

Written for this Paper.

WAKEMAN'S WANDERINGS.

LONDON, Nov. 16, 1893.—Travelers in Norway who have written of Norway and its people have invariably spoken of two characteristic subjects, but in so brief a manner as always to pique and never to satisfy the reader's natural interest. These are what have been termed for a better name the "eagle-nest farms," and the "saeters" or mountain summer dairies.

So far as I know no traveler writing in our language has ever visited the former, and while a few have actually seen a saeter, its environment and the strange and lonely life at the same have never been adequately described.

In sailing along the Norwegian coast from Bergen to the Lofoden Islands, one who is closely observant of the mainland scenery, and particularly if a powerful field-glass is used, will be surprised at the number of utterly lonely and isolated habitations, seemingly perched against the gray crags at great altitudes midway between sea and sky. The larger number of these are at least 2,000 feet above the sea. To the eye it seems inconceivable that place for even their foundations could be secured. The picture is always the same. A line of black wall thousands of feet high; a dent of purple or a depression of misty blue where the speck of a home is built; and then black and somber crags behind and above; and above and beyond these the ghostly glacier-fields.

Because from a distance their eerie location, and the ragged, huddled structures, which often surround the main habitation, recall the nest of the eagle at the edge of beetling crags, they have come to be called "eagle-nest farms." Sometimes the eye will follow a black line of fissure descending from these habitations to a cavernous, rock-gorged gap beside the water. In this case a little boat-house may be seen upon the rocks; and somewhere near, a winding, puce-like line will trail upwards and into the darkening depths. This tells that the eagle-nest farmer is a fisherman, too, or has this means of communication with the outer world; but how he reaches his home-perch above; how he subsists in his desolate habitation; and what manner of folk these are who find contentment in lives of such endless solitude, danger and nature-grudged sustenance, where conjectures which haunted the until I found means to know.

Above the cliff walls of the larger and sterner fiords which penetrate the mainland from the coast, the eagle-nest farms are even more numerous than along the outer coast. This is particularly true of portions of the Hardanger, Sogne, and Thronhjelm fiords. In the lordly Næro Fiord, a branch of the Aurlands branch of the Sogne, and in a few instances in the Trondhjem, they are at such lofty altitudes that they appear like specks of snow or ice or like poising birds upon edges of the cliff. I had noticed a few located at prodigious heights between Styve and Holmenas, on the northern wall-crests of this fiord, which, all the way beyond Dyrsdal to the waterfall of the Ytre Baaken that tumbles 3,000 feet, is like some black and terrible waterway to the realms of Eblis; and on landing at the picturesque station of Bakke, where snow-capped mountains rise thousands of feet sheer above the village, leaving not a spare

foot between habitations and the towering walls of stone, I determined that even if the endeavor should end in a broken neck I would first have seen a Norwegian eagle-nest farm.

Four days passed at Bakke, four days of contemplation of scenery so sombre and awful that it continually suggested the infernal, before I found any one either competent or willing to act as a guide. Then good fortune came to me in the person of a strapping young fellow, a native of Grindedal, who had been lured away from his own mountain home to Australia, and tired of a roving life in the antipodes was returning as best he could, with a look of homesickness in his eyes almost savage in its intensity. The little he was to receive as boatman, guide and interpreter, would on our return pay his passage on the fiord steamers around through Aurlands Fiord to Fejos, and still leave him as many dollars as a peasant's hard labor for a whole year will give for saving in Norway. So we were a happy pair as we rowed in our small boat, hired at Bakke, to the northeast towards Styve and Dyrdal's ice-fields above the clouds.

I could not have found in all Norway a more fitting companion for this particular adventure. Not so very long ago the old method of stages by row-boat along many of these fiords was still in vogue. Travelers were then taken from one station to another in cumbersome sharp-pointed boats. The crew of each would return with other passengers to its home-station; and frequently these crews, from stress of travelers' haste, or when hired by the week or month, would make voyages the entire length of a fiord and its various lesser branches.

This often brought the real Vikings of our generation, that is, the dwellers on vicks, or creeks, along the fiords, into acquaintance with the peasant folk of another fiord; and the father of my guide, whose name was Peter Erickson, was the master of such a boat when Peter was a lad. Those who dwelt at Fejos had come to not only know the lowly of Bakke, but many had acquired the almost unconscious cunning of the Indians' wood-craft, or the coast sailors' unexplainable eighth sense of instinctive pre-consciousness of location in fair weather or foul. This made clearer to these boatmen than an ordinance chart every hidden chasm, sequestered waterfall or unseen home-nest upon the crags; while the very cragsman whom he had set out to visit had been, in the days before the steamer's whistle awoke the sleeping echoes of the sombre Næro Fiord, one of the crew of Peter's father's boat.

It was well we had provided food and blankets. The enthrallment of the savagely majestic scenery of the fiord, the loiterings at chasms, gorges and narrow valley openings, where odd and fantastic hamlets and half hanging clusters of farm buildings toppled at the edges of precipices, or seemed trembling from the furies of roaring torrents; and above all, the meetings and partings with quaint peasant groups to whom the shadowy fiord was the only highway ever known, and who always shook hands with us as though we were old and dear friends they had not seen for a decade and never expected to see again, shouting and waving "*Farels*" to us as long as we were in sight—brought us only to the real beginning of our cliff

journey when it was already fairly night down there at the bottom of the narrow walls of the fiord.

The place into which Peter dexterously guided our boat was the most forbidding and gruesome I ever had the fortune to enter. From the middle of the stream the opening was wholly unob-servable; but my guide informed me that hundreds more like it could be found among the tremendous walls of the Norwegian fiords. It was practically a vertical fissure 2,000 feet high, and perhaps as deep below the water's surface. One edge was almost as smooth and rounded as a hewn pillar for all its mighty height. The other correspondingly hollowed would have closed against it, had the same inconceivable nature-force which separated it set it again in place, with perfect lamination and without an inch of variance or waste space. The two edges of these formations reaching above the clouds were not fifteen feet apart at the entrance; but away in there were weird and awful depths; for while sight could not penetrate them the whispers, murmurs, plaintive songs and hoarser threnodies of falling waters told the wondrous story of erosions, displacements, boat-battles, and all the elemental struggles which the dead centuries had known.

Not fifty feet from the entrance our boat grated against a shelving rock. It was almost as level as a floor, and but a few inches above the water. Beyond this the rock had perhaps centuries before been eaten away or had given away, forming a covered hollow like half of a truncated cone. This spot, resembling a section of the pre-historic bee hive huts of Ireland, was to be our resting-place for the night—a place which had probably sheltered more human beings before me than the greatest and oldest hotel in Norway; and I thus learned of another interesting custom of Norwegian peasantry. As I have before pointed out, the fiords are their real highways. Journeys of hundreds of miles are still made by entire families or parties too poor, or too thrifty, to seek shelter and food at the fiord-side hamlets. They have for centuries used these nature-built stations. Their food, fuel, and sheepskins for covering are brought with them in their boats, and water, the sweetest, purest, coldest water in the world, is leaping or trickling from every rock.

Peter had no sooner built a cheery fire—for each halting party from immemorial custom contributes to the public supply, and there is always fuel at hand—than he explains, torch in hand, some of the curious characteristics of this quaintest hospice I had ever beheld. A genuine Norwegian inn without landlord, station without master, hotel without host. On the same rocky level, but just around a projection of the fissure-wall, was a tiny paddock with little walls, knee-high, built of loose stones. The source of certain unaccountable sounds I had already heard with dire forebodings were now made clear. Three tiny Norwegian cows were munching their green fodder, and two of the tiniest calves I had ever seen stood gravely beside them. These might belong to the cragsman we were about to visit, Peter told me. In any event, here the peasantry, who often changed the grazing places of their little herds, penned the animals at night; and the wise little things, conscious as their