

The DANCE of MIDSUMMER EVE in the LAND of the MIDNIGHT SUN



Young Leksand Girls in Ring Dance by Lake Siljan.



Frolicking on the Wharf at Leksand.

The Dance of the Midsummer Eve, by Anders Zorn.

like time exposures of the maypole. Indeed, the violet twilight was so bright that at no time in the short interval of the sun's disappearance was it difficult to read or take photographs in the open. It was already a quarter of 12 before the maypole was sufficiently festooned to satisfy the fastidious taste of the Leksanders. Suddenly Miss Inga, my Stockholm companion, touched my arm. The murmur of the throng subsided. The maypole began to rise, pushed up from beneath by the young swains and held in place by cables. A hush of half-religious awe fell over the spectators. At last the foot of the pole settled into the hole, and stood quivering for a moment. The music was arrested by a shrill, most Circular garlands of laurel on hoops suspended to the mast by ribbons swung gayly in the breeze; and from the top fluttered a silver pennant of the purple and gold of Sweden.

A May-Pole Raising.

Tripping the Light Fantastic in the Mystic Twilight of Sweden's Welcome to Spring

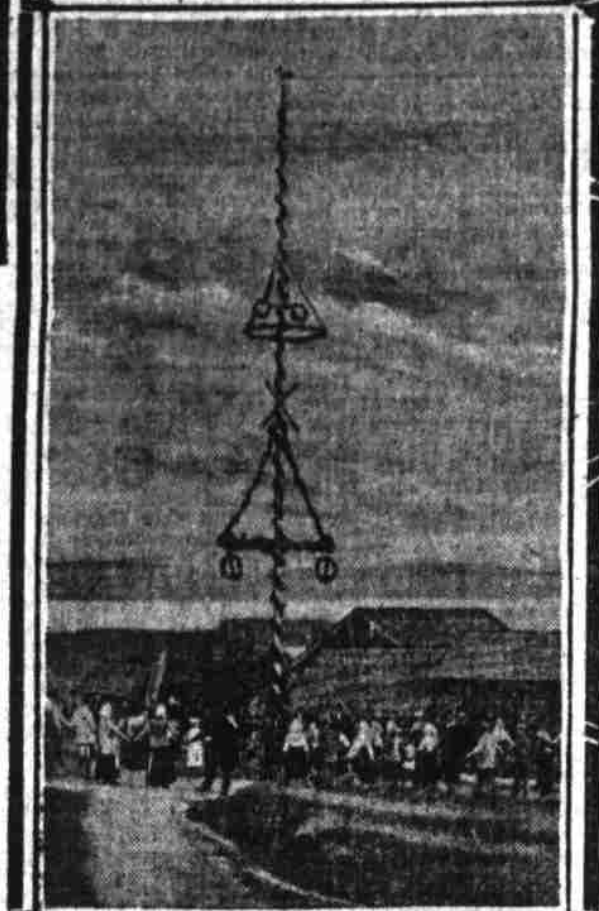
By Henry Goddard Leach, Ph. D.

FEW of us, in this century of scientific progress, are aware that there actually persists to this day, in lands otherwise Christian, some of the ancient rites and occult ceremonies of a dim heathen past. Pagan customs do not easily perish, not when they are beautiful in themselves and dear to the people who have cherished them from time immemorial.

The sacrifice and the dance of Midsummer eve is one of the last of these festivals to yield to the advance of civilization. Far in the north of Europe, in the province of Dalecarlia, in Sweden, this mysterious holiday is still observed by the descendants of the vikings. And thither I made the long pilgrimage for the purpose of studying the customs of our Germanic forefathers. In Dalecarlia, at the village of Leksand, I assisted in the annual fete of Midsummer eve—in raising the maypole, dancing the ring dance and building the fires of sacrifice to the dawn, in the bright violet twilight of the region of the midnight sun.

TH COMPANY with several Swedish visitors, I approached Leksand village on the afternoon of Midsummer eve, the 24 of June. A small steamer bore us across the tranquil lake of Siljan, "The Eye of Dalecarlia"; and the first sight of Leksand was the white church, with its quaint Austrian tower, on a bluff overlooking the lake. As we drew near the landing it seemed as though not only all Leksand, but all the people of Dalecarlia, the province in which the village is situated, had assembled to meet us. The great wharf and the bluff behind it were, I cannot say, black with humanity, but purple and red and green and blue, a scene of barbaric, almost oriental, splendor. For the Dalecarlians still wear the highly colored apparel of long ago, and many of the visitors from Stockholm and other parts of Sweden had donned peasant, that is "national," dresses for the occasion. In this gathering it was apparently the only foreigner.

On the drive from the wharf to the inn we passed the village common, with the maypole lying prone upon it, ready to be raised in the evening. Then we drove through a long lane bordered with typical Swedish birches, and here I had opportunity to examine in more detail the costumes of the promenaders. Every township has its own distinctive dress, and here were merry-makers from every village in the province of Dalecarlia. The native Leksand girl wore a white waist with full sleeves and surmounted by a laced bodice, with a close-fitting red cap, and an embroidered kerchief over her shoulders. The back of her skirt was of plain black woolen; but the distinctive feature of her attire was the red, white and black apron effect which fronted her skirt, the stripes running perpendicular to the ground. The skirt front is, indeed, the badge, the local flag, of the Dalecarlian woman.



The May-Pole in the Little Village of Orsa, from Photograph Taken Near Midnight.

Pretty lasses from Mora there were, too, made famous over the world by the portraits painted by Zorn. Some of these very girls, my driver told me, had been Zorn's models. One bewitching maid, walking by the roadside, attracted my attention even more

than the Mora girls, on account of the remarkable delicacy of her features and because of the richness of her dress, which suggested a flower garden, for, from head to foot, her cap, the bag suspended by her side, even her shoes, were all embroidered with roses of every hue.

"Yonder's a lass from Floda," my driver remarked. "She's had a long journey. She'll be a belle at the dancing tonight I reckon."

As a rule these girls were tall, athletic, with fair hair and blue eyes, the Dalecarlian type. This afternoon their faces were flushed in anticipation of Midsummer eve. So were those of the young men, for most of them, in honor of the occasion; for, and to relate, the men, especially the young men, are discarding more and more the old country dress and adopting the conventional garb of the cities. Blue knickerbockers were a characteristic feature of the boys' costumes and white leather aprons of those of their grandfathers. For the old folks were in evidence, too, smiling in the spirit of the holiday.

When at length we drove up before the red, tree-lined inn of Leksand and I asked for a room, the aged proprietress looked at me in sober astonishment. "Young man," she said, "you can have all the meals you please here, but as for a bedroom, that is impossible. All the rooms in the inn were bespoken long ago, and we have secured every other available room in the village for our guests. And besides," she added, looking at me in a kindly way, over her spectacles, "who ever heard of a young man sleeping on Midsummer eve?"

CHARACTERISTIC HOSPITALITY

Being an American, however, I thought it necessary to go forth in quest of a bed, and at last found a farmhouse near the village, where a kindly farmer's wife improvised a couch for me in one corner of the kitchen. This act was characteristic of the hospitality for which the Dalecarlians are famed. I am told that when a Dalecarlian locks his house for the night, or temporarily leaves it in summer, he hangs the key on a nail outside the door, so that the unexpected guest can enter.

From the farm I returned to the inn for a Swedish dinner. It was served from side tables, which the Swedes call the smorgas bord. One helped himself to nut soup or fruit soup, to cracker bread, honey, and goat's cheese, to mountain trout and reindeer steak. The dining room was full of fashionably dressed visit-

ors from Stockholm and landed gentry from country estates, who had laid aside their exclusiveness and put on for the occasion the "national" peasant costume of various districts to take part in this most democratic holiday.

At dinner I was presented to a pretty Stockholm girl, a baroness, whom her friends called "Inga." She gladly explained to me the program of the evening and promised to guide me around the maypole. At 8, she explained, we were to assemble in the church; at 11.30 the maypole was to be raised; then we were to dance up to 1.30, when we were to proceed up the mountain to build fires to welcome the sunrise.

The concert in the village church was like a Christian prelude to the pagan rites of the night. The church holds 6000 people and it was full to suffocation. Folk songs rendered by a choir of Leksanders in their native dress were followed by organ and violin recitals from the great masters. And the audience was well trained to appreciate. For the Dalecarlians are perhaps the best all-around educated farming race in the world. They weave tapestries and play the violin with equal facility.

At 11 that evening my Stockholm friends and I took our places on the village green, where the great maypole was to be erected, half an hour before midnight, the raising of the maypole. In Sweden the maypole is almost as cherished in popular belief as the baptismal font. Thousands of maypoles were to be raised on the village greens of Sweden simultaneously with the great event here at Leksand. In England, on the other hand, the maypole was suppressed as a heathen institution by the stern Puritans as long ago as 1644. Later, after a brief revival, the raising of the maypole in England became extinct. But in remote Sweden this practice survives today as a symbol of warm weather and rich harvest. And it is called the maypole, the May stang, in Sweden, although it is actually raised, not as it was in England, on May 1, but on June 23. For the seasons are late in these northern climes, and May finds Sweden still white with snow.

It was an expectant multitude which filled the village common of Leksand, laughing and chatting in low, musical Swedish voices. In the center a long table, with the great event here at Leksand, in the gate. Around the huge giant a score of Leksand men were busy putting the finishing touches to the decorations, twining the white trunk with spirals of flowers and greens, treating it with all the reverence a savage people pay a symbol of the deity.

The sun had already set in a purple haze over the lake of Siljan for Leksand, although close to the Arctic circle cannot boast of a sun at midnight. The "kodak fiends" in the crowd, however, continued to

The ORIENTAL IDOL of PARIS

FRENCH literature has a new light, a woman. She comes from the holy city of Jerusalem, of all places; and, of all creeds, or no creeds, that have overlaid that most despoiled of cities, she is said to be a pagan. It is the famous French litterateur, Jules Lemaitre, who has passed upon beautiful Myriam Harry that curious verdict; and he is at once her first adviser, her most stern critic and her most sincere admirer.

Until now the name of Myriam Harry has remained comparatively unknown. But the publication of her latest romance, "La Divine Chanson," in Paris is stirring interest in her talents, which are strange, and her personality, which is far stranger.

Few women living can dispute the stage of literary eminence which this stray from Jerusalem has attained while she is yet only in her twenties.

HER career itself reads with much of the flavor of adventure that France loves to find, lending glamour to the romances it reads. "It is now some years since I received a letter from a woman," writes the famous Lemaitre, apropos of the publication of "The Divine Chanson." "She asked me to give her literary advice. She said: 'I wish to be great.'"

"I invited her to call on me. She was young, tall, thin, with lively eyes and a droll accent. I gave her some good advice and did not see her again for a long time. Meanwhile, she published 'The Passing of the Bedouins,' 'Little Wives' and 'The Conquest of Jerusalem.' When she visited me for the second time she brought her book on 'Tunis.' I learned the story of her life."



Miss Myriam Harry, the latest sensation of literary France.

that mixture of blood and fire which can flow from German, Israelite and Polish ancestors. Until she was 14 years old the sacred places of the Holy City were as familiar to her feet as Broadway is to a girl in New

York. She spoke German, English, a little Hebrew and Arabic; and she fairly starved for French, of which she learned a few phrases from one of the family servants.

Her abiding place was in an ancient Saracen dwelling that breathed the adventurous life of the deserts, and often she was her father's companion in his journeys through Syria and Arabia Petrea.

When she died she went with her mother to Germany and lived until she was 17 in a girls' boarding school in Berlin, acquiring German so well that one of the leading Berlin papers published a story of hers, and failing in her examination in French, for which her soul hungered.

She went to Paris. She determined that she would not speak German at all. She felt as if she had no tongue, there among strangers; but she vowed that this French language and literature, which fate seemed bent on denying to her, should at last be hers. For three years she struggled, and at last felt that she had acquired the language she knew she was born to love.

Then she traveled—back to her native Jerusalem and into Syria, Arabia, India, China, Ceylon, into China, half of Europe, Tunis—always with eyes that saw everything and a memory that forgot nothing. She began to write; and the value of her studies was instantly apparent.

"She has no religious faith," declares Mons. Lemaitre, "she is high-tempered and independent—a pagan who, at first, received biblical culture in Protestant, Judaic and Germanic ideas. To that join French romanticism, impressionism, humanitarianism, anarchism, and all that could be learned in Paris ten years ago of advanced literature and art, and you have a picture of the intellect and temperament of Myriam Harry."

A WHIRL OF RAINBOWS

Looking around the ring, I caught sight of the petite Floda girl in a rose embroidered frock, which I had noticed in the afternoon. I bowed before her, asking in broken Swedish for the pleasure of a dance. She smiled consent from under the rim of her quaint bonnet.

It was a strange sight, the whirling, laughing hundreds in their rainbow costumes. To a foreigner like myself it seemed a great open-air pageant. There was something weird about the whole effect; I was tempted to pinch my arm to make sure that after all I was not taking part with Oberon and his fairies in a dream, or a dream to dance here out of doors in a violet dawn, a few minutes after midnight, a little under the Arctic circle, among people dressed in Asiatic splendor! The twilight had been met halfway by the dawn; the two seemed to wreath with each other, and Lake Siljan beside us became a furnace of blood-red and purple.

On the grass near the wharf they were dancing intricate dances, the steps of which had been handed down by centuries of tradition from the heathen religious festivals. The dancers accompanied their movements by song. Perhaps 100 young men formed a ring, the center of which was a group of girls, each with a partner, and a smaller ring, with eyes bent modestly on the ground, singing the words:

Then their figures straightened, and each girl darted a furtive glance around the encircling ring of men, singing:
To find herself a mate
Who is so lovely.

Then with the words,
Sing, heppan as
Fallerallan,

the ring of girls broke up and each maid sprang lightly across the open green to the man in the ring whom she had chosen for her "mate" and seized his hand. And now the pairs, man and maid, danced a pretty movement together, singing the refrain "hoppa span sa." This done, the man went back to his place in the outer circle, and the girls repeated their ring dance. I saw a handsome cavalry officer from a Baron Gyllenkrone, captured twice by a Stockholm girl, but four times, the man never laid his eyes on her. I think I shall never forget the flashing eyes and flushed faces of those Swedish girls, as they broke from the ring like meteors from a comet, singing their "Fallerallan" to that unintelligible refrain they seemed to express the spirit of the northern festival, the lyric note of the Midsummer eve.

At 1.30, however, we were interrupted by the shout: "To the mountain to welcome the sunrise." The violins moved up the hillside, the dancers following in a line.

Among the giant boulders of a neighboring height the multitude of merry-makers reassembled to watch the early sunrise over distant hills and woods—the sun which had scarcely left us. Bonfires had been kindled on the crags and beacons gleamed also from surrounding hills. The bonfires on Midsummer eve are the survival of another heathen custom. They are supposed to be miniature suns and to act as charms for the crops during the following summer.

From booths on the mountain side steaming coffee and biscuits were dispensed, and the scene among the rocks suggested the sermon on the mount and the miracle of the loaves and fishes.

When we had paid our proper adoration to the sun we descended to dance again until late in the morning. Not so for Miss Inga, of Stockholm. Today the city girl must throw off the spell of the night together with her peasant costume and put on the conventional frock dictated by the modes of Paris. To her as to me, the American, Midsummer eve had been an unreality, a fairy dream. And yet, to me, not altogether untrue! For I shall never forget that glimpse into the dim barbaric past of our ancestors, nor those merry-makers in their multicolored dress, dancing and singing on Lake Siljan in the purple light of a midnight dawn.