

## ART. V.—THE WHITE SEA PENINSULA.

*The White Sea Peninsula ; a Journey in Russian Lapland and Karelia.* By EDWARD RAE, F.R.G.S., Author of "The Land of the North Wind." Map and Illustrations. Pp. 340. John Murray.

MR. RAE left the Tyne on the 31st of May, passed Aberdeen on the 1st of June, lost the Shetlands on the 2nd, and passed out into the Atlantic with a fresh northerly wind and a moderate sea. For four long days and nights the *Aurora* pitched steadily, the wind gradually increasing. On the 5th they coasted past the Lofodens, the wind still dead ahead, and increasing to a gale. On the sixth afternoon they passed Tromsö and Hammerfest. On the 7th, the *Aurora* was steaming under the North Cape, the solid old cliff rising a thousand feet from the cold Arctic Sea. Snow covered more than one-half of the purple mountains of Finnmarken ; the Arctic waves glittered in a crystal atmosphere and in cloudless sunlight. Midsummer and midwinter were face to face. Whales were peacefully spouting on the horizon, and the keen frosty breeze blew in the voyagers' faces. Before midnight the *Aurora* was in sight of Vardö. They sounded the whistle loudly, and after steaming patiently down the channel, a Norseman put off in his boat, and Mr. Rae and his fellow traveller took leave of the worthy Scotch officers of the *Aurora*—a Dundee steamer, bound for Archangel, the owners of which had kindly agreed to land the two travellers at Vardö. This town lives upon fish and fishing. The little wooden warehouses reek with fish, the boats are steeped in the smell of fish, and the air is full of it. The travellers sought, with their baggage, Hansen's hotel, and retired to rest at 1 A.M., in brilliant daylight, sleeping profoundly, smothered in eider-down quilts. That evening the Vice-Consul dined with them, and they had a good meal of fish, reindeer venison, Norwegian pancakes, and a fruit-dish drenched in cream.

After a time, Mr. Rae engaged as "interpreter," a decent little man with a red beard, who didn't speak a word of English! The idea of an interpreter (Russian, *Perevodchik*) of this kind seemed humorous ; and they engaged him, dimly hoping he might prove useful in other ways. Having chartered a small Norwegian steamer for the voyage to Kola, at a cost of £24, and obtained a recommendation from the Vice-Consul to the Ispravnik, they steamed away from Vardö. Several of the crew were Russians ; as good-natured and useless a set as ever went to sea.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Rae says :—"There is a certain antipathy to water in the mind of the Muscovite—whether for toilet, beverage or travel. Any other

There were sudden gusts of wind. Their steam yacht, the *Pram*, was small, and did not take kindly to the waves of the open Arctic, but rolled and heaved. In the little roadstead of Sibb Navolok they were kindly treated. A Norse farmer made them very comfortable; and for cream, biscuits, cheese, coffee and so forth, payment was refused. Steaming ahead, against a freezing cold wind, in due time they turned into the smooth waters of the Kolafjord, and came in sight of the cupolas of Peter the Great's white church in Kola—Lapland's oldest village or town. Dropping anchor in the fine stream of the Túloma, abreast of the town, the *Pram* sounded her whistle; it was a rare circumstance, and the inhabitants—some scores—crowded to the point. Kola was visited by an English gunboat in 1854, and if a gun had been fired on the *Pram*, says Mr. Rae, the people might have taken to the woods.<sup>1</sup> As it was, the reception was cordial. The clean well-dressed women wore red skirts, and bright coloured handkerchiefs on their heads and shoulders; the children seemed well cared for; and among the crowd there were a few uniforms—grey overcoats, high boots, and the familiar flat-topped caps:—

We were taken [writes our author] to a large room in a beautifully clean house, shared, as is the custom, by two or three families. Their houses are generally built alike, having inner corridors, closed and small doors, thickly padded for warmth. Each room has windows of double glass—perhaps six or eight of them, which give a wonderful cheerfulness, but are seldom opened. We were always at war on this point with our hostess, who protested against our keeping the windows perpetually open, and closed them whenever we left the room. The furniture was neat and clean: in one corner, or more, of every room, stood the *Sviati Obrasi*—the invariable little shrine of silver or brass-covered pictures—with small hanging lamps in front of them.

Mr. Rae called upon the Ispravnik—the head man—who gave him a kind welcome, and kept him drinking tea and smoking cigarettes two hours. The Ispravnik expressed himself strongly about the difficulties of any journey in the Kola peninsula; the interior was empty, and the coasts were dangerous; the rein-

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nation would have long since explored its own northern coasts and seas. Not ice, nor snow, nor fatigue will prevent the Russian from patiently traversing vast distances by land. His bugbear is water. The White Sea was first opened to commerce by Chancellor and other foreigners; and the only Russian possession beyond the seas, Alaska, was cheerfully bestowed upon the United States."

<sup>1</sup> The population of the peninsula of which Kola is the capital, is about 10,000—i.e., Russians, about 5000, Karelians, about 2000, and Lapps, over 2000. Of the total surface of the peninsula, nine-sixteenths consists of *tundra*—i.e., moor and wilderness; six-sixteenths of forest, and the remaining sixteenth of lake, mere, and marsh.

deer were all sick and unfit for work; and Lapps as bearers could not be hired. But Mr. Rae had made up his mind, and was not to be daunted.<sup>1</sup> A change of plan, however, was necessary.

After a time a boat and crew were obtained; a steamer on its way to Vardö towed them down the river; when well out in the sea, they embarked on the *snéka*, cast off from the steamer, and set sail for the east. The *snéka* was old and rickety; and the Englishmen were cramped enough. The Mark Tapley spirit, however, seems to have prevailed. One of the crew was a curious little Lapp: he had a small, orange-tanned, wrinkled face, with dull eyes, yellow hair growing over them, and narrow sloping shoulders. He wore an old soldier's overcoat, and his boots were immense. The crew jested at him; and if any misfortune happened, or anybody had to be blamed, it was sure to be Zakkar Andrei Zitkikoff. An American lady is reported to have said of the hippopotamus, "Oh my, ain't he plain!" Zakkar was even ugly:—

Once Zakkar was found [writes Mr. Rae] half-an-hour after the men had finished their dinner, drinking tea absently, and munching black bread. When I put some sugar into his cup, Zakkar Andrei Zitkikoff smiled for the first, and, with one exception, the only time—a quaint comical smile, and doffed his cap. When the wind increased, and grew colder and shriller, I passed Zakkar my quilt. He took off his cap, and smiled again. The wind now increased, and blew in gusts. The old *snéka* flew along, her gunwale hissing through the water as though it had been red-hot. In a quick squall the old patched rag which served as a sail blew away from the mast, and the boat reeled. One man got mixed up with the tackle, and was nearly swept overboard; this, of course, was Zakkar Andrei Zitkikoff. Fortunately the hurricane could not lift him out of his boots, or he would have gone finally.

Some clever bits of word-painting meet us as we follow this boat along the coast.<sup>2</sup> Here is a little Arctic picture:—

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<sup>1</sup> When the Ispravnik paid our traveller a visit, he was dressed in his full-dress uniform—dark blue trousers, dark green coat, with military buttons, and long military overcoat. "He saw all our outfit," writes Mr. Rae, "from the cooking apparatus—of which he approved highly—to the tinned and potted meats, of which, poor fellow, he approved still more. The Perevodtchik assiduously supplied him with tea and cigarettes. . . . He had never left the province; had never travelled further than Archangel. He could not afford to—as he told me. A poor Russian Ispravnik generally means an honest one." Mr. Rae made him happy by sending the "Interpreter" after him to his house, bearing a box of cocoa for himself, and of raisins for his children.

<sup>2</sup> On the Múrman coast there are 41 fishing stations; from 2,000 to 3,000 fishers. One of the finest harbours never freezes—thanks to the Gulf Stream. Not a human being makes his appearance here, or even a vessel,

The boat moored to the rock ; the Lapps hewing wood, or grouped round the fire, cooking their fish and ours. Snow and granite lay all around, and the cold sea beneath. We found granite grey, blue, white and red, white and green, and blood-red. We had to hurry away, for the tide was ebbing. One man was nearly left behind on the desert shore. It was Zakkar Andrei Zitkikoff.

Again, there are pretty pages of description in the diary of tent-life at the Seven Islands:—

We are enjoying our camp by the snow in the Land of the Midnight Sun. The ground is dry : no dew falls. The moss is a dry cushion. Upon the moss we have spread brushwood, on the brushwood a waterproof sheet, on the sheet a double canvass carpet, on that our ulsters and the Kola quilts. Over us are waterproofs, and a familiar travelling companion (Barbary rug). . . . so we need fear no rheumatism. Our effects are stowed for the night in front of the tent : the more perishable ones inside.

Transparent blue smoke floats away from the fire, which the Doctor feeds with silver-birch faggots. Below the snug tent, near the dove-coloured sea, are rude block huts, roofed with birch bark and turf. Codfish hang to dry on long racks ; gulls hover round a boat in which the Russians are cutting up freshly caught fish. Above the white tent flutters the English ensign. Not far distant, on a tall, rocky cliff, stands a grave-looking *moujik*, hired to watch for a chance Archangel steamer.

At last a steamer was sighted, and the travellers sailed away from the Mürman coast, passed the Holy Cape, and entered the broad river Ponoï. The remainder of their cruise round the peninsula, across the White Sea, to the Island of Solovetsk, and to Kem, and northward along the Karelian coast, up the river and lakes to Kola, we cannot even touch upon. The description of Kem, the capital of Karelia, is very good.

As a specimen of the scenes which Mr. Rae's graphic pen brings before us, we may give the following sketch of a view on the White Sea :—

Late one night we walked down to the beach for fresh air. We passed two white wooden churches with red roofs. Round them, out of the bare yellow sand, rose a thick crop of wooden crosses—an unenclosed burial place. We walked over the dry flat sand for a mile, and came to where lay the delicate summer sea, flushed with pale pink. Rounded waves curled and broke musically, and white foam

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in the long winter months. "It is shameful," we read, "that the poor Mürmansk fishermen should be deprived of all medical assistance. . . . Not even an apothecary's assistant can be found on these 1,300 miles of coast between Vardö and Archangel." A sick or wounded fisherman, therefore, must sacrifice the earnings which should keep his family in the winter months, to travel to the hospital in Archangel.

swept silently on to the smooth sand. The sea became, as it sometimes did towards midnight and dawn, smooth and white as milk. Behind us, northward, lay Kouzomen, a low line of black dots in intense shade, under a delicious pink sky: and on the horizon lay the misty golden light of the scarcely obscured midnight sun.

Mr. Rae's apology for the mosquitoes—"insects about which," he says, "there exists much prejudice," is at least amusing:—

I smear my hand with tar and oil, and watch his dainty and troubled air as he approaches it. . . . I watch him settle on the tiller, near my head. He raises his legs in turns, like the fingers of a pianist. He lifts one in the air, and works rapidly with the others. He takes two or three experimental paces, and then beats time with his two antennæ, like the conductor of an orchestra. He examines the tiller with his proboscis, and finds it is not tasty: then he sits down on two hind legs and looks about him. He elevates his proboscis like a telescope, as if to look out to sea, then smooths it down with his fore-feet.

About the people of the dreary peninsula our traveller writes in a kindly spirit. He regrets the apathy of the Russian authorities and of the priests. "We left the White Sea Peninsula," he says, "with sad impressions. It was the scene of so much unnecessary poverty and suffering—the fruits of Government neglect, of ignorance and superstition: it seemed to be the abode of fatherless children and widows, and all that are desolate and oppressed."<sup>1</sup> Writing at Solovetsk, the monastery of which is "vastly wealthy," he says: "The monks of Solovetsk have a reputation for getting rather than giving. Almost at their doors lie the harmless Karelians, whose families starve in the summer, who travel to the Arctic coast to earn their bread, and suffer and die by the hundred for the want of some little medical help. Three hundred miles away lie the tûndras of the Samoyedes; and with all the priests and steamers these poor savages have remained almost untaught." Greed and superstition are here akin.

A very readable description of an interview with a priest in Karelia is given on page 209. Of the population of the White Sea shores, it seems, the Russians are, speaking generally, the

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<sup>1</sup> On page 206 we read:—"The North Russian peasants dawdle. . . . The poor people have other qualities, however, that entitle them to respect. We have wandered again and again among the peasants, leaving our effects unwatched and unsecured: and with the exception of the small theft or piece of spitefulness at Siem Ostrova, we never missed so much as a piece of sugar. Of the class immediately above the peasants—those who are in the position of making bargains or receiving money otherwise than as wages—we have a different opinion. As to the miserably underpaid *tchinovniks* or officials: if they attempt to add to their incomes, they are hardly to be blamed."

traders, fishers, and speculators; the Lapps and Karelians, the hunters and fishers; the Quains, or Finns, the agriculturists. In Keret there are about twenty Karelians, most of whom go to the Arctic fisheries:—

The priest of Keret [says Mr. Rae] came at our invitation to drink coffee with us. He told us the fishermen generally take their boys with them to the north, leaving one or two to help the mother. So that in the summer months the school, which is free to all, but not compulsory, is quite deserted. In the winter, when the men and boys are at home, perhaps fifty children attend the school. I asked why the people of Keret and elsewhere, who travel yearly backward and forward, do not take their families and settle where fish and employment are so abundant, rather than live on as at present, half-starving, here, and toiling on the long journeys over the snow each autumn and spring? Some of the Mürmansk travel a thousand versts to the sea, from Pomoria and Onéga and even farther—setting out in the end of March. It is a strange sight to see old and young, parties of twenty or fifty, drawing clothes, bread, anchor, chains, &c., on hand-sledges.

He said they were fond of their homes, and that life would be hard in the winter on the Arctic coast. I said not so hard as here; the sea being open, the climate less trying; in Gavrilova, Kola, and Tiribirka people lived in comfort. I added that if the Mürmansk summer population were to settle there, there would soon be steamers and a telegraph line, as on the coast of Finmarken. I asked if he had ever tried to persuade the people to settle on the Mürman coast. He said, "Yes." But as the emigration of half his flock would reduce his comforts and advantages, and might involve his following them to the lonely winter sea, I imagine the priest was not importunate in his persuasion. I am sorry to say I think it more likely he would work upon their superstitious fears to detain them in Keret.

In the good little steamer *Curfew* the travellers steamed away from Vardö:—

The sun was never clouded, the fresh north wind never abated, and on the fourth day we crossed the Arctic circle. It was a warm golden evening, the water had the lovely transparent colour of chalcedony, and there was a glorious swell on the sea.

It must be nights such as this that fascinate one, and, effacing miseries, awaken a longing for the Arctic—so great as to be almost unaccountable; greater even than the longing after old pictures, noble buildings, or the buried past, and equal to the unfulfilled longings of a dream.

On the seventh evening they were in sight of Montrose.

The illustrations in this attractive volume are really good. The type is large and clear. There is a well-drawn map. We heartily recommend this ably-written story of a cruise in regions of which scarcely anything is known; it is highly interesting, and has much information on religious subjects.