

EVERLASTING HOUSES.
HOMES IN NORWAY THAT HAVE
EXISTED FOR AGES.

The quaint "stavekirker" of Central Norway and their weird and picturesque surroundings—bonders and udalmen 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.

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 "aagle-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 had built upon it a new annex for each generation or century—was by far the stoutest, sturdiest and best.

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 Thielemarken district are many quaint old wooden mills which I found to be from 150 to 250 years old.

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 portion was invariably of different construction, became apparent.

On the east bank of the Lyster Fiord, opposite Solvern, is perched the lonely hamlet of Urnaes. But a tiny patch of tillable land surrounds it, and then come the mountains which pierce the clouds above.

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 bottomsides upward and stood upon its roof.

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 Lerdal, the Hitterdal church, that of Lom, near Andvord, Urnaes, beside the Lyster Fiord, and that of Eidsborg in the Telemarken district.

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 Urnaes 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.

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.

On the east bank of the Lyster Fiord, opposite Solvern, is perched the lonely hamlet of Urnaes. 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 Urnaes. Antiquarians tell us that here once stood a temple to Thor. Scattered all about are huge mounds, called "Kamphouge," where mighty Vikings and pre-historic heroes lie buried. One feels at weird old Urnaes 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.

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 bonders' guard or farm-house is an odd 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 farmhouse itself, if the oldest still the widest, largest and most commodious of all, with its invariable 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 starting 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 farm, 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 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 Nullamullais 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 concussion that would be engendered by tumbling down hill. This resulted in 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 untold 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, dashing 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 innate 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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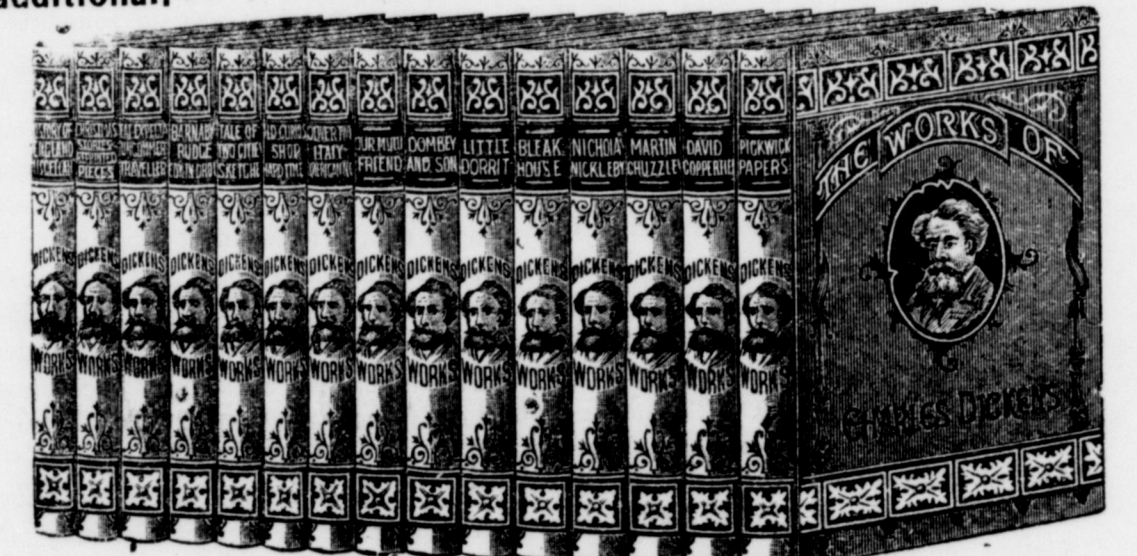
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