

An Account of a Voyage on the Yacht Blencathra. By Helen Peel. With a Preface by Lord Dufferin. Illustrated. A. C. McClurg & Co.

FANCY A SOCIETY BELLE in the full flush of the London season embarking on an Arctic yacht for a sail in the Kara Sea! Yet this is just what has been accomplished by Miss Helen Peel, daughter of Sir Robert Peel, an English girl who bids fair in her daring and unconventionality to turn out a second Lady Brassey. She and her companion, Mrs. Jamers, are the only ladies who have ever sailed these waters; they have been excelled in daring by the American Mrs. Peary only.

"Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the roote,

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"Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,"

wrote old Chaucer in the "Merry England" of 500 years ago, and this "longing" is as active as ever, for, though Miss Peel did not start on her 3,000 miles' voyage in "Aprille," she did set sail across the Arctic Circle in July, eighteen months ago, from the old port of Appledore, associated with King Alfred's destruction of the Danish fleet in 894. The party consisted of two ladies and two gentlemen, and a crew of 24, aboard the steam yacht Blencathra of 424 tons' burthen, which was to act as a convoy to the Orestes, with her load of rails for the trans-Siberian railway. Four other vessels, mostly belonging to the Russian Imperial Navy, accompanied these two on this dangerous voyage. The destination was Yeniseisk on the Yenisei river, where the rails and a certain amount of gold-mining machinery were to be dropped. The trip, lasting four months, was a complete success, and was superintended by Capt. Wiggins, the experienced Arctic navigator who had discovered this open all-water route to Siberia in 1874. Everything went to a charm. Miss Peel was not a good sailor, but she was not a complaining one, and took rough weather as philosophically as an exceedingly cheerful, very young and very enthusiastic person may be expected to take it. To her everything was novel and delightful, except the putrid fishing-villages of the midnight sun. The run to Hammerfest, Tromsø and the North Cape was a vivid experience, now in sunshine, now in fog and storm, and the gloomy Norwegian fjords often smiled upon the voyagers in sunniest tranquillity. Miss Peel declares that she did not suffer from cold, though she forgot to take her furs along, and intimates that she added very little, even among the ice floes, to her usual English summer clothing. The Blencathra did not touch at very many points, but the voyage included Archangel, Nova-Zembla, the land of the flat-nosed Samoyeds, and Golchika, a point not far from the place where Nansen ten days before had started on his still unfinished attempt to reach the Pole from the Siberian side. Mr. Jackson, a new explorer with the same will o' the wisp in view—that vanishing point, the Pole,—accompanied the Blencathra and was landed in the Samoyed settlements, preparatory to setting out. Captain Wiggins adds a chapter of his experiences, getting home overland in a sled from Yeniseisk to St. Petersburg, and the Marquis of Dufferin, himself a great traveller and Miss Peel's godfather, contributes a characteristically witty and graceful introduction.