

CLASSICS TO GO

THROUGH ARCTIC LAPLAND



CHARLES JOHN CUTCLIFFE WRIGHT HYNE

Through Arctic Lapland

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RINGING A BEAR TRACK

Preface

It seems customary in a book of travel to make frequent allusions to other voyagers who have journeyed over the same ground, or at least the same district, and to make constant references to them, and give copious quotations from their works. Of course we ought to have gone to the British Museum before starting on our travel, and there read up all books which in the least bore upon the country which we were going to visit. We omitted to do this, firstly, because we preferred to observe things for ourselves, from our own individual standpoint, unprejudiced by the way in which other people had observed them; and, secondly, from the far more potent reason that we made our actual start in a great hurry, and had little enough time for any preparations whatever.

However, on our return to England we thought well to check the information we had garnered. So we duly provided ourselves with readers' tickets for that institution, and went to the British Museum Library, and got down every book which seemed in any way to bear upon the country we had wandered over, regardless of the tongue in which it was written. It was a surprise to us to learn (and may we add that the surprise was not without its pleasant savour?) that of all the volumes in that collection not one covered the route which we took during summer through Arctic Lapland. Many had gone near it, from a gentleman of bygone date who wrote in Latin, to Mr. Paul du Chaillu, who chats about the larger part of the Scandinavian Peninsula. But we seemed to have stumbled across the one bit of Europe which has not been pilloried on paper at one time or another, and so we here venture to take up a couple of note-books which were originally made for personal

gratification, and amplify them into a volume of letterpress and sketches which may haply interest others.

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Log Track across Swamp

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CHAPTER I

LONDON TO VARDÖ, WITH A FEW EXAMPLES OF HOW PLANS MAY BE CHANGED

The wharves of Katherine Dock were black with many thousands of people, and all their eyes converged on a little auxiliary barque which was working out of the basin under her own gentle steam. The barque carried a white tub at her mainmast-head, was rigged with single topsails, bore many white double-ended boats upturned on skids amidships, and was decorated with sundry other matters which even to the shore eye would seem strange in London river. Stacked in her waist were bags of coal, crates, packing cases, a couple of ice-anchors, a tangle of trellis-work sledges, and other quaint trifles which had not yet been struck below.

Any craft more unlike the ordinary conventional type of yacht it would have been hard to conceive, and yet the burgee of the Royal Thames Yacht Club fluttered out from above the white crow's nest (or fouled the telescope rail, as the case might be) and an English blue ensign hung clean and unfrayed from the mizzen truck, as the mizzen gaff, its more orthodox station, had not yet been set up.

The barque was already a vessel well known. As a sealer and whale-fisher she had earned fat dividends for Dundee owners; as the *S.Y. Windward* she had made history, and helped to found the British colony of Elmwood in Franz Josef's Land, and had been iced up for an Arctic winter in a bay at the back of Cape Flora; and on this trip she was destined (although no one even guessed at it then) to acquire a far more international fame. She was setting out

then from Katherine Dock under the command of that old ice-sailor, Captain James Brown, to carry recruits and supplies to the Jackson-Harmsworth exploring expedition after their second winter amongst the polar ice; and she landed these on the sterile rocks of Franz Josef's Land after a bitter struggle with the floes, and brought back with her to the land of champagne and telegraph wires, Frithjof Nansen, the Norskman, as by this time all the world most thoroughly knows.

Slowly that single-topsail barque was warped across the dock basin, a strange small creature amongst the huge steam shipping; slowly she passed through the outer lock; and then the ebb of the muddy river took her, and she moved out into the stream, and the black crowds on the dock-head sent up thunderous cheers.

The little auxiliary propeller fluttered astern, and she dropped down river at no ostentatious speed. But the white barrel perched up there under the main truck betrayed her always, and every vessel of every nationality in those cosmopolitan reaches knew her as the yacht of the English Arctic expedition. The blue ensign was kept on a constant dance up and down from her mizzen truck, as it answered other bunting, which was dipped in salute from countless peaks and poop-staffs. Some crews cheered her as she passed at her puny gait through the crowded shipping; the band of the *Worcester* played her down the river out of earshot; everybody she passed warmed to her enterprise and wished her success and a snug return.

Ladies, and owner, and shore folk, had come down the river to give her a final "send off," but these left at Greenhythe with the mud pilot, and from that began an easy voyage to the rim of the Polar Sea. The *Windward* was to go North as much as possible under her own canvas; but as some steam would certainly be required for head winds

and other emergencies, she was to call in at Vardö at the entrance to the White Sea to rebunker, so as to have the largest possible supply of good Welsh steam coal for her final battle with the Northern ice. To this port, in the north-easternmost angle of Arctic Norway, the *Windward* carried as passengers Mr. Cecil Hayter, who drew pictures for this book, and another man, who wrote it.

Now, to say that we two had a vague notion of what was ahead of us was putting the matter mildly. We knew many of those concerned in the Jackson-Harmsworth expedition, and had always had an interest in the achievements of the *Windward*; and one night in somebody's billiard-room we had talked vaguely over "going North and doing something up there" ourselves. We imagined this something might be to explore the Petchora or one of the lesser-known Northern Siberian rivers, to make the acquaintance of the Samoyede in his native *choom*, and incidentally to do some big game shooting. We knew remarkably little about the country, and so were quite unfettered in making some very appetising plans. This was six months before the *Windward* sailed, and though we met two or three times in the interval, the matter was only mentioned casually, and with merely a dilettante interest.

Finally, when Mr. Alfred Harmsworth wired "Are you going North with *Windward*?" and got a simultaneous reply of "Delighted" from each of us, the yacht was booked to sail in fifty hours' time, and any preparations we wished to make were naturally hustled.



MIDNIGHT AMONG THE LOFÖTENS.

When we actually did get under weigh, our outfit consisted of one inferior double-barrelled 12-bore shot-gun by an anonymous maker, one good Marlin '45 repeating rifle carrying a long bullet, a small assortment of tinned foods and loaded cartridges, an imaginative map, the clothes we stood up in, and a brown canvas, seaman's bag apiece containing sleeping sack, tooth-brush, spare shirt, and foreign office passport with a hieroglyphical Russian *visé*.

But if our equipment was slender, the plan of our expedition was at least definite and concise. The Petchora and North Siberia were to be left undisturbed in their accustomed darkness. Even the virgin delights of Novaya Zembya (to which island a steamer was alleged to be on the point of starting from Archangel) were to be left for another time. We were going to see the Lapp in that unmeddled-with country, Arctic Lapland.

It had been my luck to live *en famille* with some herder Lapps once before in North-Western Norway. I had some elk shooting and some fishing up there, and I came across the tribe one day poaching red char from one of my own hired lakes. I kept silence about my temporary proprietorship, and assisted to steal my own fish, after which I encamped with them for seven days, sleeping *à la belle étoile*, and providing my own nutriment. The tribe possessed some three hundred head of tame reindeer, and as my available luggage at the time was a Kodak camera, I managed to get some rather good photographs of the deer at close quarters.

It was these photographs which suggested going to see the Lapp in his own domains. The map showed the position of Lapland in large letters, and for the sake of definiteness we made up our minds to cross it from north to south, and take to the seas again at the head of the Gulf of Bothnia. That should be our expedition. It was delightfully simple in its scope and comprehensiveness.

Drawing from our own ignorance, and from the united ignorance of others (most freely and generously bestowed), we mapped out the details of the campaign with glibness and ease. At Vardö we were to purchase furs to wear and horses to ride. Russian horses, or rather ponies, they were to be: our friends told us all about them. And then we had merely to procure a guide and interpreter, and set off. There was a road along the north shore of the Varanger fjord to

Vadsö, and from there a bridle path of sorts led to Næsseby and Puolnak, and down through the country by Lake Enare to Kittila, where it met a broad road which continued down by the side of the Torneo River as far as the coast. We knew all this because the large scale map which we bought at the best map shop in London said it was so. And there were plenty of villages—the map marked them with clearness and precision. At nights we would either sleep out in our furs and blanket sacks, or sleep in the villages.

As regards the commissariat, that we decided would be simple also. Reindeer meat, salmon, rye bread, milk, cheese, and butter would be always procurable from the natives. And besides, we should shoot far more game than we could possibly use for the pot. Men who “knew the country round there” assured us clearly on this point. Game swarmed. The country was alive with bear, ptarmigan, willow grouse, and capercaillie. I wonder now that no one suggested we might pick up a belated mammoth. And though I personally had been shooting in North Norway before, and so discounted part of the yarns, I did think we should find enough to keep going upon.

The few tins of provisions we did take were mainly to serve as luxuries. For instance, we had quite a large supply of *foie gras* and larks in aspic.

I had a vivid recollection of how the last tin of that *pâté de foie gras* went. We had put in a forty-mile tramp by way of sharpening the appetite, and we sat down in the middle of a gray cloud of mosquitoes to share it between us. It was a tin about four inches in diameter by two deep, and it contained a generous casing of tallow, which had partly melted through being carried next to a perspiring Laplander's back. There was no scrap of any other food available, and so we divided the *pâté* (and the tallow) with mathematical accuracy. Hayter eyed the polished tin when

we had finished, and said thoughtfully that he always had liked *foie gras*. I mentioned that sometimes I preferred beef or even venison; that I could do with about six pounds of beef just then; and that as a meal for a hungry man, *foie gras* was all very well, but did not seem to go quite far enough.

With these hints, then, at our initial ignorance of what lay beyond, let me pass on to Vardö, which was the real starting-point of both our plans and our journey. The *Windward* made an easy voyage of it on the whole up to there, and although she carried away her main-topsail yard, and smashed the reefing spar below it in two places, that was looked upon as rather a slice of luck, as it might well have been disastrous if such an accident had happened later, when every ounce of steam and every inch of canvas might be wanted in the fierce wrestle with the Polar ice. In Vardö it might be repaired.



VARDÖ HARBOUR.

Inside Vardö harbour walls, then, to a mooring we came, and the smells of the place closed round us and took possession. Bobbling about on the harbour swell around us were some two hundred vessels of strange Northern rig, and almost all connected with the trade in fish. There is no agriculture in this town perched on the northern outskirts of the continent; there are no trees to make a timber business; there are no metals or fuels to dig from the earth; there are

no inducements to weave or carry on any of the manufactures of a more gentle clime. The sea is the only field which yields the Vardö man a harvest, and from the sea he reaps it with unremitting industry. Finns, Russians, Norwegians, Samoyedes, Lapps, all join in the work and bring their catch, in clumsy yots, and square-sailed viking boats, and the other weird unhandy craft of the North, in past the concrete wall of Vardö harbour, and run alongside the smelling warehouses which are built on piles at the water-side, and send it ashore all slimy and glistening, and then go off to dangle bait in the chill inhospitable seas for more.

The men of the town, and the women, gut the fish, and leave the entrails to rot in the streets, or under the wharfs, or in the harbour water; and then the carcasses are carried to the outskirts of the town, and hung on endless racks of wood to shrivel, and dry, and scent the air as thoroughly as the rains of the climate will permit. At the corner posts hang posies of cods' heads to serve as fodder for the cows and goats during the winter, and these too help to amplify the stink. And from the mainland, beyond the fort, when the breezes blow Vardö-wards, there drift across more forceful stinks from the factory where they flense the Finner whales, and try down the blubber into oil, and cut up the pink beef for canned meats and fodder for the Arctic cow.

In the harbour, steamers from France, and Hamburg, and lower Norway, load bales of the dried cod, which will carry the aroma of Vardö as far as Bremen, Brest, and St. Petersburg.

As wooden places go, the town itself is not uncomely. It is built on an island, which is nearly cut in two by the fjords that form the harbour, and it has two principal streets running at right angles to one another, and others again branching off these. The houses are of all colours from ochre

to gray, and all sizes, and all architectures. There are roses and stocks and geraniums showing from behind the windows. The older roofs are green with grass, and dotted with the flowers of buttercup and clover. Some are roofed with turf alone. Goats feed on the roofs, and ladders lead up to them, so that the owners can pull off burning rafters in case of a fire. There are goats in the streets too, snuffling amongst the disused fish.

Once the town was a strong place, but the star-shaped fort, which was built in 1735, is to-day obsolete, though field-guns and some breech-loaders on slides still grin through the embrasures, and the garrison of fifteen men take it in orderly turns to hoist the Norwegian flag. The racks of drying fish carcasses run along the side of its ramp, and bristling nosegays of cods' heads dangle on either side of its main entrance.

There are other towns of Norway given up to the cult of the cod, but nowhere is it so entirely the one staple of commerce as in this ancient settlement so far within the Arctic Circle. The tail of the Gulf Stream keeps its climate equable. It is never very hot and never very cold, and in this it differs vastly from the interior of the continent to the southward, where both extremes prevail; and if it has to put up with a six months' night in the winter of the year, with only a slight lightening of the gloom at midday to tell that the sun is still somewhere in the universe to keep the world a-move, at the same time it has another six months when all lamps can be dismantled and put away, and day burns high all round the clock and round again.

But the summer is the time when commerce bristles. It is then that the larger merchants toil to make their wealth; and when the lamps begin to kindle in the windows, they take the mail steamers and go away to follow the retiring sun. Some merely retreat to Tromsö, some to Bergen, some

to Petersburg; but there are others who go to Italy and Southern Europe; and there is one who washes the cod-stink from him, and dons the garb of fashion, and winter after winter hies him to a tiny principality on the Riviera, where they keep a roulette bank, which it is his mood to try and break. The gambling rooms down there are cosmopolitan, certainly, but I wonder how many people have guessed that they usually contain a stock-fish prince who gets his wealth from the chilly Polar sea?

Now Vardö was not what we had come so far to see, or smell. We wanted to get started on our travel in Arctic Lapland as quickly as might be; and as soon as the whale-boat had set us ashore amongst the fish litter on one of the wharves, we set about pushing inquiries as far as they would go.

The success we met with in this pursuit was not brilliant. In fact the results might be catalogued as almost entirely negative.

In the first instance the horse-bubble was pricked once and for all. Lapland, it appeared, was largely made up of swamps and lakes and rivers, and we were gravely informed that the horse was not a navigable animal. If we wanted to get through, we must walk and wade where that was possible, and canoe or raft the rest; and it was suggested that if we wished to ensure success, we had better in addition borrow two pairs of good reliable wings to help us. Anything we wished to take with us must be borne about our own persons or carried on the backs of hired men. And this was about all the definite information we could arrive at. The cause of the deficit was simple: during the summer months, communication across the interior was entirely interrupted, and Vardö could not be expected to know much about a journey which was never done.

In winter, when the snow crust hardened, and the rivers and the lakes were roofed with massive ice, then movement about the country was a comparatively easy thing. There were recognised routes, and the traveller could pack himself into one of the boat-like, reindeer sledges, and move along over the frozen surface at from six to ten miles per hour, and be sure of relays of deer at certain appointed stations. But in summer the deer were away deep in the fjelds, fattening on the ivory-yellow moss; they were useless to travel with through swamps and across deep open water, and the mosquitoes would have maddened them if they had been tried; and, in consequence, the natives of the interior bowed to the inevitable. They just stayed in their farms, or their fishing-camps, or their herd-stations, and worked during the brief summer months to store up food against the long grim frozen night of winter.

At first, then, it was pointed out to us that we were proposing to do an impossibility, and it was suggested that we should either wait in Vardö till the snows came and sledges could be used, or abandon the Lapland expedition and go off to explore the Petchora, or visit that fascinatingly unknown island, Novaya Zembyla. We quite saw the charm of these two last alternatives, and made arrangements for riving the secrets from Novaya Zembyla some other season, and thinning its flocks of deer and polar bears, and charting the Matoskin Skyar; but for the present Lapland was what our souls hankered after, and we had got to get there somehow.

It is not to be denied, though, that the Novaya Zembyla scheme had its seductions. There was in Vardö harbour a weird, clumsy craft of the type locally known as "yot," which had visited that island a-many times with a crew of hunters. She had two masts with a square sail (not lug) hoisting on each, and her best point of sailing was more or less before the wind. With the wind anywhere ahead, she just had to

run into shelter, or drift, till the breeze chose to veer again. She had no notion whatever of ratching to windward, and was not addicted to making certain or rapid passages. That summer she was laid up. During the previous summer (having sailed in the spring) she had gone out to the Kara Strait, and then pushed up along the Western Novaya Zemblyan coast, following the line of drift-ice as it retreated north. She had an ample crew on board, and these made short expeditions inshore, taking with them powder and shot, and bringing back deer skins and deer meat. They seldom went far inland from the coast, for fear lest the clumsy "yot" should be blown off in some sudden gale, and they would be left without means of retreat; and they went for the commercial business of meat-hunting alone, just as their fellows hunted the seas for fish; and when their holds were full of venison and peltries, it was a case of 'bout-ship with them, and back to Vardö again as fast as they could drive her.

We could not find that any of these hunters had so much as shut the eye of sleep upon the island. Samoyedes were alleged to reside there permanently, shifting their *chooms* from point to point as the struggle for a lean subsistence prompted; and in the south there certainly was a Russian colony in the leading strings of the Government of Archangel, and visited once a year by an erratic steamer. But, as I say, the great bulk of the island was *terra incognita*; there was no reason why it should be exceptionally impassable; and there was every cause to expect that it would be plentifully rambled over by fowl of all sorts—and possibly the great auk, who knew?—and graciously blessed in the matter of four-footed big game.

The charm of the Arctic (which must be felt to be understood) had got us well in tow, and we licked our lips over the thought of this unknown isle, and drunk up all available yarns concerning it, and made exhaustive plans to

explore it in the not very distant future. But we did not allow this mere flirtation to seduce us away from the more immediate business of the present. Lapland was what we wanted, and it was on schemes for crossing Lapland at which we hammered with unremitting industry.

At last, after much pressing, it was admitted that we might possibly find carriers for our transport at the other side of the Varanger fjord, but at the same time it was pointed out that we probably should not. At any rate the route from Puolnak was utterly impracticable. Our only chance was to start from the Neiden Elv, cross from there to Enare See, boat that, and then trust to luck. Provisions, we were told plainly, it was most unlikely we should find, but (so absolutely ignorant were these Vardö people of the interior of Lapland) the prospects of sport were said to be extremely rosy. There were few bear or other big game, to be sure, but the gun would provide us with fowl in all abundance for the pot. And, anyway, it was entirely useless to further recruit our slender stock of tins. It was vastly improbable that we should be able to get carriers for the few we had got. It was more than likely that we should have to desert them, and press on alone with merely cartridges as personal luggage, if we were fools enough to try and travel through country at that season where it was not intended by Nature that man should go.

Now this information was none of it very encouraging, and none of it very definite. It was most of it frankly given as depending on mere hearsay. And although we advertised our want largely, and tramped up and down the fish-strewn streets to see countless likely people, nowhere could we find a man who knew Lapland personally, much less one who would (for a fee) act as guide, much less one who could serve as guide and interpreter both. For here was another difficulty: the Lapps spoke Quivnsk (or Finnish), and we did not. We possessed a slender vocabulary of Russian and