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***THE NORWEGIAN  
FJORDS***

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# **The Norwegian Fjords**

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# THE NORWEGIAN FJORDS

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## CHAPTER I

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### THE HARDANGER FJORD

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To approach the Norwegian coast at sunrise is an exceedingly enjoyable experience. Myriads of rock-islands in the sea and cloud-islands in the sky, their perspective terminating on the distant horizon in a peaked range of inland mountains, themselves like a cloud floating in golden vapour of dawn.

As the rising sun burns its path upwards, the sparkling sea reflects the glory of the sky in countless hues, and the magic of morning is felt in the air, cool and clear as crystal, as the steamer slows to await the pilot and the sea-birds wheel around.

Threading this intricate maze of islands, indications of human habitation soon become evident perched on grassy headlands or nestling in rocky creeks, and soon we are at the busy wharf of the first port of call, Stavanger, a bustling and clean little town, whose eleventh-century cathedral

stands in dignified contrast to the brightly-painted wooden buildings at its feet.

## Bergen

The navigation of the coast here is exceedingly intricate—rocky islands and skerries innumerable, and narrow winding channels; lighthouses, which are seen at every turn, and on both sides of the steamer's course, indicate the dangers and test the skill of the pilot and captain as the steamer proceeds in a north-westerly direction to Bergen, the metropolis of Western Norway.

Founded by King Olaf Kyrre in 1070, Bergen has witnessed most of the stirring events of the nation's life.

The population of the town is now 72,000. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Hanseatic League, which then monopolized the commerce of Northern Europe, held absolute sway here in Bergen, and the quaint Tydskebyggen (German quay) was their trading quarters. Near by the fortified tower of Rosenkranz was built to hold the Hanseatic quarter in check. It adjoins Haakonshal, the ancient palace of King Haakon Haakonson, who died in 1263.

This is the most ancient part of the town, although it is at present undergoing a change. Tydskebyggen is being modernized; its old-world character is fast disappearing.

Close by is St. Maria Kirken, a quaint twelfth-century church, formerly in possession of the Hanseatic League.

Triangelen (the fish-market quay) is interesting on Wednesday and Saturday mornings, where a fleet of small fishing-boats is moored alongside, lively and witty bargaining going on between buyer and seller which is

highly amusing to witness. Bergen is in many respects a most interesting town, the ancient rubbing shoulders with the modern—the electric tram-car with the carrier's cart and "kariol"; the slender wood-framed, sack-covered booth with the gaily-painted kiosk; and the latest fashions from London and Paris with the divers picturesque costumes of fisherfolk and farmer, "striler" and "bönder." Handsome stone-built shops stand cheek by jowl with the low red-tiled wooden ones, no two alike, in every variety of size and colour, relieving the monotony of the narrow and crooked streets.

The climate of Bergen is exceedingly mild and humid, not unlike that of the west coast of Scotland, and the numerous shops where umbrellas and rain-coats are displayed for sale give some indication of the prevailing weather, although I have known it to be fine there for several days together. But this not being in the nature of a guide-book—"Baedeker," "Beyer," and "Bennett" supply all the information one necessarily requires, and much more than I have space to admit here—we must pass on to the chief subject of the book, and enter the fjords, taking first the Hardanger Fjord.

This beautiful arm of the sea is second in regard to length, the Sogne Fjord being the longest; but what it lacks in this respect is more than balanced by the charm of the scenery and the greater area of land under cultivation—orchards gay with blossom, and well-trimmed farms with brightly-painted wooden houses, red, yellow, or white, perched high on the mountain's flank, or nestling nearer the fjord margin. This beautiful district of Hardanger has been the theme of poet and painter for generations.

### The Hardanger costume

The Hardanger women are mostly of fair complexion, with blue eyes, and their costume is the most picturesque of

any in the country. It consists of a bright red or green bodice, gay with beads in front, clean white linen sleeves, a large white head-covering ("skaut"), blue skirt trimmed with coloured braid, and a belt of beads with an old silver filigree clasp. The unmarried wear the hair hanging in two long plaits down the back, and for headgear a small white cotton shawl tied under the chin in place of the more elaborate "skaut" of the married.

It is an interesting sight to witness on Sunday mornings the well-filled boats coming from all parts of the fjord parish, men and girls alike rowing their graceful boats to church. On landing, they arrange each other's toilet on the beach, and when inside the sacred edifice, the women and girls sit on one side of the centre aisle and the men on the other.

The service is Lutheran, and there is much singing of hymns or "psalmer" in a leisurely way while sitting. The farmer's dog is also quite a "regular attender," but he is usually well-behaved, and no one appears to take the slightest notice of him unless he happens to pick a quarrel with another of his species.





### **Odde, Hardanger Fjord.**

After, and sometimes during, Divine service small groups of farmers may be seen in the churchyard talking over the state of the market—of crops and cattle and other gossip—as each one repeatedly turns over the ample "quid" of tobacco in his mouth. It may be that they meet only once in three weeks, for many a parson has two or three churches to attend to. But the churches are, as a rule, well filled, no matter what happens to be the condition of the weather.

A peasant's homestead

In their homes these peasants live the "simple life" in square log houses of primitive form, finished on the outside with weather-boarding, turf laid on birchbark for roof-covering, on which grow masses of wild flowers, and one may even see a young birch-tree find root there and flourish.

The houses are painted on the outside, according to the taste of their owners, red, white, or yellow ochre, and these bright spots of colour add a cheerful note to the landscape.

Inside the house the log walls are allowed to season, and in time they acquire a rich tone of brown. There is generally one principal room on the ground floor, and in it the farmer, his family, and servants live and have their meals together in quite patriarchal fashion. In this room also are commonly found a couple of beds used by the farmer and his wife, the other members of the household having theirs up in the loft.

The cooking is done in the large common-room, as is also the carding, spinning, winding, and weaving of home-grown wool for the family in quite primitive fashion on ancient wheel and wooden hand-loom, this industry being their chief employment in the long winter nights.

Outside the farm-house there is always a store-room, called a "stabbur," standing separately. This building rests on short strong pillars of wood to keep out the rats and other intruders, and in it are stored dried meats, cheeses, milk, and other foodstuffs.

An additional outbuilding, called a "bui," is used for keeping the clothing, tapestries, blankets, etc.; also the daughter's wedding trousseau and old silver articles—heirlooms—including a bride's crown of silver gilt, all stored away in huge chests ("kists"). Here may also be found carefully treasured a variety of ancient carved and painted

wooden bowls and tankards, out of use except at weddings and other state occasions.

Another detached outhouse, called an "ild-hus," is used for the baking of "flad bröd," a kind of rye cake, crisp and dry, and of the thickness of brown paper.

Yet another small outhouse is required for drying corn for brewing purposes, farmers being permitted to brew ale for their own consumption only, the sale of it not being lawful. Most households enjoy their home-brewed ale at Christmas-time, and they may even keep a small quantity over until Easter.

In addition to these small outbuildings there are, of course, the barn and cowhouse, with accommodation for horses, sheep, and pigs, forming altogether quite a little hamlet.

On the farms the womenfolk must look after the cattle, sheep, and goats, in addition to their ordinary household work, so they have not much time for idle recreation. The only important break in their humdrum lives, and to which they look forward with gladness, is the annual removal of the household, in the early summer, to the "sæter," or mountain outfarm, a description of which, and the life there, I will deal with in a subsequent chapter.

The male members of the family are chiefly occupied with the raising and trading in domestic animals—horses, cattle, goats, sheep, etc.—in cutting faggots from their woods, and in the making of barrel-hoops for sale in the nearest towns. Boat-building also employs much of their time.

**Horticulture—land tenure**

Horticulture does not play any very prominent part in Norway, although, on most farms it is carried on to some extent, together with regular farming.

Among the more enlightened peasantry it is the rule to find outside the dwelling-house a kitchen garden where vegetables necessary to the family are raised, such as cabbages, turnips, carrots, onions, peas, and beans, and of fruit-trees we may find in many places pears, apples, cherries, currants, gooseberries, and strawberries.

On every hand the planting of fruit-trees is increasing, and in favourable years quite excellent results may be obtained, but the rough climate during the winter renders the fruit yield somewhat uncertain. It is only in a few districts around the Christiania Fjord and the Hardanger Fjord that horticulture is carried on to any greater extent than to satisfy the farmer's own requirements, although at the present time there is a strong movement for the promotion of horticulture, and many of the counties ("amt") have appointed gardeners, who travel round the district giving farmers free instruction in the laying out and management of gardens and orchards. Perhaps it may be as well to mention here that the Norwegian peasant has always enjoyed a freedom which to the same class in other countries has been denied.

In former centuries the feudal system was generally adopted in most European countries, but it has never existed in Norway.

The peasants have always maintained their freedom to acquire property anywhere within the limits of their own country; this circumstance, however, did not prevent an accumulation of the landed estates in a few hands, the result being that the peasant class to a very great extent