

color of the snow-streaks and rock-grays interspersed—the sæter folk and their flocks, that pass the brief summer thousands of feet above their kin and kind. Then come the measureless fields, rock and ice fields of utter solitude and desolation; the whole crowned by countless ghostly peaks of ice, far above the clouds, an awful realm of frozen silence between the last vestige of natural-life and the eternal infinite.

I had penetrated to the mysterious "eagle-nest" farms above the clouds, and now I desired to see something of sæter life in the same lofty regions. Descending the lordly Romsdal, the most wonderful of all Norwegian valleys, partly by carriage and partly on foot, from Håaker to Vebungsnaes, I came upon the jolliest skydsut or post-boy I had found in all Norway, tow-headed, big-eyed, open-mouth Lars Peterson, or Peter Larsen, I am not sure which. Tramping alone had become insufferable. For a trifling consideration I purchased the companionship and willing services of Lars for a period of ten days. He had been taught English at school, had been four years a post-boy, coming in contact in that period with thousands of Englishmen and Americans; though not sixteen years of age he was as strong as an ox and nimble as a deer; and, while rippling and running over with a gurgling and boundless good nature, had a Mark Tapley sort of philosophy for all unpleasant emergencies and a ready back door out of every exasperating difficulty.

The Romsdal is a tremendous gorge or gully from 2000 to 4000 feet deep, and from fifty to sixty miles in length, cutting through some of the highest mountains and the greatest snow and ice fields of Norway. Along most of its length walls rise on either side precipitously upwards of 3000 feet; and over these pitch waterfalls not by the half dozen or dozen but by the score, most of them having a sheer fall for their entire descent. These feed and increase the volume of the Reuma river, along which winds the highway, that nearly the whole distance foams and tumbles and roars in noisy turbulence on its northwest course to the fiord of Molde and the sea. It should be called the somber Vale of Waterfalls. There is nothing to compare with it in any part of the explored globe.

We loitered at the Sletta Foss, where the Reuma itself tumbles into the valley, between Stueffallen and Ormein stations; at the triple Vermedals Foss, and passed days of pleasure and wonder between Ormein and Horgheim, where there are hundreds of these water marvels, varying from 500 to 3000 feet in fall, and where at one place I counted fifty-three in full view at one time; saw the filmy Døntefossen which, directly at the roadside, tumbles 3700 Norsk feet; and, when opposite the giant Romsdal horn or peak, near the picturesque station of Roedningen, led by merry Lars, we took a mountain path towards the upland Alnesdal district, still above which Lars promised to bring me to some of the wildest and loneliest sæters of Norway.

It is no easy task to climb to these sæters. Some are from twenty to sixty miles from the valley hamlets and farms. Those we sought were perhaps no more than twelve mile distant from the Romsdal highway, but certainly more than twice that distance by the circuitous and tortuous way. The path was

plain enough to Lars, as to all these Norwegian Alpine climbers, and to the ponies used to carry supplies to the sæters and bring back again their pack-loads of butter and cheese; but a stranger to these ravines and crags would have been irretrievably lost after a half day's wandering. As it was we were obliged to pass a night beside a lonely tarn shut in by black walls, with snow-clad peaks for the only outlook beyond.

Here Lars' genius for surmounting difficulties was illustrated. We had brought a little food. During the last two hours' ascent Lars had gathered here and there every dead branch of wood that came in sight, as well as bunches of juniper branches. These with his *tollkniv*, which every peasant carries, and some bits of strong cord which every post-boy possesses with which to mend broken harness, he had arranged in compact branches, bestowing them on his head, shoulders and body until he was completely hidden from sight. With the dry wood he built a cheery fire. The juniper branches provided our bed, which was laid in a snug angle of a projecting rock. A traveling rug and a stout carriage blanket formed our covering, and here beneath the glittering stars we "slept swate rings round our heads," as the Irish mother would say of her healthfully sleeping child.

The next morning our ascent was resumed through hollows, over ridges where ice and snow lay concealed beneath thin layers of black sediment and slime, around soundless tarns still and dark as the walls enclosing them, past corpses of stunted fire, and with never a sight of a living thing. The most amazing sight to me in these upper regions was the frequent patches in sunny hollows of strawberries. In some places the ground was literally red with them. I noticed, too, that in these pockety spots the heat, even at this high altitude, was almost stifling.

All the way Lars had been telling me in answer to my inquiries about sæters and sæter folk. Somethings thus learned were very interesting. In the first place, about the middle of June until the tenth of September, which brief period comprises the entire Norwegian summer, every cow in Norway, not needed for a scant home supply of milk, is sent to the mountain sæter. With the cows go all other cattle, all goats and sheep and occasionally these will be accompanied by swine which are quite as much a home among the crags as the sheep and goats. The sæters themselves comprise huts or cabins and rude dairies combined, where the sæter folk, who are invariably women and girls, live entirely alone in this desolate isolation, while caring for the herds, milking the cows, goats and even ewes, and converting the milk into butter and cheese for the winter store in the valley homes, often scores of miles away.

There is great commotion throughout Norway when the annual June exodus of the sæter-girls and their herds begins. Every farm is in utmost confusion. The entire household is busied getting together and packing up what will be necessary for use in the temporary mountain home. There are churns and milk pails, pots and moulds, frying-pans and odds and ends of cheap crockery and scant cutlery. For food there is a bit of sugar and coffee, much flour and

meal, crates and fladbrod, some bacon, perhaps some dried or pickled fish, and, more in weight than in all else, salt for the cattle. The girls themselves find room for odd bits of embroidery and a few nick-nacks, while a Bible and some worn volumes of old Norse tales are never forgotten. Besides these things, there are pounds of wool to be spun, or other pounds of yarn to be knit. A few blankets or sheepskin for bedding and but little more than the clothing upon their backs completes the meagre outfit.

When all is in readiness these strange processions—something like the annual outgoing of the flocks and their herders of the Apulian plains of Southern Italy—set forth from every gaard or farm in Norway. The belongings for the sæter are slung in baskets upon the backs of sure-footed ponies, or old horses that have known the same journey for decades. The farmer marches in advance blowing unearthly blasts from the *lur*, a not over-musical horn made from birch bark. Then come the cattle. No need to drive these. Like the Gipsies who cannot be kept from the road and the tent at the first bursting of spring time buds, they have tired of their reindeer-moss fodder of the winter, have scented the juice blades that are springing to life in the tiny far vales above them, and, with genuine manifestations of joy, crowd close upon the farmer and his blaring *lur*. Then follow the sæter girls, picturesque in their bright bodices, white caps and short skirts, but each bearing upon her shoulders a yoke, from which depend baskets, kettles and all manner of paraphernalia, almost equaling in bulk and weight the packs upon the ponies' backs.

Towards evening of the second day we came to the sæter of *Kron*. From a distance nothing could be distinguished but a low, wide hut at the side of a gentle ravine, here and there between the rocks spotted with bits of verdure. The horizon line was close and serrated with masses of lichen stone, here and there intersected by other gullies and ravines. Through these, Lars said, the herds wandered long distances in their daily grazing jaunts. No human beings were at first in sight about the sæter. Shortly a flaxen haired maiden, huge of girth and limb, stood at the hut door, and, shading her eyes with her great bare arm and not her hand, looked long and earnestly at us. Lars gurgled at this, and made wonderful gestures in return. Suddenly the girl—Tillie, Lars called her—rushed at us in a sort of bounding gallop, and seizing my post-boy guide hugged him ecstatically, wrestling with him, turning him round and about, and again hugging him, while tears of joy flowed down her honest face, a perfect torrent of questions and interjections meantime being poured upon him.

The rascal Lars, who had previously kept me in ignorance of the fact, then told me that the sæter girl, Tillie, was his only sister. A cousin, Christine, as little as Tillie was big, was her companion; for two women were required at the *Kron* sæter, there being altogether thirty cattle, three-fourths of which were milch cows, and as many more sheep and goats to care for, and so in a few moments no stranger was there, but all were best of friends. So glorious a treat to these lonely folk is the arrival of friends or kin from the