

Bayard Taylor

The appearance of an American author in this volume invites an explanation, but needs no apology. Bayard Taylor, from a Quaker family in Pennsylvania set off at the age of twenty for a two year exploration of Europe, to be financed by journalism. His *Views Afoot, or Europe seen with Knapsack and Staff* (1846) was a best-seller and launched his career as a writer, lecturer and finally as a diplomat. He excelled as a travel writer, describing journeys to the Mediterranean, Asia Minor, Egypt, central Africa, India, China, and Japan. He was appointed to the diplomatic service to St Petersburg, and in 1863 became *chargé d'affaires*. In 1878 he was accredited United States Minister in Berlin, where he died in the same year. I have permitted his guest appearance here because he is an unusually good travel writer, and because he provides the only account of winter travelling in Finland in the whole period. In addition his 'Cruise on Lake Ladoga' touches on another area neglected by British travellers. His acquaintance with an Englishman living in Lapland is an unexpected novelty.

A decision to explore Sweden landed Taylor there in December 1856; he took lessons in Swedish before setting off with his companion Braisted on a remarkable tour, which he described in *Northern Travel: Summer and Winter Pictures of Sweden, Denmark and Lapland*, published in London in 1858. He began by heading north by sledge to Haparanda and Tornio. He followed the route up the river Tornio which Edward Daniel Clarke had taken in 1799; Clarke had travelled slowly upstream, mainly by boat, in summer, beset by mosquitoes, while Taylor, using post horses, (the posting system now extended at least to Mouniovaara) travelled briskly, mainly on the ice, and endured temperatures as low as -49°F, at which point the mercury froze. His horses seem never to have frozen. Despite these differences, the route his recognisable the same as Clarke's:

Our road led up the left bank of the river, both sides of which were studded with neat little villages. The country was well cleared and cultivated, and appeared so populous and flourishing that I could scarcely realise in what part of the world we were.

Taylor's writing contains a number of descriptions of the magical colours of the short Lapland day, and these decorate his book almost like a series of paintings at an exhibition:

The next day was a day to be remembered: such a glory of twilight splendors for six full hours was beyond all the charms of daylight in any zone. We started at seven, with a temperature of 20° below zero, still keeping up the left bank of the Tornea. The country now rose into bold hills, and the features of the scenery became broad and majestic. The northern sky was again pure violet, and a pale red tinge from the dawn rested on the tops of the snowy hills. The prevailing color of the sky slowly brightened into lilac, then into pink, then rose color, which again gave way to a flood of splendid orange when the sun appeared. Every change of color affected the tone of the landscape. The woods, so wrapped in snow that not a single green needle was to be seen, took by turns the hues of the sky, and seemed to give out, rather than to reflect, the opalescent lustre of the morning. The sunshine brightened instead of dispelling these effects. At noon the sun's disc was not more than 1° above the horizon, throwing a level golden light on the hills. The north, before us, was as blue as the Mediterranean, and the vault of heaven, overhead, canopied us with pink. Every object was glorified and transfigured in the magic glow.

After pausing for this painting of the scene, we are immediately moved on to the practicalities of bread and butter:

At the first station we got some hot milk, with raw salmon, shingle bread and frozen butter. Our horses were good, and we drove merrily along, up the frozen Tornea. The roads were filled with people going to church, probably to celebrate some religious anniversary. Fresh ruddy faces had they, firm features, strong frames and resolute carriage, but the most of them were positively ugly, and, by contrast with the frank Swedes, their expression was furtive and sinister. Near Packila we passed a fine old church of red brick, with a very handsome belfry. At Niemis we changed horses in ten minutes, and hastened on up the bed of the Tornea to Matarengi [Övertorneå], where we should reach the Arctic Circle. The hills rose higher, with fine sweeping outlines, and the river was still half a mile broad—a plain of solid snow, with the track marked out by bushes. The ambition of many travellers to the north was to see the midnight sun; Taylor's aspiration was to 'enter the Arctic Zone in the dead of winter'. Although this was a moment for rejoicing 'It was impossible to toss our caps, for they were not only tied upon our heads, but frozen

fast to our beards.' Their spirits never flagged: 'it would have been difficult to find two jollier men with frozen noses.'
They made good progress, with a new experience, it seemed, every day:

It was four o'clock, and our horses were beginning to stagger, when we reached a little village called Jokijalka, on the Russian [ie Finnish] side. The postilion stopped at a house, or rather a quadrangle of huts, which he made me comprehend was an inn, adding that it was 4 *polan* and 3 *belikor* (a fearfully unintelligible distance!) to the next one. We entered, and found promise enough in the thin, sallow, sandy-haired, and most obsequious landlord, and a whole herd of rosy children, to decide us to stop. We were ushered into the milk-room, which was warm and carpeted, and had a single narrow bed. I employed my vocabulary with good effect, the quick-witted children helping me out, and in due time we got a supper of fried mutton, bread, butter, and hot milk. The children came in every few minutes to stare at our writing, an operation which they probably never saw before. They would stand in silent curiosity for half an hour at a time, then suddenly rush out, and enjoy a relief of shouts and laughter on the outside. Since leaving Matarengi we had been regarded at all the stations with much wonder, not always unmixed with mistrust.

At Muoniovaara 'presently appeared a tall, slender man dressed in the universal gray suit which travelling Englishmen wear, from the Equator to the Poles.' This was an English resident, John Wolley, a naturalist and noted ornithologist, educated at Eton and Cambridge and trained in the law and in medicine, who had lived – or been based - there for several years. The travellers spent several days with him, lodging with a neighbouring carpenter, and he introduced them to many aspects of local life, including one of his visits as a local doctor to the natives. It was Wolley, and not a native, who introduced them to both the sauna ('a vapour bath') and to reindeer driving; Taylor gives vivid accounts of both experiences. The latter proved to be a necessary preparation for his coming travels : CHAPTER X: A REINDEER JOURNEY ACROSS LAPLAND. He describes his first lesson:

I seated myself, took proper hold of the rein, and awaited the signal to start. My deer was a strong, swift animal, who had just shed his horns. Ludwig set off first; my deer gave a startling leap, dashed around the corner of the house, and made down the hill. I tried to

catch the breath which had been jerked out of me, and to keep my balance, as the pulk, swaying from side to side, bounced over the snow. It was too late; a swift presentiment of the catastrophe flashed across my mind, but I was powerless to avert it. In another second I found myself rolling in the loose snow, with the pulk bottom upward beside me. The deer, who was attached to my arm, was standing still, facing me, with an expression of stupid surprise (but no sympathy) on his face. I got up, shook myself, righted the pulk, and commenced again. Off we went, like the wind, down the hill, the snow flying in my face and blinding me. My pulk made tremendous leaps, bounding from side to side, until, the whirlwind suddenly subsiding, I found myself off the road, deep overhead in the snow, choked and blinded, and with small snowdrifts in my pockets, sleeves and bosom. My beard and eyebrows became instantly a white, solid mass, and my face began to tingle from its snow-bath; but, on looking back, I saw as white a beard suddenly emerge from a drift, followed by the stout body of Braisted, who was gathering himself up after his third shipwreck.

We took a fresh start, I narrowly missing another overturn, as we descended the slope below the house, but on reaching the level of the Muonio, I found no difficulty in keeping my balance, and began to enjoy the exercise. My deer struck out, passed the others, and soon I was alone on the track. In the grey Arctic twilight, gliding noiselessly and swiftly over the snow, with the low huts of Muonioniska dimly seen in the distance before me, I had my first true experience of Lapland travelling.

After Muoniovaara Taylor largely abandoned his poetic praise of the scenery, describing his return from dining with Wolley more realistically:

Warmed and comforted by such luxurious fare, we climbed the hill to the carpenter's house, in the dreary Arctic twilight, in the most cheerful and contented frame of mind. Was this, indeed, Lapland? Did we, indeed, stand already in the dark heart of the polar Winter? Yes; there was no doubt of it. The imagination could scarcely conceive a more desolate picture than that upon which we gazed—the plain of sombre snow, beyond which the black huts of the village were faintly discernible, the stunted woods and bleak hills, which night and the raw snow clouds had half obscured, and yonder fur-clad figure gliding silently along beside his reindeer. Yet, even here, where Man seemed to have settled out of pure spite against Nature, were comfort and

hospitality and kindness. We entered the carpenter's house, lit our candles and pipes, and sat down to enjoy at ease the unusual feeling of shelter and of home.

This is more the mood of the remainder of Taylor's journey north, which ended at Kautokeino. Of 'Lippivara' he wrote 'I have rarely seen anything quite so bleak and God-forsaken as this village.' The excitement of reindeer-driving palled, and everywhere now the colours had changed to shadowy mist:

We pursued our way in complete silence. Our little caravan, in single file, presented a strange, shadowy, mysterious appearance as it followed the winding path, dimly seen through the mist, first on this side and then on that; not a sound being heard, except the crunching of one's own pulk over the snow. My reindeer and myself seemed to be the only living things, and we were pursuing the phantoms of other travellers and other deer, who had long ago perished in the wilderness. It was impossible to see more than a hundred yards; some short, stunted birches, in their spectral coating of snow, grew along the low ridges of the deep, loose snow, which separated the marshes, but nothing else interrupted the monotony of the endless grey ocean through which we went floundering, apparently at hap-hazard. How our guides found the way was beyond my comprehension, for I could discover no distinguishable landmarks. After two hours or more we struck upon a cluster of huts called Palajarvi, seven miles from Lippajarvi, which proved that we were on the right track.

Taylor's return journey, unlike Clarke's, simply retraced his tracks, and he was in too much of a hurry always to revisit the acquaintances which he had made on the way out. John Wolley he did not forget, though, and paid this warm tribute to him:

I cannot close this chapter, however, without confessing my obligations to Mr. Wolley, whose thorough knowledge of the Lapps and Finns enabled me to test the truth of my own impressions, and to mature opinions which I should otherwise, from my own short experience, have hesitated in stating. Mr. Wolley, with that pluck and persistence of English character which Emerson so much admires, had made himself master of all that Lapland can furnish to the traveller, but intended remaining another year for scientific purposes. If he

gives to the world—as I hope and trust he will—the result of this long and patient inquiry and investigation, we shall have at last a standard authority for this little-known corner of Europe. We were also indebted to Mr. Wolley for much personal kindness, which I take pleasure in acknowledging in the only way he cannot prevent.

They left Muoniovaara 'on the afternoon of the 24th of January, leaving Mr. Wolley to wait for June and the birds in that dismal seclusion.' The only publication of Wolley's that I can trace is an illustrated catalogue for a collection of bird's eggs, *Ootheca Wolleyana*. The image of the Englishman in 'the universal gray suit' living in this remote part of Lapland, looking after his reindeer, doctoring the natives, and waiting for the birds to return, is a haunting one. To learn that he fathered twins adds to the glamour.

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Only six years later Taylor reappears in the north as a diplomat, accredited at St Petersburg. 'A Cruise on Lake Ladoga' appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1864 and was reprinted in *By-Ways of Europe*, a collection of his travel writings. It gives an indication of how quickly and widely steamer travel was developing; there were at least two rival steamers working on Lake Ladoga, the *Valamo* and the *Letuchie*, they raced one another and occasionally got in each other's way.

The *Valamo*, with Taylor and a companion (identified only as 'P') among the crowds on board, travelled along the west coast of Lake Ladoga, stopping for the first night in the monastery at Konevets, exploring the legendary 'Konkamen or Horse Rock', and stopping at Käkisalmi (Kexholm):

Before us lay a single wharf, with three wooden buildings leaning against a hill of sand.

“But where is Kexholm?”

“A verst inland” says the captain; “and I will give you just half an hour to see it.”

There were a score of peasants, with clumsy two-wheeled carts and shaggy ponies at the landing. Into one of these we clambered, gave the word of command, and we whirled off at a gallop. There may have been some elasticity in the horse, but there certainly was none in the cart. It was a perfect conductor, and the shock with which it passed over stones and leaped ruts was instantly communicated to the *os sacrum*, passing thence along the vertebrae, to discharge itself in the teeth. Our driver was a sunburnt Finn, who was bent upon performing

his share of the contract, in order that he might afterwards with a better face demand a ruble. On receiving just the half, however, he put it into his pocket, without a word of remonstrance.

“*Suomi?*” I asked, calling up a Finnish word with an effort.

“*Suomi-lainen,*” he answered, proudly enough, though the exact meaning is, “I am a swamplander.”

Kexholm, which was founded in 1295, has attained since then a population of several hundreds. Grass grows between the cobblestones of its broad streets, but the houses are altogether so bright, so clean, so substantially comfortable, and the geraniums and roses peeping out between snowy curtains in almost every window suggested such cozy interiors, that I found myself quite attracted towards the plain little town. “Here,” said I to P., “is a nook which is really out of the world. No need of a monastery, where you have such perfect seclusion, and the indispensable solace of natural society to make it endurable.” Pleasant faces occasionally looked out, curiously, at the impetuous strangers: had they known our nationality, I fancy the whole population would have run together. Reaching the last house, nestled among twinkling birch-trees on a bend of the river beyond, we turned about, and made for the fortress, - another conquest of the Great Peter. Its low ramparts had a shabby, neglected look; an old drawbridge spanned the moat and there was no sentinel to challenge us as we galloped across. In and out again, and down the long, quiet street, and over the jolting level to the top of the sandhill, - we had seen Kexholm in half an hour.

The steamer's timetable controlled everything, and Taylor's wish to linger had to give way to a vow to return.

The boat docked next at the island of Valamo, but the travellers decided to postpone their visit to the church and monastery until the return journey, so that they could experience '[t]he anniversary of Saints Sergius and Herrmann, miracle-workers'; instead, they climbed a summit to view and marvel at the scenery. The boat continued to Sortavala, a town 'so secluded that Ladoga seems a world's highway in comparison with its quiet harbor.'

There was to be a fair on the morrow, and from the northern shore of the lake, as well as the wild inland region towards the Saima, the people had collected for trade, gossip, and festivity. Children in ragged garments of hemp, bleached upon their bodies, impudently begged for pocket-money; women in scarlet kerchiefs curiously

scrutinized us; peasants carried bundles of freshly mown grass to the horses which were exposed for sale; ladies with Hungarian hats, crushed their crinolines into queer old cabriolets; gentlemen with business faces and an aspect of wealth smoked paper cigars; and numbers of hucksters offered baskets of biscuit and cakes, of a disagreeable yellow color and great apparent toughness. It was a repetition, with slight variations, of a village fair anywhere else, or an election day in America.

Passing through the roughly paved and somewhat dirty streets, past shops full of primitive hardware, groceries which emitted powerful whiffs of salt fish or new leather, bakeries with crisp padlocks of bread in the windows, drinking-houses plentifully supplied with *qvass* and *vodki*, and, finally, the one watch-maker, and the vender of paper, pens, and Finnish almanacs, we reached a broad suburban street, whose substantial houses, with their courts and gardens, hinted at the aristocracy of Serdopol. The inn, with its Swedish sign, was large and comfortable, and a peep into the open windows disclosed as pleasant quarters as a traveller could wish. A little farther the town ceased, and we found ourselves upon a rough, sloping common, at the top of which stood the church with its neighboring belfry. It was unmistakably Lutheran in appearance, — very plain and massive and sober in color, with a steep roof for shedding snow. The only attempt at ornament was a fanciful shingle-mosaic, but in pattern only, not in color. Across the common ran a double row of small booths, which had just been erected for the coming fair; and sturdy young fellows from the country, with their rough carts and shaggy ponies, were gathering along the highway, to skirmish a little in advance of their bargains.

The road enticed us onwards into the country. On our left, a long slope descended to an upper arm of the harbor, the head of which we saw to be near at hand. The opposite shore was fairly laid out in grain-fields, through which cropped out, here and there, long walls of granite, rising higher and higher towards the west, until they culminated in the round, hard forehead of a lofty hill. There was no other point within easy reach which promised much of a view; so, rounding the head of the bay, we addressed ourselves to climbing the rocks, somewhat to the surprise of the herd-, as they drove their cows into the town to be milked.

...It was wonderfully silent. Not a bird twittered; no bleat of sheep or low of cattle was heard from the grassy fields; no shout of children, or

evening hail from the returning boats of the fishers. Over all the land brooded an atmosphere of sleep, of serene, perpetual peace. To sit and look upon it was in itself a refreshment like that of healthy slumber. The restless devil which lurks in the human brain was quieted for the time, and we dreamed — knowing all the while the vanity of the dream — of a pastoral life in some such spot, among as ignorant and simple-hearted a people, ourselves as untroubled by the agitations of the world.

...Returning to the town, we halted at the top of the common to watch the farmers of the neighborhood at their horse dealing. Very hard, keen, weather-browned faces had they, eyes tight-set for the main chance, mouths worn thin by biting farthings, and hands whose hard fingers crooked with holding fast what they had earned. Faces almost of the Yankee type, many of them, and relieved by the twinkling of a humorous faculty or the wild gleam of imagination. The shaggy little horses, of a dun or dull tan-color, seemed to understand that their best performance was required, and rushed up and down the road with an amazing exhibition of mettle. I could understand nothing of the Finnish tongue except its music; but it was easy to perceive that the remarks of the crowd were shrewd, intelligent, and racy.

The remainder of Taylor's account is a long account of the anniversary celebrations, with the monastery coping with the influx of hundreds of pilgrims. The boat provided an excursion to 'the Holy Island', six miles east of the monastery. He developed a feeling far deeper than a tourist's interest from this journey across

Saima, that great, irregular lake, which, with its innumerable arms, extends for a hundred and fifty miles into the heart of Finland, clasping the forests and mountains of Savolax, where the altar-stones of Jumala still stand in the shade of sacred oaks, and the song of the Kalewala is sung by the descendants of Wainamoinen. I registered a vow to visit those Finnish solitudes.

Despite this declared intention, he seems never to have returned.