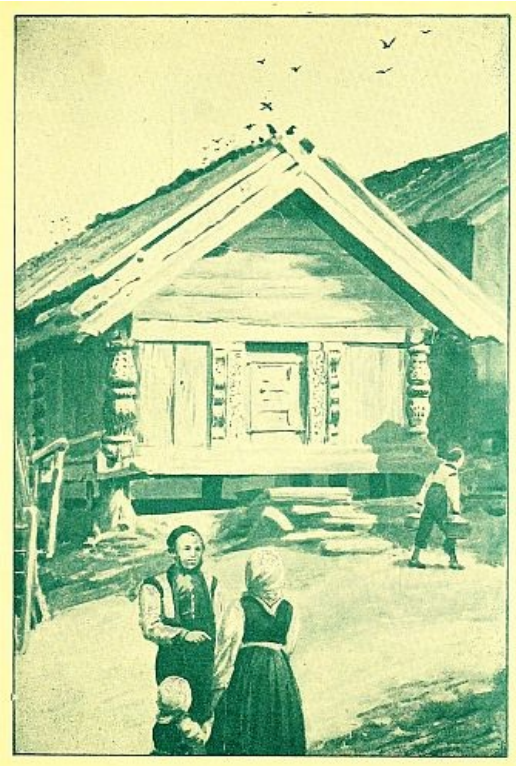
"Come, Ole, get to work on that tub you are making for me. And, Mari, take your knitting and go out on the porch. I wish to be quiet while I watch the baking of the cake. There will be fun enough for you this afternoon."

Mari's mother had promised her a coffee party in honour of her birthday. Soon after dinner the children began to arrive. They were dressed in their best and looked very happy, although the white kerchiefs tied around the rosy faces of the girls made them appear like little old women.

There was plenty of coffee to drink, for the children of the North are as fond of it as the older people. Then there was the magnificent birthday cake, rich in the fruits and sugar, and trimmed with the flowers Ole had gathered in the morning. Of course, there were piles of flat-bread on the table, besides other things of which the children were fond. [61]

Many games were played outdoors in the sunshine. Mulberry-bush was the favourite, and it was played over and over again.

"I shall never forget my tenth birthday," said Mari, that night, after her little friends had gone home. "I have had a lovely time, mother, and you were so good to let me have the party."



CARVED HOUSES AT THELEMARKEN.

"You can repay me by being more diligent in all your work the coming year, my child. Learn to be more careful in your knitting and spinning. Always be ready, with a cheerful face, to help me in the churning, and I shall think you are growing to be a noble woman."

Our little cousin certainly had many duties. Her hands were seldom idle during the long winter afternoons and evenings, for there were stockings to knit for Ole and herself, scarfs to crochet, wool to be spun and woven, besides many other things which Norse girls need to learn if they are to grow up to be good housekeepers. [62]

And Ole had much to do, also. In summer there was plenty of work in the garden, besides fishing and shooting the wild ducks. During the winter time he must make many useful things at his carpenter's bench. His father was his teacher in this kind of work. Why, he had made every piece of furniture in the house; and although it was not beautiful, it was well made and strong.

"I love to carve," Ole once said to his sister. "I wish it were the fashion to decorate our buildings as the people of Thelemarken do. I have seen pictures of their storehouses. They are just beautiful, Mari. The men carve with their knives all sorts of figures on the outside. The side posts of the porches are fairly covered with lovely patterns." [63]

"The people there don't dress as we do, either," answered Mari. "Even the farmers wear the same clothes at work as on the holidays. I should think it would be hard to keep clean their white jackets all trimmed with silver buttons. The women there sometimes make their aprons out of silk handkerchiefs. And they wear their silver belts and brooches every day. I should like to go there and see them. Just think, Ole, I've never been away from this place in my life!"

"Never mind, little sister. You and I will travel some day and go all over our country. We will even go to the North Cape and see the sun set at midnight and then rise a moment afterward. We can almost do that here on midsummer nights, but not quite. You know people from all over the world travel to the North Cape, Mari." [64]

"What else do they see there besides the midnight sunset and sunrise?"

"Our friend Ernst, over in the village, went there once. He belonged to the crew of a ship that carries people there every summer. He says it is a high mass of rocks, and it is hard to climb. When you reach the top, you can get a good view of the Arctic Ocean, but there is nothing to see but the dreary water; no land nor ship in sight. That is, of course, as you look toward the north. On one side of the cape there is a small glacier, but those can be seen in many other parts of the country. One doesn't need to go to the North Cape to look at a glacier."

"Our teacher told me, Ole, that a long time ago this whole country was covered with ice. Of course, there were no people then. But after a while the land became warmer and the ice went away. Here and there, the ice-rivers, or glaciers, were left among the mountains, and they have [65] stayed there ever since. I don't see why."

"Of course, it's terribly cold above us, Mari, up among the mountains. The snow falls and changes into ice. It slides slowly down into the valleys and begins to melt, but there is always plenty of ice above. People like to come to our country to see the glaciers as well as the other wonderful sights. I declare, I'm getting sleepy and I am going to bed. Good night, little sister."

CHAPTER VI. [66]

The Wedding

"THERE they are. They are just rounding the point," exclaimed Mari.

She was standing on the shore and looking anxiously down the bay. She was not alone, by any means, for every one of the village was there with her. Why were they all dressed so finely? Why were they all looking in one direction? And why was the church door standing open? It was not Sunday, and it was the time when every one was usually at work.

Gustav and Frigga, who lived farther up the coast, you remember, were to be married. There was no church in Frigga's village, so the wedding party must come here.

For what would a wedding be if it were not held in a church? Half of the beauty would be [67] missing.

Ah! here come the boats. The first one, of course, contains the fair bride and her lover. They sit on a raised seat, with the bridesmaid and best man near them.

The bride looks quite charming with the high silver crown on her fair head. It seems as though a queen and her royal party were drawing near. The boat is trimmed with flowers, and the rowers pull with a will.

Two other boats follow close behind, containing the dearest friends of the bride and groom. As they draw near, the people on the shore hasten to greet them with a rousing welcome.

And now the procession is formed and starts out toward the church. First comes the fiddler with his violin under his arm. He is followed by a man bearing a large silver tankard. The health of the newly married pair will be drunk from this many times before the festival is over. Next [68] comes the best man, with Gustav and Frigga close behind; after whom follow the fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers of the couple. Last, come the other relatives and friends. All are laughing and joking, and are bright with the pretty colours of their holiday clothes.

Now they enter the little church and pass down the aisles strewn with juniper-tips. The air is very sweet with the odour of the freshly cut sprigs. The minister is at the altar to meet them. He is dressed as usual in his long black gown with the great white ruff around his neck.

But the bride! How lovely she looks as she stands with bent head, with the silver crown resting on her fair hair. A heavy silver chain is around her neck, and she sparkles with rings, and brooches, and other ornaments without number. Her stomacher is covered with silver [69] embroidery. Her apron is of the finest muslin, and is also embroidered beautifully.

The little church was so full that Ole and Mari were crowded near the door with the other children. But they could see everything that was going on.

"Isn't she beautiful?" whispered Mari, to a little girl behind her. "I don't believe our queen in her own palace can look grander than she."

When the service was over, the wedding party left the church and turned toward the shore. Was the good time over now, do you think? By no means, for a whole week's merriment had only begun.

The bridal party seated themselves in the boat in which they had arrived. The other boats were quickly filled; the fiddler began to play a lively air; the rowers pulled with long, steady strokes, and as they moved out over the clear, sunlit waters, one of the party began to sing. Others joined [70] in the song until the air seemed filled with music.

Ole and Mari stood on the shore together with the others who had not gone with the young couple to their new home.

"Gustav has made a lovely new house for Frigga," Ole told his sister. "I sailed over there last week with Olaf, and it was just done. The last piece of furniture was also finished. I wish we were going there to-day; what fun everybody will have, feasting and dancing."

"Never mind, Ole, we shall be grown up before many years. And then we shall be invited to the wedding-parties," said Mari. "Let's go in swimming and have some fun by ourselves this afternoon."

Several other children followed the example of Ole and Mari. Soon there was such a splashing and diving that the echoes of the noise came sounding back from the mountainsides. Norse [71] children are great swimmers. When Mari was no more than five years old she had learned to feel as much at home in the water as the mermaids of whom her mother told in stories. She could stay below as long as Ole; she could dive, and tread water, and swim backwards. There was nothing to fear, for sharks were never seen near that shore, and the water was so clear one could see to the very bottom, no matter how deep it might be.

CHAPTER VII. [72]

LEGENDS

"I AM afraid I shall have to go to lumbering this winter," said Mari's father, as the family sat around the great open fireplace.

Henrik had been home from the mountain pasture for two weeks. It was growing cold, and Jack Frost had paid several visits to the farm already.

"What a shame it is that the crops turned out so badly," answered his wife. "In one more week of good weather, you could have saved everything."

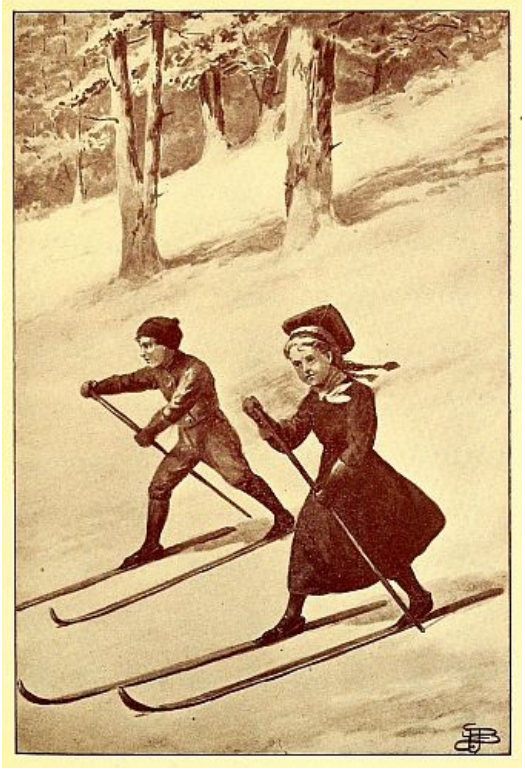
"Yes, that is true, wife, but we cannot help it. We lost nearly everything on account of the frost. If you are to live in comfort, I must earn money now in some other way. Two of the farm-hands can go with me to the camp in the woods, so I shall not be very lonely." [73]

The farmer looked around the cheerful room, and sighed. Mari went to his side, and put her arms around his neck.

"Dear father, we shall miss you so much," she said. "You will come home at Christmas, anyway, won't you?"

"O yes, the camp is not so far away but I shall try to be back for one night out of every two weeks. Henrik and Ole will take good care of you girls and your mother, I know. They will be able to visit me, too. They are both good runners on the skis (skees). Although the camp is miles away, it will not seem much to them, eh, Ole?"

"It will be grand sport," answered the boy, quickly. "We will run a race to see which one of us can get there first. Of course Henrik will win. But who cares? I don't."



The two boys had been busy all day making new [74] skis for themselves. Great sport the children would have all this winter sliding down the hillsides.

Coasting on sleds! yes, there was plenty of that, too, on the snowy slopes around Mari's home. But ski-lobing was better fun, by far. Mari had learned to slide on skis long ago. They were made from two strips of wood, six feet long, with pointed ends curved upward. When they were strapped on her stout shoes the little girl could slide over the snow at a wonderful rate, without sinking or falling.

No, there was no sport like ski-lobing. Mari had the sled Henrik made for her two years ago, and her two brothers sometimes dragged her on it down to the village. Sometimes all the children went coasting with their sleds. "But it isn't as good as ski-lobing," they would always say when they came home.

And it was no wonder; you would agree with them, [75] if you could once see them travel. It was almost like flying. They would stand together at the top of a slope.

"Ready!" Henrik would cry.

Then away! they would all start downwards. It seemed but a second before all were standing at the foot of the hill, out of breath and rosy as the reddest winter apples.

"Now for the top," cried the leader, after a moment's rest; and up they would go again.

It is easy to understand now why Ole and Henrik were not afraid of a long trip on skis over the snow-covered fields and hills. They were so skilful they would get to the camp in two hours at most.

After an afternoon's sport on the hillside, the children once more gathered in the big living-room.

"Tell us some of the good old stories we love so much," said Mari. "There is no one who tells them so well, dear father."

[76] It was the last evening he would be at home. The next morning he must start out for the cold, dreary camp in the woods. Every one was feeling sad, but all tried to hide it and seem gay and cheerful.

"What shall it be, a fairy-story, or a tale of the gods and goddesses in whom the Vikings believed?" he asked when the children had gathered around him, in front of the blazing logs in the fireplace.

"First let us hear that wonderful legend of the beginning of the world," answered Mari. "It is told in the Eddas, you know."

"Very well, then. Shut your eyes and try to think of a time when there was no earth, nor sun, nor stars, and the Great Father was All."

Mari opened her eyes after a moment and said, softly, "How lonely it must have been, papa."

[77] "A time came, however," her father went on, "when all was changed. For out of the thoughts of the All-Father, the Land of Winter was formed in the far north. It was wrapped in ice and cold and mist. Then, far away to the south, arose the Land of Heat and Fire, whose flames never died nor burned low.

"Now, between the land of darkness and cold, and the land of light and heat, there was a great abyss, into which the icy rivers from the north were ever flowing. Mist rose from these waters and rushed to meet the sparks from the fires which were ever burning in the south lands. And as they met, a wondrous giant came into life, the child of Heat and Cold."

"Who was there to care for him when he was little?" asked Mari.

[78] "He needed no one, because he was not like ourselves, my dear; still, he must have food. And so a wonderful cow appeared, to give him milk. As she licked the ice from the stones, a new being gradually took shape and arose. He was like ourselves, Mari, only larger, nobler, mightier. He was the father of all the gods, of whom you have read so many stories. I believe you are fondest of the god Odin, are you not, Ole?"

"Yes, father, and it is because so many brave and noble things are told of him. But please go on with the story. You haven't yet told us how this world was made."

"The gods made it out of the body of the giant, whom they were obliged to kill."

"They killed him because he grew wicked and evil, didn't he, papa?"

[79] "Yes, Mari, and that was a good reason, without doubt. The gods now used all their thought and power in making the world beautiful. The mountains that reach up so grandly toward the sky were their work, as well as the beautiful valleys, the rivers winding through the green meadows, the rushing cataracts, and the blue lakes. It is, indeed, a wonderful earth. Round it all the gods wrapped the great oceans which send their arms far up into our shores."

"But how were the stars made?" asked Mari.

"The gods first made the blue heaven which stretches above us, and dwarfs were put at each corner to keep it in place. Sparks arising from the realm of fire were caught and changed into stars, and they were set on high to give light.

"A giantess whose name was Night had a son called Day. The gods were kind to them and gave them beautiful chariots and swift horses with which to ride through the heavens. Look out of the window, children, and see how bright it is. That is because the mane of Night's horse is shedding light upon the earth as he travels onward.

[80] "When the sun and the moon, day and night, were established, the gods set to work to build a home for themselves. They looked about for the most beautiful spot, and decided upon a high plain on the summit of a lofty mountain. The glorious city was built, and the gods settled in their new home. It was the Golden Age of the world, for there was no sickness, nor death, nor sorrow, nor pain.

"In the very centre of the wondrous city the gods fashioned a golden hall for themselves, and in

it there was a shining throne for each one. They had many games and sports, in which they vied with each other in strength and skill. They had a smithy, where they shaped iron and gold and silver into powerful tools and weapons. It was here that the rainbow was made, which you see at times arching over the heavens.

"But the gods were not satisfied. They looked over the earth and saw no living creatures. They said among themselves:

"'We will make the dwarfs, who shall live in the earth and work the mines.' [81]

"But this was not all, for Odin, your favourite among the gods, said to his brothers:

"'Look yonder at those two trees, the ash and the elm, standing side by side. We will make man and woman from them. They shall people the earth and we will care for them as our children.'

"So it came to pass that our race began to live among the hills and valleys, and has been here ever since. But the gods have never deserted us, but are ever ready to help and protect us. At least, all this is what the legend teaches."

"Of course, there are no real gods, are there?" said Mari.

"The only gods are our beautiful souls, my daughter. They can never die nor do evil, any more than these gods in whom our old Vikings really believed. The giants are our earthly natures that [82] are constantly trying to make us forget our godlike souls. But we shall conquer them at last, just as the gods always succeeded in mastering the giants, no matter how strong or clever they were."

"Didn't it take a long time to do it, papa? The Golden Age didn't last after quarrelling began, did it?"

"No. The gods had their troubles and sorrows as well as men. But, as I said before, the gods always ended by being successful."

"Are you too tired to tell another story, father? This time I wish we could hear something about the fairies. Won't you tell us about Ashiepattle?"

Now Ashiepattle is one of the favourites of all Norse children, and many tales are told of his wonderful deeds.

"Which story shall it be?" asked the farmer.

"The one about his eating with the troll," cried Mari and Ole, together. [83]

Their father laughed. "You are never tired of that, although you are almost a man, Ole. Listen, then, and you shall hear how this brave boy ate with the giant.

"Once upon a time there was a man who had three sons. The older boys were idle and lazy and would do no work. Their father was too old and feeble to compel them. He had a fine wood-lot, and he wished them to go out and cut down the trees. Then he would be able to sell lumber and pay his bills; but for a long time the sons gave no heed to his request.

"At length, however, they began to listen and think the plan was a good one. The oldest son shouldered his axe and started for the forest. But he had no sooner begun his work upon a big tree, than a troll suddenly appeared at his side.

"'That is my tree,' said the troll. 'If you cut it down, I will kill you at once.' [84]

"The boy was terribly frightened. And it is scarcely to be wondered at, for the troll was an immense, fierce-looking creature. Dropping his axe, he started for home on the run, and did not stop to look around till he got there.

"'You coward,' cried his father when he heard his story. 'When I was a boy no troll was ever able to scare me away from my work.'

"'I will go,' said the second son. 'I shall not be afraid, you may believe.'

"He started out with a brave heart, and was soon at work in the forest. But his axe had hardly struck the first tree when the troll appeared before him.

"'Spare the tree, if you wish me to spare your life,' cried the giant.

"The boy did exactly as his brother had done before him. All his bravery disappeared the moment he looked upon the giant. Without stopping a moment he fled for home, and rushed into [85] the house breathless.

"'What a foolish, cowardly fellow,' cried his father. 'You are not much like me when I was young. No troll ever drove me away from my work.'

"'Let me try, father,' said little Ashiepattle. 'I am not afraid.'

"His two brothers looked at him in astonishment. '*You* try, when we have both failed! You, who never go out of the house, what an idea!' And they laughed in scorn.

"Nevertheless, Ashiepattle went to the forest. But first, he asked his mother for a good supply of food. She at once put on the pot and made him a cheese, for she had nothing ready. With this

in his bag, he started out merrily and was soon at work. The axe was sent straight into the heart of the tree, and the chips flew right and left. But just then a deep, gruff voice was heard close by.

"'Stop at once,' cried the troll, 'or you shall die.' [86]

"Now, do you suppose Ashiepattle followed his brothers' example, and that he fled from the troll? He never thought of such a thing. He did run, to be sure, but only for a short distance, to the spot where he had left his cheese. Coming back to the place where the troll stood, he squeezed his cheese with all his might.

"'Keep still, or I will squeeze you just as I am squeezing this cheese,' he shouted.

"It would have made you laugh to see that little fellow talking to the big giant in this way; but the troll was a coward, as all big blusterers are, and somehow Ashiepattle felt it. His quick mind told him that he was a human being, and wiser than all the trolls. What do you suppose the troll did, children? He cried, 'Spare me!' with a voice trembling with fear. 'If you will only spare me, I [87] will help you cut down the trees,' he added, in haste.

"That afternoon great work was done in the forest. Many great trees were laid low; for the troll had wonderful strength in his big arms, and he showed himself a fine helper.

"When night came the troll proposed that Ashiepattle should go home with him to supper.

"'It is nearer than your house,' he said.

"So Ashiepattle went with the troll to his home in the forest.

"Before the supper could be made ready, a fire must be made in the fireplace. The troll said he would do this if Ashiepattle would draw some water from the well.

"When the boy looked at the iron buckets he should have to fill, he knew that he could not even lift them; but he was too wise to say this.

"'I won't bother with those buckets,' he told the troll; 'I will bring the well itself. Then you will [88] be sure to have water enough.'

"'O, don't do that,' cried the troll, in fear, 'for I will have no well left. Let me get the water, while you make the fire.'

"This suited Ashiepattle, of course, for it was exactly what he wished. The water was brought, and a great kettleful of porridge was soon ready to eat, so the troll and the boy sat down together at the table.

"'I can eat more than you, although you are so much larger,' said Ashiepattle to his host.

"'Let us see you try,' said the troll, who felt sure he could beat the boy.

"What do you think Ashiepattle did? When the troll was not looking, he seized the bag in which he had kept the cheese, and, fastening it in front of him, he slipped most of the porridge he received into that, instead of his mouth. At last it was quite full. Ashiepattle then took his knife [89] and cut a hole in it, while the troll watched him in wonder. After awhile the giant exclaimed:

"'I really can't eat any more. I shall have to admit you have beaten me.'

"'Didn't you see what I did?' cried his visitor. 'If you cut a hole in your stomach as you saw me do, you can eat as long as you wish.'

"'But didn't it hurt terribly?' asked the troll.

"'No, indeed. Try it and see for yourself,' replied Ashiepattle, laughing inside all the while.

"The troll did as he was told, and you may guess what happened. He fell on the floor in agony and died in a few moments.

"And what did our brave little Ashiepattle do? He searched for the stores of gold and silver belonging to the troll, and soon succeeded in finding them. He started for home in great glee, for [90] now he could pay his father's debt and free the old man from trouble."

"Listen," cried Henrik, as his father finished the story. "There is a noise outside as though something were the matter. Do you suppose foxes have dared to come near and are disturbing the hens?"

"We will soon find out," cried the farmer, jumping to his feet. "Hand me my gun from the wall, good wife, and Henrik, take yours and follow me."

They crept out of the house with as little noise as possible, while Ole and Mari flattened their noses against the window-panes. But it was pitch-dark outside, and they could see nothing.

Bang, bang! went a gun.

"They found him, they found him," shouted Ole, jumping up and down. "I do hope he was hit."

A few minutes after, steps were heard coming back to the house. Ole rushed to the door and [91] opened it. There stood his father holding a large red fox by the nape of the neck. The eyes of the animal were glassy, for he was quite dead.

"He was creeping away over the snow when we saw him," said the farmer, "and he had one of my finest hens in his mouth. I don't believe this was his first visit, either, for you know, wife, we have lost several fowls lately. Henrik, you and Ole may skin this sly fellow and make a mat for your mother. But it is getting late, and I must start early in the morning, so to bed, one and all."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LUMBER CAMP

[92]

THE whole family were awake bright and early the next morning. Mari and Greta helped their mother in packing the birch-bark knapsack with the provisions their father needed to carry with him to the forest. There must be a good supply of dried meat and fish, sugar, butter, and flour. Last, but not least, the coffee was packed safely inside. What would the good man and his helpers do without this refreshing drink? When they returned to the hut after a day's chilling work, a bowl of hot coffee would fill them with new life.

[93] "Ole and I will come next week and bring you fresh supplies," said Henrik, as his father bade them good-bye and the three men started out on their snow-shoes over the crisp snow.

They were soon out of sight and the rest of the family returned to their work. But little Mari, who loved her father very tenderly, kept thinking of the hard, cold work before him. What kind of a home would he find when he got into the forest? There would be no shelter of any kind.

He and his men must go to work at once and saw some logs, with which they would build a rough hut. They would stuff the chinks with moss to keep out the great cold, or else they would freeze to death.

What furniture would they have? A large, flat stone would serve as a fireplace, while the bed would be made of poles placed side by side and covered with moss. That was all. They must sleep as close to the fire as possible, and even then they would suffer greatly during the long, freezing nights.

[94] "I am so sorry the crops failed," said Mari to her mother when she had thought of all these things. "I almost wish father had gone to work fishing this winter. I don't believe that would have been as hard work."

"The sea has its own dangers, my daughter," answered her mother. "Think of the fearful storms that rage along our coast and the sad deaths that have come to some of our friends. No, Mari, lumbering is hard work, but it is safer, I think, than fishing in the winter season."

Ole had come into the room while they were talking.

"It's cold and uncomfortable for father this winter, I know," he said, "but the greatest danger is in the spring-time, when he has to float the logs down the narrow streams to the sawmills."

"Why is that so dangerous?" asked Mari.

[95] "Because his work isn't over when he has once launched the logs into the water. He must watch them in their course and see that they get to their journey's end. Suppose one log gets across the stream and blocks the way? Then father must wade out into the water and pull that log aside with his boat-hook. He has to spend a good deal of his time in the water, and is likely to freeze his feet, or get a terrible cold, at any rate. Perhaps he has to jump on the logs as he pulls them apart. Suppose he slips and, falling through, is jammed to death between the logs!

"There, there, Mari, dear, don't cry. I shouldn't have said all this. Father will probably get along all right and come home safe in the spring."

Henrik put his strong arms around his little sister, and she had soon forgotten her fears and was laughing heartily over the fairy-story he was telling her.

[96] The next week after their father left home, Henrik and Ole started out on a visit to the camp, carrying with them a stock of provisions large enough to supply the men for several days longer.

"Take your gun, Henrik," said his mother, "for you can't tell what wild creatures you may meet on the way. It would be a fine surprise for your father if you should present him with a hare or a deer. Some fresh meat would make a rare treat for the men."

The boys skimmed over mile after mile of snowy ground, and nothing unusual happened. No houses were in sight all this time, and there were no tracks of living creatures. It was lonely, and dreary, and quiet.

They were nearing their journey's end, and were climbing the side of a hill, when Henrik suddenly stopped.

[97] "See, Ole," he whispered, "there are the tracks of some four-footed beast ahead of us. They are too heavy and big for hares'. It may be we are near some bear's den. Look out, for you know the old ones are sometimes very fierce. Let us follow the tracks for a while and see what we come to,

anyway."

"Shouldn't we be proud if we could find him and kill him?" answered Ole. "Roasted bear's meat makes a pretty good dinner."

The boys travelled very carefully now, for they had come into the thick woods. The tracks suddenly came to an end at a pile of logs lying at one side.

"Perhaps the bear has a snug home under those logs," said Henrik, in a low tone, as he seized his gun.

At that very moment the boys heard a sound, and at once a huge brown bear appeared. He moved sleepily, as though he had just been wakened, but as soon as he got sight of the boys he roused, and his face became fierce.

No time was to be lost, but Henrik was as cool as any old hunter. His hand did not tremble as [98] he took careful aim. Whizz! flew the bullet just as the bear prepared to come at them. It would have gone straight into his heart if he had not suddenly raised his paw, but it entered that instead.

"Run for your life, Ole," shouted his brother, as the huge and angry brute dashed toward them.

Even as he spoke, the bear knocked Ole down, and would have made short work of him if it had not been for Henrik's coolness. A second shot from his gun broke the animal's neck. He rose on his hind legs, and plunged blindly forward only to fall dead at Henrik's feet.

"It's a good thing we are trained to be soldiers at school," the brave boy said afterward, when he told the story to his father. "I really believe I should have lost my head, if it hadn't been for that training. But I said to myself: 'You never fail at home in hitting the mark, why should you [99] now?' It gave me courage, father."

His father smiled and answered, "You have done well, Henrik. I am proud of you."

This was said as the boys sat around the fire in the log hut that night. As soon as they were sure the bear was really dead, they had hurried on to the camp, which was only a short distance away. Then, as soon as they had told of their luck, the men went back with them to skin the bear and cut up and bring in the meat. They brought it to the camp on a rough sledge.

"He is a beauty," exclaimed one of the men, as he looked at the bear.

"And as big a one as I ever set eyes on," said the other. "I don't see how you ever dared to tackle him, Henrik. I should have hesitated for a moment, myself."

It was so late in the day when they all got back to the camp that father said:

"Boys, you had better stay all night, unless you think your mother will worry about you." [100]

"We told her we might not come home to-day," said Ole. "It is such a long tramp, she said we had better not try, for we would get too tired. So it is all right."

How good the bear steak looked when it was set on the rough supper-table. It was smoked a good deal,—that was certain; but no one spoke or even thought of that. And the table was not elegant, for there was no cloth to cover the rough pine boards. But the fresh cheese, the kind mother had sent, the hard brown bread baked by the men, with plenty of bear steak and a bowl of steaming coffee, made a supper "fit for a king," as the boys declared when they could eat no more.

CHAPTER IX. [101]

THE LAPPS

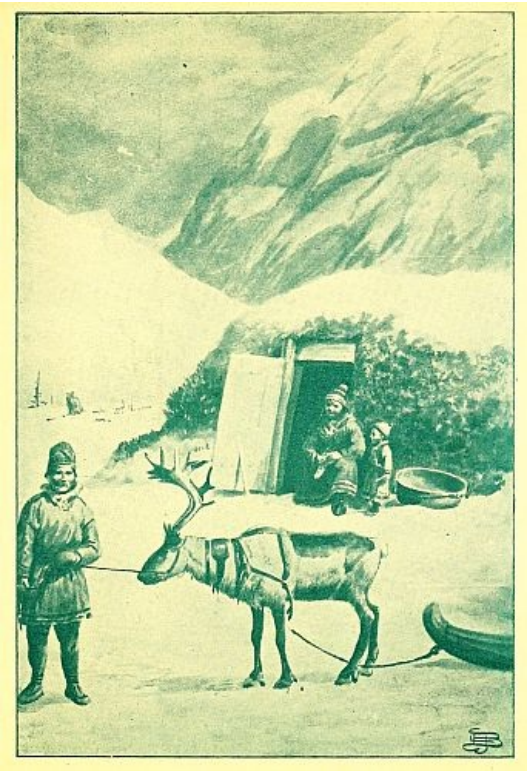
"Perhaps this seems a cold place to you, when you think of the warm farmhouse you left yesterday," said one of the workmen to Henrik. "You ought to go to the far north, and visit the Lapps. Ah! you will find plenty of cold weather there. But those queer people don't seem to notice it very much. I suppose that is because they have got used to it, since they never lived anywhere else."

"Do tell us about them," begged Ole. "I didn't know you had ever been to Lapland, Adolf."

"Yes, when I was a young man I was a great hunter, Ole. I have travelled all over this country and have seen many strange sights."

"I should like to be a hunter, too," said Henrik. "It must be great sport getting the wild [102] reindeer. But go on, Adolf, and tell us about the homes of the Lapps, and their herds of tame reindeer, as well as the queer ways of the people."

"They are a strange people, that is a fact," said Adolf. "They are queer-looking and queer in their ways. They are very small, few of them over five



"'IT IS ALWAYS IN THE SHAPE OF A MOUND.'"

feet tall, and they are quite stout. Their skin is of a dark yellow; the hair is jet-black, coarse and straight; their cheek-bones, high; and their eyes are blue and small. Their little noses turn up in a comical way, and their mouths are often open as though they were surprised at something."

"I suppose they dress in fur, don't they?" asked Ole.

"O yes, from head to foot. But they get all they need from the skins of their reindeer. They wear high boots bound tightly around their legs in winter-time, [103] so they are able to keep dry, even if they are out in the worst snow-storm."

"What are their houses made of?" asked Henrik. "I suppose lumber is scarce where they live."

"Sometimes the people make a frame-work of timber and cover it first with skins and then with turf. Sometimes the hut is built of stones, over which the turf is thickly laid. But it is always in the shape of a mound."

"Are there any windows in the hut?"

"No, Ole, and so, of course, the air inside is very close and unpleasant. There isn't even a chimney. A hole is left in the roof large enough to let out the smoke; that is all. When the short summer comes round, the Lapps prefer to live in deer-skin tents, and I can't say I blame them."

"Did you ever visit them in their homes, Adolf?" asked Henrik. [104]

"Yes, I stayed with a family of them over night. They seemed very friendly and tried to make my visit pleasant, but I didn't enjoy it very much, it was such a dirty, smoky place.

"In the middle of the room was a stone fireplace, over which hung the kettle when our supper was cooked. They all squatted on deer-skins around the fire. When I had been there a few minutes, I heard a noise overhead. I looked up and saw a dear little blue-eyed baby, swinging in a hammock and cooing to me. I reached up and took it down, and it snuggled in my arms as though it knew I was a friend."

"What did you have for supper?" asked the farmer.

"Everything came from the reindeer, of course. There was plenty of rich milk, besides a good-sized cheese and a meat stew. I have eaten worse meals since, many times."

"But how did you sleep?"

"The beds were easily made by stretching deer-skins on the floor. We covered ourselves with [105] more skins, and lay snug and warm till morning."

"Did you sleep more warmly than we do here?" The farmer laughed as he said it.

"I must say I did," replied Adolf, with an answering laugh.

"Although the Lapps' huts are far from beautiful, they are made so that wind and snow cannot blow in, at any rate." Adolf pointed to a ridge of snow that had sifted in through the wall, although they had stuffed the cracks as well as they could with dried moss.

"But, dear me! the Lapps wouldn't mind it very much if it did," he went on. "The men will lie down to sleep in an open field on rocks or snow, if they are not near their home. They are not afraid of the cold, and it seldom seems to hurt them, either.

"As I lay on the floor of the hut that night, I could see rows of smoked meat and fish hanging [106] against the sides of the walls. They have neither storehouses nor closets, so they are obliged to keep their provisions in the huts.

"The next morning I went out among the reindeer with the chief of the settlement. I believe there were more than a thousand reindeer in sight. It was milking-day and the men were having a lively time of it. They had to catch each animal and hold it still with a lasso while the milking was done."

"Why did you speak of milking-day, Adolf? Don't the Lapps milk the reindeer as often as we do our cows?"

"No, indeed. It is done only once a week, because the creatures are so wild. They are not gentle and tame, as you have probably supposed. They can be managed very well in driving, however. It is great sport to ride behind a team of reindeer, for one flies over the snow like the [107]

wind. Their masters sometimes drive them a hundred miles in a day."

"That is good, for I have heard that the Lapps don't stay in one place all their lives. They are a wandering people, aren't they?"

"Yes, Ole, but one reason for that is the need of finding good feeding-grounds for their deer. When one place becomes bare, they must seek another. Then, again, in the summer-time they like to go to the rivers and camp beside them for the sake of the salmon fishing. They are as fond as we of a good dish of salmon for dinner."

"What do the reindeer feed on?" asked Henrik.

"In winter they paw away the snow and find the lichen, which is a little gray plant very much like the moss you see growing on the mountainside about here. In summer they eat the young [108] and tender shoots on the bushes and low trees. They are very hardy creatures and among the most useful."

"Just think!" cried Ole. "The reindeer furnish the Lapps with everything they need,—their clothing, food, and shelter; and, as if that were not enough, they make good beasts of burden, and carry their masters wherever they wish to go."

"I shall tell Mari all about them when I get home," Ole went on. "I know one question my busy little sister will ask at once. She will say, 'What do the women and children do with themselves all the time?' How shall I answer that question, Adolf?"

"You may tell Mari there is plenty of work for them. They dress the reindeer skins, and make lovely rugs and warm slippers turned up at the toes and bound with red."

"Why, yes, Ole, your mother has a pair of slippers made by the Lapp women," interrupted his [109] father. "I bought them for her at Bergen, and she wears them on cold winter mornings."

"That is so, I remember them; but I never thought about the Lapps when I looked at them," answered Ole. "Is there anything else the women of Lapland make, Adolf?"

"Many things. They showed me knives and spoons they had shaped out of the horns of the reindeer. They were very pretty, and a great deal of time must have been spent on the carving. The men and boys do most of this last work. I really think the most wonderful thing I saw was the thread the women make of the reindeer sinews. It is fine and even, yet very strong. I wish I could have seen them making it."

Adolf yawned. "I am so sleepy I think it must be bedtime. There's a hard day's work before us [110] to-morrow."

After fresh wood had been laid on the fire, the party quickly settled themselves for the night's rest.

CHAPTER X. [111]

HOLIDAY FROLICS

"Father's coming, father's coming!" cried Mari as she stood looking down the snow-covered valley.

She rushed into the house and put on her skis, then skimmed across the fields with long strides.

"Everything is ready," she told her father as soon as she reached him. "And now we shall have a lovely Christmas because you have come."

Yes, everything was ready for the greatest day of the year. Even the birds were not forgotten, for a fresh sheaf of wheat had been fastened on the pole where the magpie had hidden the silver brooch. Ole had made a new collar for the dog, Kyle; Henrik had shot enough wild game for the [112] Christmas dinner; Mari and Greta had helped their mother in making some wonderful cakes.

There was nothing for the tired father to do except to sit in the chimney-corner and frolic with his children. It was a jolly time, for no one was expected to be quiet now, and all were allowed to do as they pleased.

Christmas comes but once a year, and the children realized it fully.

They played games and told stories; they danced and sang to the music of Henrik's violin. There was no spinning, or even crocheting, for the girls, while the boys did only what farm work was needed to keep the horses and cattle comfortable.

On Christmas Day a party of the villagers came to the farm to share in the games and feasting. Even the magpie, mischievous little fellow, seemed to enjoy the fun. He flew from one to the others of the party and, lighting on the shoulders of the young girls suddenly, would startle them [113] and make every one else laugh.

The baby, bless his heart, had the best time of all. He was not left to hang in his cradle for a single moment. Everybody wished to hold him, and he was passed from one to another of the company, where he enjoyed himself fingering the shining silver ornaments of his friends.

He had his new toys to amuse him, also, for Henrik and Ole had carved him a doll and a queer-looking horse out of wood.

Everybody was jolly and happy, and there was much drinking of coffee and shaking of hands. It was eleven o'clock when the tired but happy children climbed the steps of their beds to dream of the good time just over.

After this, it did not seem a very long time to Fastilevn, which is the next best holiday to Christmas. At least, that is what Mari thought, and if you lived with her you would surely think so too. [114]

Fastilevn comes in the early spring, on the first Monday of Lent, and on that day the Norse children are allowed to do exactly as they wish. Their parents may be strict and stern all the rest of the year, but at Fastilevn all rules are laid aside and the little ones may run wild if they like.

Cakes and buns! If you could see Mari, Greta, and their brothers eat sweet things on this day, you would wonder where they could possibly find room in their stomachs to stow them all away.

The feasting was not the best part of the fun, however. You would never guess what strange thing the children were allowed to do on that day. They might whip their mother! Of course, it was all in sport. The boys took long birch twigs and fastened many tissue-papers and coloured ribbons and tinsel upon them. The night before the great day, these twigs were set up in a corner of the living-room, all ready for the next day's fun. [115]

With the first light of morning those gay switches began to be plied, while the children followed their mother about, laughing gaily all the while.

How long did the fun last, do you suppose? Until the last shred of paper was gone from each switch.

And how do you suppose there ever came to be such an odd custom? The Norse parents believe firmly in the old maxim, "Spare the rod and spoil the child." Their children are likely to be often whipped for wrong-doing; Fastilevn is supposed to make up for twelve months of whippings, whether they were deserved or not.

Mari has seldom needed punishment, for she is a good, helpful little girl; but she enjoys Fastilevn very much, nevertheless.

The holiday came to an end, as all days must, whether they are good or bad. In the evening, when the bare switches had been thrown away, Mari went to her mother and put her arms around her neck, whispering: [116]

"Mamma, I wouldn't really hurt you for the world, even if you had to give me a thousand whippings. And I am going to try harder than ever to be your little helper."

The good woman's eyes filled with tears. "God bless you, little daughter," she said, as she bent down and kissed her.

THE END.

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