

EVERLASTING HOUSES.

HOMES IN NORWAY THAT HAVE EXISTED FOR AGES.

The quaint "Stavekirker" of Central Norway and their weird and picturesque surroundings—Borgund and Urdalmen and their Village-Like Homes.

LONDON, Dec. 7.—Some of the architectural features of Norway are exceedingly distinctive and curious, when it is remembered that, contrasted with the age of civilization in southern Europe, the Norse are comparatively new comers in this Arctic land. There are what might be termed three zones of buildings and edifices, each giving an almost universally different example of structural style and material. In the remote and desolate north all ancient structures are of stone. In southern Norway oak and beech have been utilized. In the central districts everything has been, and is still built of pine.

If one has grown to believe that oak represents all that is enduring and almost everlasting among the nobler woods serviceable to man, his ideas must be modified, when he has come to know the ancient pine-built structures of central Norway.

In visiting an "agle-nest" farm above the clouds beside the gloomy Nero Fiord I noticed that the oldest portion of the farmer's home—a long, rambling structure which seemed to have been built upon it a new annex for each generation or century—was by far the stoutest, sturdiest and best. I questioned the farmer as to its age. The family legendary memories and finally the family records agreed that it must have been built some time in the sixteenth century, or perhaps three hundred and fifty years ago. In the Telemarken district are many quaint old wooden mills which I found to be from 150 to 250 years old. In a bonder's home, I visited in the Trondhjem country, the low wide living-room, around which had been added other huger modern apartments and two-storey high halls, was over 400 years old, and as perfect from decay in any of its timbers as the day it was built; and when among the seters of Romsdal and Gudbrandsdal heights, I even found seter huts, the habitation of the seter-girls who tend the mountain herds in summer, which had been built from 150 to 250 years ago.

I soon began to notice that if the oldest portion of all these structures was not the best, it was still, considering its age, incomparably the best preserved; and another curious fact, that such portions were invariably of different construction, became apparent. The pine timbers in these structural portions of greatest antiquity were invariably placed on end in the formation of walls, and never laid together horizontally. This ancient method of building, I finally learned, is what the Norse call "reisvark," that is, raised work, or "stood-up work," and in this peculiar method of building lies the secret of the astounding antiquity of the famous wooden churches of Norway. Every portion is constructed from Norwegian pine, so enduring beyond any historically known oak that it has withstood the furies of Norwegian storms, the rigors of almost Arctic winters and again the searching heat of almost tropical summers, through periods ranging from five to eight hundred years.

The most prominent object in all these huddled structures is always the farm "storhaus," which rises story above story, each upper story projecting beyond the one beneath it, like a huge pagoda turned bottomside upward and stood upon its roof. Continuous hanging balconies often extend entirely around each story. Curious outside stairs ascend to each. The quaintest of carving of demons' heads and serpents often ornament every available portion of outer space; and fantastic carved wooden horns project from the corners of the eaves, or seem ready to blare from the peaks of the roof. In out-of-the-way places water-mills of equally curious and almost barbaric design will be found. These structures are all very ancient; but the flattened arches of the Moors, the peculiar natural and reversed forms of the Chinese pagoda, and that profusion of grotesque carvings characteristic, in wood and stone, in all of the most ancient hamlets of the Mediterranean countries, reappear in this stern northern land with surprising frequency and certainty of recognition.

The ancient and tiny pine churches of Norway are regarded by travellers as among the most interesting curiosities of the country. The best examples are those of Borgund, in Laerdal, the Hitterdal church, that of Lom, near Andvord, Urnes, beside the Lyster Fiord, and that of Eidsborg in the Telemarken district. All these churches are called in Norway, "Stavekirker," or stave-churches, because all were originally constructed by the "reisvark," or perpendicular method of joining the hewn pine timbers in their walls. The same treatment extended to porches and to all portions of the superstructures. The "stavekirker" of Borgund, Hitterdal Lom and Urnes are the more noted. All are still used as houses of worship, save the Borgund church, which is now a national curiosity, protected from desecration and decay by the Antiquarian Society, or Christians.

Of these "stavekirker," the Borgund church is the tiniest, most primitive and ancient; the Hitterdal church the most

unique and symmetric, if not indeed beautiful; and the church of Urnes most interesting from its proximity to prehistoric surroundings. Borgund, in the heart of a deep valley set roundabout with snow-capped mountains, suggests a toy church dropped there in the vagrant play of some infant god of Norse mythology. It has almost the true pagoda form; diminishing square, and steep-slanted roofs, rising above each other; the third extremely protruding and prominent. This is in turn surmounted by a distinct structure with a disproportionately large roof, from which rises a central pinnacle, very like the minaret of a mosque, the peaked gables of the highest two stories being provided with most distinctly Oriental outwardly curving, horn-shaped ornamentalations. Its entire outward appearance is barbaric and grotesque, and but for its quaint half-Gothic, half-Norman porches, strikingly like the sunny south porches of the very ancient parish churches of England, would suggest that its dark interior was fitting housing only for some gigantic fire-belching Hindoo god. Its inner dimensions are ridiculously small. The nave is but twenty-three feet long, and about twenty wide; the chancel is only sixteen feet long and eleven in width; but is one mass of carvings—strange old crosses, horrible delineations of the passions, grotesque dragon heads, and loathsome intertwined serpents, interspersed with Runic inscriptions; as though in the stern olden days, none might near the sacred presences without visible tokens of those earthly powers which delight in conjuring an ever-present hell.

The Hitterdal church is more symmetric than that of Borgund. Its dimensions are somewhat greater; and its six steep shingled roofs are carried to a far greater height. Three curious towers rise at equal gradients. The lowest above the apse, and the second above the chancel are circular in form, have cone-shaped peaks, like neatly thatched English hay-stacks, and the third, above where the nave is separated from the chancel by the diminutive transept, is sharply peaked from above a square tower. The three towers sustain high carved wooden crosses. An interesting peculiarity of its interior is that the central tower is supported by wooden columns of tremendous height, each one of which is a single tree of Norway pine, stripped of its bark, and whose dimensions have never been equalled in any trees since found in Norwegian forests. Among other curiosities of the Hitterdal church is a chair of remarkably solidly, standing by the altar. Its carvings are amazing in their character and profusion; and it is pretty well settled by antiquarians that it was made in the year 1000. This leaves it among the oldest, if not the oldest of wooden chairs in existence. Two facts should be kept in mind regarding these ancient "stavekirker," which certainly add greatly to their antique interest. No other material but pine has been used in their construction or restoration; and every one was originally built after the true church form. Each one possesses a nave, a chancel and side aisles, usually transepts giving the outlines of the Cross, and they all stand east and west with the altar, and apse at the head or east end of the cross.

On the east bank of the Lyster Fiord, opposite Solvorn, is perched the lonely hamlet of Urnes. But a tiny patch of tillable land surrounds it, and then come the mountains which pierce the clouds above. Jutting out into the gloomy fiord is a little cone-like promontory. Upon the peak of this stands the lonely "stavekirke" of Urnes. Antiquarians tell us that here once stood a temple to Thor. Scattered all about are huge mounds, called "Kempshouge," where mighty Vikings and pre-historic heroes lie buried. One feels at weird old Urnes as though he has come to the very inner temple of Norse antiquity and mythology. The church itself intensifies this weirdly fascinating feeling. To my mind its lonely situation and sombre interior pique the fancy to a more intense and searching grasp upon the mighty past of Norseland than any other spot or scene in Norway. The pine beams of the interior are tremendous in size and black with age. The carvings are even more fanciful and grotesque than at Borgund or Hitterdal. Behind the altar are rude pictures of the twelve apostles, 400 years old. No one knows how old is that most curious candelabrum, ever seen, to be found here, a rudely wrought tiny iron ship; the chalice is 350 years old; beside the altar hang the priests' vestments dated 1681; but all these things are comparatively modern embellishments. A curiosity of earlier date is a huge beam across the chancel to which are yet attached some rotting pulleys. This was the ancient "gale stok," or pillory, from which in those dear old times many long to have returned naughty children and offending parents were strung up in sight of the congregation which had gathered for consolation, forgiveness and prayer.

All lands passing out of the hands of original family ownership do not again become udal-lands until they have been in possession of a new proprietor for a period of twenty years; and the subdivision of these old Norwegian estates is largely prevented by one heir purchasing the inherited rights of the others, when their purchase of reclaimed lands, and emigration do the rest.

Like the Cumberland "statesmen's" stone-built homes, which seem to have added a new clump of rock and wall for each generation or century, the Norwegian bonder's guard or farm-house is an old jumble of structures, like a tiny huddled hamlet in itself. Whether in one continuous series of attached structures, or comprising many separate buildings, they always seem to have been gradually brought together with a view to forming an irregular sort of court, protected from the terrible winter storms. First there is the farm-house itself, the oldest still the widest, largest and most commodious of all, with its invariably quaint, carved porch, its huge chimneys, and its roof of big scale-like shingles, or still of turf in which there are often seen growing vagrant mountain flowers. Then there are the bake-house, also used on account of the heat which can be secured and for its privacy, the family bath-house, the dairy, always an important structure and a veritable feast, in butter, cheese and milk, for city eyes; and most important of all the

"storhaus." The latter is not only literally a house for stores and supplies of food, such as sugar, salt, candles, flour, dried and pickled fish, bacon, pork, and dried meat hanging from dark beams in startling variety and profusion, but it is the granary as well; and here are found in huge bins, heaps of the rye, barley and oats, the quickening sun of these northern latitudes matures in such generous measure and fine hard grain.

Besides these there are long, low sheds; a huge building similar to an American or English barn, in which every spear of precious hay, tender birch, twigs, and great quantities of reindeer moss are treasured against the long winter's needs for the herds; and often three or four comfortable, stout-walled cottages in which "housemen" or cottagers, each having the use of a portion of land, rent free for a certain number of days, labor upon the estate, live in more than ordinary comfort and content. However old or weather-beaten these farmsteads may be, they give to all this stern north land that tangible, palpable warmth of color which subdues and softens all material sterility and desolation, wherever it is enduringly built that blessed and thrice blessed earthly type of heaven, the home.

EDGAR L. WAKEMAN.

A TERRIBLE COMBAT.

The Battle For Life Between a Jungle Bear and a Colossal Serpent.

The following story of a great land serpent would make a good companion story—in his hands—to Rudyard Kipling's sea serpent tale; but there is this material difference—that this land serpent story has the advantage of being true. In those great primeval jungles known as the Nullamulais some Chenchus were engaged in setting their nets for game when their attention was attracted by the most hideous noises—fierce roars of rage and pain and a prolonged hissing, like the escape of steam from an engine. They hastened to the spot and beheld the progress of a Homeric conflict.

A huge jungle bear was fighting for its life with a colossal serpent. The serpent wound its enormous folds around the bear; the bear dashed itself from side to side and rolled around on the ground in frenzied endeavour to get free, roaring angrily the while and snapping its jaws like castanets at the serpent's folds, which, however, it could not reach, owing to the way they were constricted around the bear's quivering body. In this way the belligerents swayed to the summit of a hill, down which the bear cast itself with a velocity that evidently disconcerted the enveloping serpent, for it unwound a couple of folds and threw its tail around a tree evidently with the intention of anchoring the bear to the tree, and preventing the unpleasant convulsions that would be engendered by tumbling down hill. This rescued the serpent's undoing, in more ways than one. The rigid line of tail stretched out from the tree to the bear's body gave the bear a chance of seizing hold of its assailant, which up to this time had not been afforded. It was prompt to avail itself of the opportunity, and turning with a tremendous effort, fastened its powerful jaws into the snake's quivering flesh. The hissing was now appalling, as the writhing serpent rapidly uncoiled its huge body and struck savagely at the clinched jaws of the bear to make it release the mangled mass of flesh between. In response, the bear roared furiously, clashing from side to side, and worrying the mouthful of serpent in its jaws in paroxysms of anguished rage. Once more the serpent constricted, the bear howled and gasped and both rolled struggling out of view into the high grass of the forest.

Their track was now marked with pools of blood, and when they were again seen they had parted. The snake evidently badly mangled, was coiled in an attitude of defence, with his head erect, and hissing apprehensively. It had evidently had enough, and only wished to be left in peace. Not so the bear. Though nearly crushed to death, with its tongue lolling out from its gasping foam-flecked and bloody jaws, the aroused brute, with infinite ferocity, declined to retire from the combat. After a moment's pause it rushed upon the serpent. Evidently the latter was spent from loss of blood, for the bear immediately got it by the head, and dragged it about with roars of triumph. The whole of the undergrowth around was beat down flat by the convulsive strokes of the great serpent's tail as the bear crushed its head to pieces, and it ultimately lay as an inert and lifeless mass beneath the ferocious assaults of its vindictive enemy. The Chenchus believe the encounter was accidental. It occurred on a game track in the forest, and they are of opinion that the serpent was sunning itself on the path when the bear came along, and, as neither would yield the path to the other, the fight resulted.—[Madras Mail.]

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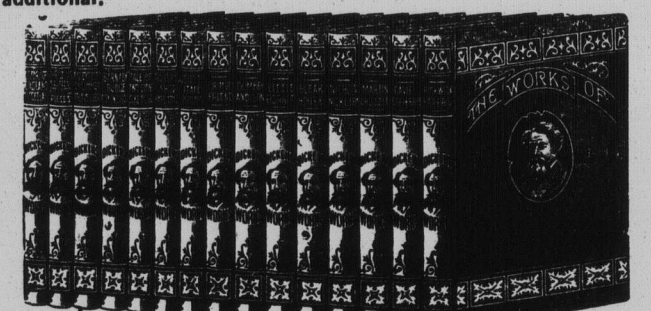
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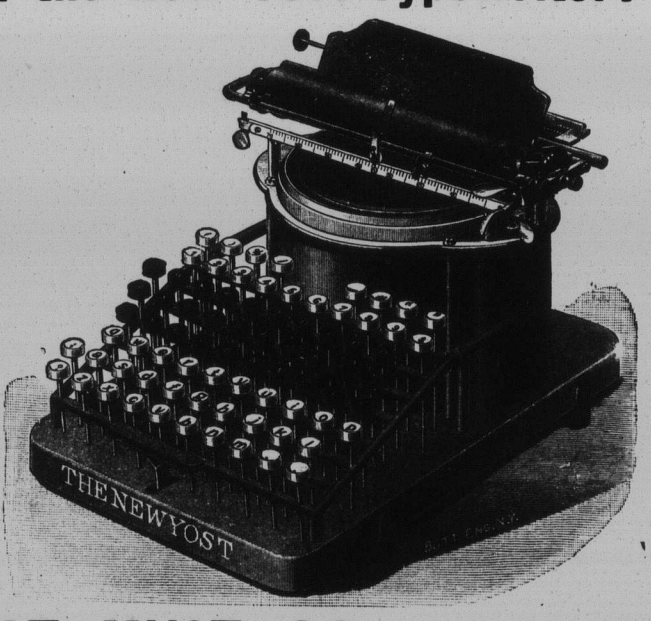
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