

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07444-5 - In Pursuit of a Shadow by a Lady Astronomer

Elizabeth Brown

Excerpt

[More information](#)

# IN PURSUIT OF A SHADOW

---

## CHAPTER. I

### HULL TO CHRISTIANIA

It was about 4 p.m. in the afternoon of July 15, 1887, that I alighted from the Midland express at Hull and met my travelling companion. I had left my home on the previous day and had passed the night at Cheltenham to enable me to take the 9.20 a.m. train and all day I had been travelling North with only one change of carriage at the Milford Junction.

My companion, whom I will call L, lived in one of the Northern Counties and we were bound for Russia to see the great Solar eclipse of August 19, so that it may be imagined we met under circumstances of pleasurable excitement not unmingled with awe at the prospect of countries strange and unknown and of people of unknown tongues among whom we, with but slender linguistic acquirements, were about to

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07444-5 - In Pursuit of a Shadow by a Lady Astronomer

Elizabeth Brown

Excerpt

[More information](#)

venture, nor had our friends and acquaintance spared us the usual amount of alarming prophecies, first and foremost among which stood the terrors of Russian Custom-houses, stern officials and a perpetual background of police supervision.

Our packing had been accomplished in the teeth of numberless hampering counsels. Books had been interdicted by one friend, sketching materials viewed doubtfully by another, while a third anxiously specified that nothing was more important than the loose arrangement of all corners in our trunks in preparation for invading hands; added to this my beautiful little telescope, the loan of an astronomical friend, in its oblong black box, certainly presented a suspicious appearance almost suggesting dynamite! However for good or for ill our belongings were packed up and we were ready to start at last. L. did not join me for the first time as travelling companion; she and I had journeyed over sea and land together before, and I had proved her value in that capacity to my complete satisfaction, and our dinner at the Royal Station Hotel was a very cheerful and inspiring one in the company of some of her own people who had come to start her on her travels.

The evening was not very propitious. Heavy rain fell and we heard thunder about 6.30 but it had cleared by the time we went on board our ship, the Rollo, of the well-known Wilson

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07444-5 - In Pursuit of a Shadow by a Lady Astronomer

Elizabeth Brown

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Hull to Christiania*

3

line, at 9.45. All was calm and promising then and the inspection of our berths which rather to our discontent were in the ladies' saloon proved encouraging. There was not the bustle we had dreaded, and we were able to prepare for the night without disturbance when we wished. The steamer was not due to start till 12, and we therefore had to make our good-byes long before but L. could not make up her mind to the final parting so early and merely lay down without undressing, going on deck later to have the last glimpse of her brother and sister who had come down to the docks with this intent, and as the Rollo, leaving her moorings about 2, slowly passed along, their last farewells were accomplished by touching umbrellas from shore and deck. But though I remained below sleep was not possible for a long time, and I thought the tramping overhead, the horn blowing and windlass winding would never cease.

Save for this, the soft electric light in the cabin, free from oily odours, would have been most soothing, the berths were comfortable and the stewardess perfect in her way. But even the hubbub of a steamer ceases at last, and it was a pleasant surprise when the arrival of a delicious cup of 7 o'clock tea and rusks, an unexpected luxury, proved to us that our first night out of England was well over. Breakfast was, or was supposed to be at 9. Our fellow passengers, numbering 45 in the saloon, were

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07444-5 - In Pursuit of a Shadow by a Lady Astronomer

Elizabeth Brown

Excerpt

[More information](#)

chiefly bound for Norway, and our companionship was thus for too short a time to admit of much intimacy. It was a fine morning, and when breakfast was over we sat on deck enjoying the cool air after a hot night. We were now in open sea, no land visible, the water a lovely blue, only some pillary thunder clouds presented rather a threatening appearance. We watched some gentlemen playing shuffle-board, and afterwards accepted their invitation to join in the game, proving that our heads and hands were thus far steady enough for a little wholesome exercise, but, alas, this happy state did not continue long, the wind freshened till the sea became quite rough, and though we kept up a brave front till after lunch it was not possible to do so much longer or indeed to find shelter on deck, and the rest of the day and of the night following was spent in great discomfort in our berths, nor were we able to make our appearance on deck until one o'clock the next day, and probably courage would have failed us then but that we were due at Christiansand at 1.30 and were anxious for our first glimpse of Norway. Unfortunately it was then raining steadily so that there was no temptation to land, nor were the wet decks conducive to comfort on board. We were moored close to the shore and our first sight of a Scandinavian town reminded us of Canada. We had a view of wooden houses, mostly warehouses, and there was a

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07444-5 - In Pursuit of a Shadow by a Lady Astronomer

Elizabeth Brown

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Hull to Christiania*

5

church not far off, but the cessation of motion was, it must be confessed, more welcome than the loveliest view would have been, and indeed it so raised my companion's spirits that before long she summoned courage for a short walk, though without, as far as I can remember, bringing back any very definite impressions of her first touch of Norwegian soil. The day, be it remembered, was Sunday and on the return of the errant passengers the Captain read prayers in the saloon, a shortened form adapted from our prayer-book, for the Wilson line, with several hymns, and by this time we were sufficiently recovered to enjoy it, and I think a religious service is never more restful and soothing than amid the turmoils and changes of travel.

We reached Christiania about 9 on Monday morning, (July 18th). The land when first sighted looked flat and uninteresting, but as we drew nearer, the long low outlines seemed to rise higher and higher, rocky prominences crowned with stunted spruce firs came into view, soft grey hills filled up the background, lovely in their misty faintness, and then, encircled by these fair heights, with its church spires, wooden chalêts and large warehouses many coloured and of lovely tones of dull green and ochre, the city of the sweet sounding name revealed itself. We could but feast our eyes on its beauty. Many of the public buildings were embedded in trees, and amongst them the king's

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07444-5 - In Pursuit of a Shadow by a Lady Astronomer

Elizabeth Brown

Excerpt

[More information](#)

summer palace, white with turreted towers, was conspicuous, while every movement of our propeller seemed to reveal some new and striking conformation of the girdling hills.

Then came the landing which was to have been our first experience of custom-house severities, but to our surprise the luggage was passed with hardly any examination, my own box not being even opened, so choosing one of the carriages which were in waiting, we were quickly driven to the Grand Hotel.

How soon the charm of a new land asserts itself! The most ordinary bed-room in a foreign hotel has something distinctive, and therefore pleasing even to a hardened voyager. Our eyes rested with satisfaction on the little characteristic signs of Norwegian life and habits, but our chambermaid was German, as proved to be very usually the case, even in Russia.

Having thus housed our boxes we felt we must lose no time in seeing a little of the town, so with the help of the hotel porter engaging a carriage we took a short drive. Passing through paved streets and clean squares, and by many public buildings, among which the king's palace and the Parliament house were conspicuous, we reached the University which is open three times a week, and there in an adjoining building, saw that most interesting old relic the Viking Ship. Little did I think when many years ago I read the graphic description of its discovery

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07444-5 - In Pursuit of a Shadow by a Lady Astronomer

Elizabeth Brown

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Hull to Christiania*

7

in the *Times*, that my eyes would ever actually see the original—the aged vessel which had lain for centuries embedded in the sands of the Baltic. So carefully was it exhumed at the time, that it has been retained in almost perfect preservation, and here we saw it lying in the house which was erected for its shelter, its ancient timbers blackened by time and by its long continuance under water, but still holding together, though it seems a marvel that they should do so. The keel of the ship is very sharp and almost perfect, and the frame-work of the great ribs so little displaced that the original form and proportions are discernible at a glance. It stands on a raised platform protected by railings, and the building also contains the actual bones of the old Scandinavian Monarch, who, according to the custom of his time, was at his death buried in his vessel, which was then sunk beneath the waters for his final rest. The bones are preserved in a glass case in a corner of the room, but the ornaments and other accessories of kingly state which were also found were removed to the Museum. This sight was the most thrilling incident of our expedition, and immediately after we returned to our hotel for dinner. The fare was good, but the dish which chiefly remains in my memory was one containing no less than ten different kinds of fruit, fresh and dried. In the afternoon we sallied forth again, and this time we

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07444-5 - In Pursuit of a Shadow by a Lady Astronomer

Elizabeth Brown

Excerpt

[More information](#)

took a steam ferry to Frederiksborg on the other side of the harbour, where are villas and shrubberies, seats and landing places, so that an hour passed pleasantly. We made our first sketches, and then went back again by ferry to tea, and I may mention that by this time we had completely fallen in love with the Norwegian horses, or rather ponies, for they are small, but stout, strong little animals, often indeed very usually cream coloured, with long manes and tails, and a most friendly Christian expression of countenance, indicating kindly usage and gentle treatment. A curious habit obtains among the drivers of country vehicles, market carts and such like. When leaving their carriages, or when stopping for any length of time they make all secure by tying one leg of the horse, for which purpose a long strap or rope is affixed to one of the shafts with a leathern loop at the end, which is buckled round the animal's leg, just below the hock. I watched a woman doing it with the greatest celerity, and thought it a comical illustration of our national adage "tied by the leg" which might be brought forward as a philological proof of our Scandinavian origin. Of these good little animals we made personal trial the next day (Tuesday, July 19) to which I must now pass, for on applying to our obliging "maitre d'hotel" for advice he suggested a drive to Frognerstøt, a summer residence of Consul Heftog,



Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07444-5 - In Pursuit of a Shadow by a Lady Astronomer

Elizabeth Brown

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Hull to Christiania*

9

whither we started in a carriage and pair after our breakfast. On leaving the city, the road passes through open fields with many flowers by the road sides, among which we noticed hare-bells, yellow bedstraw, white chrysanthemums, and one species of bright coloured geranium, and then it winds upwards for miles through spruce forests. It was difficult to believe we were not in Switzerland, the cool damp woods and pine needled paths recalled many old experiences, but the sturdy little horses, who made nothing of the long ascent, were of a different type, and so was our driver, who spoke only Swedish. Arrived at our destination, we found it to be merely a summer chalêt in an open space with others scattered about. Its beauty consisted in the lovely view of the distant city and sea stretched out far below us, the exquisite colouring of which, with the ever changing reflections of the summer clouds, made a picture never to be forgotten, though one impossible to paint. We lingered here for about an hour, children were gathering whortleberries, and we found the leaves of the hepatica, but there was too much shade for any wealth of flowers. Presently L. noticed our driver give a significant tap to the shafts of our carriage, at which hint we again took our seats, and reaching our hotel at 1.30 found the nominal "table d'hôte," which is really a common opportunity

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07444-5 - In Pursuit of a Shadow by a Lady Astronomer

Elizabeth Brown

Excerpt

[More information](#)

for private dinners, which are ordered from the “carte” going on in the “sal speise.”

In the afternoon we took the steamer to Oscarshall, the king’s summer palace, but as this excursion had no very distinctive features it need hardly be described in detail. It gave us an opportunity of seeing more of the people of the country than our morning drive, the steamers being crowded with afternoon excursionists. The poorer women invariably wear a light handkerchief tied over their heads, and they are all clean and well-behaved. I much enjoyed a quiet rest on the shore, attempting to catch some of the soft distant effects in my sketch book, leaving L., who is a far better sight-seer than I am, to “do” the palace. And here I may confess once for all, that but for her greater zeal and gentle but persistent instigation, much that I did see would have remained unseen, for I am country born and bred, and the love of quietness inherent in such, suffers much strain and self-denial in enduring the life of towns.

On retiring to rest at night we had some difficulty in explaining to our chamber-maid the exact time we wished to be called the next day, until L. cut the knot by a vigorous rapping on the door and by risking the well-being of her watch by twirling the hands round to the desired hour, a process which soon enlightened the bright little woman as to our wishes.