

VIEW OF THE SKAGAFJORD, AND MODE OF TRAVELLING.



ICELAND;  
OR THE  
JOURNAL OF A RESIDENCE  
IN THAT ISLAND,  
DURING THE YEARS 1814 AND 1815.

CONTAINING  
OBSERVATIONS ON THE NATURAL PHENOMENA,  
HISTORY, LITERATURE, AND ANTIQUITIES OF THE ISLAND; AND  
THE RELIGION, CHARACTER, MANNERS, AND CUSTOMS  
OF ITS INHABITANTS.

WITH AN  
*INTRODUCTION AND APPENDIX.*

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BY EBENEZER HENDERSON,

Doctor in Philosophy, Member of the Royal Society of Gottenburgh, Honorary Member of  
the Literary Society of Puhnen, and Corresponding Member of the  
Scandinavian Literary Society at Copenhagen.

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Illustrated with a Map and Engravings.

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*IN TWO VOLUMES.*

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1818.

THE  
SOCIETY OF  
MUSICIANS



TO  
HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS  
CHRISTIAN FREDERIC,  
*PRINCE OF DENMARK,*  
*&c. &c. &c.*  
FROM A PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE  
OF THE DEEP INTEREST  
WHICH HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS TAKES  
IN THE INHABITANTS AND LITERATURE OF ICELAND ;  
AS A TESTIMONY OF RESPECT  
FOR THE LIBERAL PATRONAGE AND SUPPORT  
WHICH HE AFFORDS  
TO THE CAUSE OF THE BIBLE SOCIETY,  
AND A TRIBUTE  
OF THE MOST UNFEIGNED GRATITUDE  
FOR REPEATED INSTANCES OF CONDESCENDING REGARD,  
THESE VOLUMES  
ARE HUMBLY INSCRIBED,  
BY HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS'S  
MOST OBEDIENT  
AND MOST DEVOTED SERVANT,  
THE AUTHOR.





## PREFACE.

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WERE it necessary to offer any apology for the publication of these Volumes, it would be amply furnished by the interest which has been excited in the public mind in behalf of the island of which they treat. Not only have individuals, of purely scientific habits, had their curiosity awakened and gratified by the details of natural research, with which they have been presented by those who have recently visited Iceland, with a view to explore its extraordinary phenomena ; but such as bend their attention more to the history of man, and especially those who wish to contemplate him as affected by the influence of moral

and religious principle, have felt a most lively concern about the inhabitants of that remote country, and expressed an ardent desire of becoming more intimately acquainted with the peculiarities of their character and habits of life.

The object which the author had in view in visiting Iceland, was exclusively to investigate the wants of its inhabitants with respect to the Holy Scriptures ; to adopt the most eligible measures for the speedy distribution of the copies which had been provided for them by the bounty of the British and Foreign Bible Society ; and to establish a similar institution among the Icelanders, for the purpose of providing them in future with seasonable and adequate supplies of this invaluable repository of Divine Revelation. On his arrival, he found that it would be impossible for him to attain this object, except by making the tour of the island, and visiting those of its inhabitants whose concurrence and co-operation were deemed of importance to the

execution of his plan ; and as its extent, and the difficulties necessarily connected with travelling, are very considerable, he was obliged to spend upwards of a year in that country, and make his projected tour at different times.

The present work contains the result of the observations which he made in the course of these journies. Where he went over the same ground with former travellers, he has in a great measure been anticipated by the remarks which they have laid before the public ; although he flatters himself the reader will not peruse even this part of his narrative without meeting with instances both in confirmation and amplification of their statements. But most of the regions through which he passed have never been visited by any native of Great Britain, and many of them had been wholly unexplored by foreigners.

The very prominent place which the natural appearances of the island occupy on

almost every page, arises from the predominance and extraordinary characters of these phenomena. It is impossible for a stranger to take a single step in Iceland, without having some uncommon object of this description presented to his view ; and, in taking down notes of his progress, his principal difficulty lies in the selection of subjects where such a multiplicity claim his attention. It not unfrequently happens that he is denied the pleasure of seeing a human being for several days together, when proceeding from one part of the island to another. In crossing the deserts of the interior, he may travel two hundred miles without perceiving the smallest symptom of animated being of any description whatever ; and, even in traversing the inhabited parts, he still finds himself more surrounded by nature than by human society, owing to the distance from one farm-house to another.

It was not the intention of the author to have entered at all on the subject of the

history and literature of Iceland, especially as they have been treated with such consummate ability by Dr. Holland, in those parts of Sir George Mackenzie's Travels which are furnished by his pen; but it afterwards occurred to him, that many of those who perused these volumes might not have an opportunity of seeing that work; and, in order to remove the defect which must thus have attached to them, he has drawn up a brief sketch of the island and its inhabitants, and given it the form of an Introduction. Such as may wish to obtain fuller information on these subjects, he most cordially refers to Dr. Holland's Preliminary Dissertation.

The inquiry into Icelandic Poetry, was occasioned by a close study of that species of composition, with a view to ascertain the meaning of the Edda, in which is contained the ancient mythology of the Scandinavian nations. In this study the author was greatly assisted by a Danish work, entitled, "Nordens Ældste Poesie," by Jon

Olafson, a learned Icelandic antiquary and philologist.

The Map is constructed from the most recent maps which we have of Iceland, with a number of corrections, made from the author's personal observation, assisted by an accurate sketch, which was kindly furnished him by one of the Danish officers employed in surveying the coasts.

For any inaccuracies, in point of language, the author claims the indulgence of his readers; which he feels assured they will not deny him, when he informs them, that, during an absence of thirteen years from his native country, his attention has been more directed to the study of other languages, than to the cultivation of his own.

EDINBURGH,  
*April 21, 1818.*

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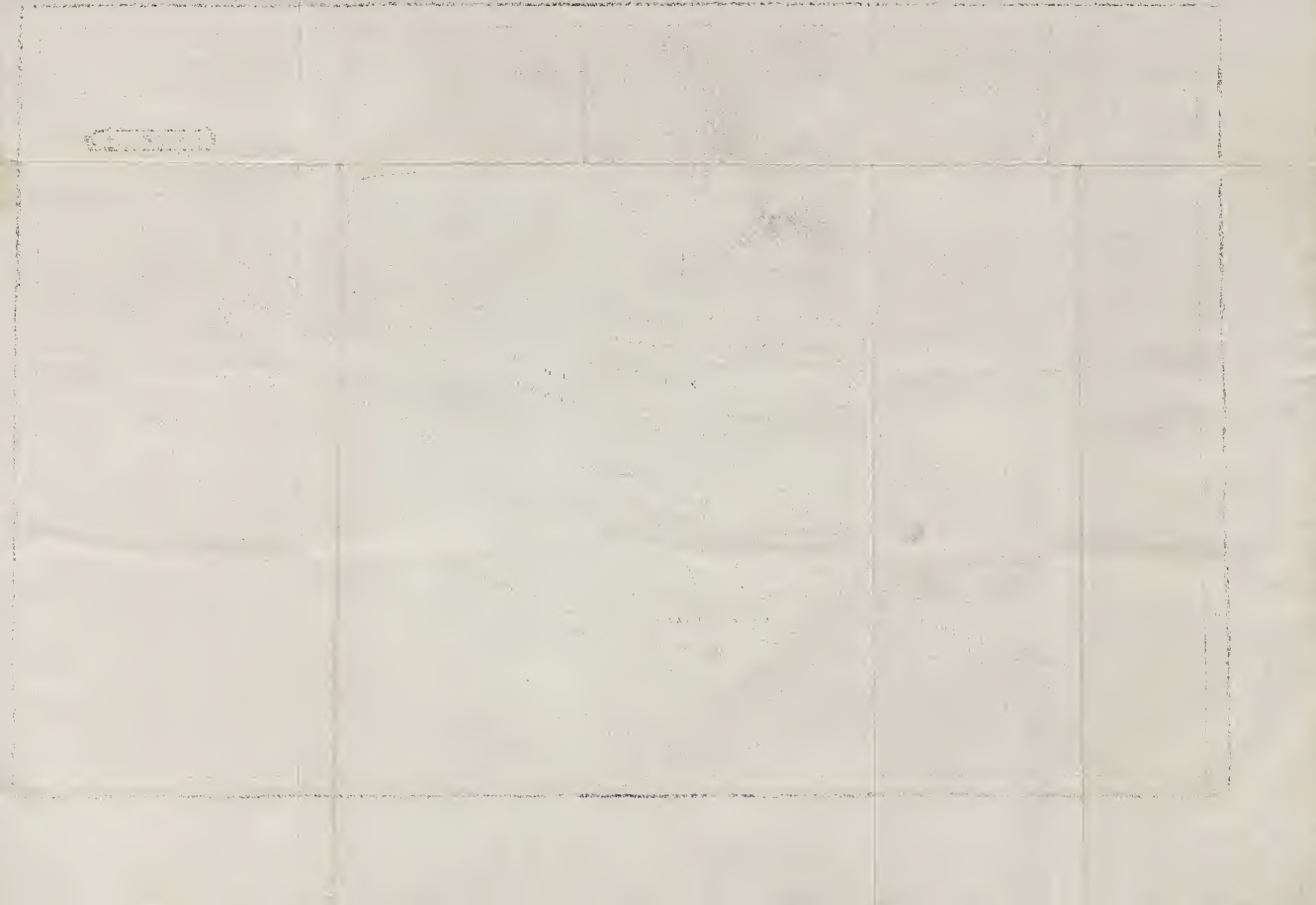
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Drawn & engraved under the direction of R. Hamberg & W. A. D. Lönn, Lithographers.

## INTRODUCTION.

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THE island of Iceland is situated in the Atlantic Ocean, on the confines of the polar circle, between  $63^{\circ} 24'$  and  $66^{\circ} 30'$  of north latitude, and between  $13^{\circ} 15'$  and  $24^{\circ} 40'$  in longitude west of Greenwich.

The opinion, that this island owes its formation to the operations of submarine volcanoes, is not only confirmed by analogical reasonings deduced from the appearances presented by other islands, which are confessedly of volcanic origin, but gains ground in proportion to the progress of a closer and more accurate investigation of the geological phenomena which every part of it exhibits to the view of the naturalist. In no quarter of the globe do we find crowded within

the same extent of surface such a number of ignivomous mountains, so many boiling springs, or such immense tracts of lava, as here arrest the attention of the traveller. The general aspect of the country is the most rugged and dreary imaginable. On every side appear marks of confusion and devastation, or the tremendous sources of these evils in the yawning craters of huge and menacing volcanoes. Nor is the mind of a spectator relieved from the disagreeable emotions arising from reflection on the subterraneous fires which are raging beneath him, by a temporary survey of the huge mountains of perpetual ice by which he is surrounded. These very masses, which naturally exclude the most distant idea of heat, contain in their bosom the fuel of conflagration, and are frequently seen to emit smoke and flames, and pour down upon the plains immense floods of boiling mud and water, or red-hot torrents of devouring lava.

The principal volcanoes are: the Öraefa, Skaptâr, Kötlugiâ, Solheima, Myrdal, Torfa, Eyafialla, Arnarfell, Eirik, Bald, Blâfell, Geitland, Snæfell, Drânga, and Glâma Yökuls or ice mountains; Krabla, Hrafninnufiall, Leirhnukr, Biarnarflag, Hitahol, Hrossaborg, Herdabreid, Sníâfiall, Trolldyngiar, Kerlingafiall, Hekla, Skialdbreid, Skardsheidi, Henglafiall,

and the range of mountains which stretch from thence to Cape Reykianess, near which an old submarine volcano was in action not many years ago. There exists, besides, an immense number of smaller cones and craters, from which streams of melted substances have been poured forth over the surrounding regions. Of these volcanoes, Krabla, Leirhnukr, Biarnarflag, Hitahol, Hekla, and the Kótlugiâ, Solheima, Öræfa, and Skaptâr Yökuls have been active in the course of last century. The first four are situate in the northern division of the island, near the lake Myvatn, and are supposed to have some subterraneous communication with each other. The rest lie in nearly a direct line along the southern coast.

Tracts of lava traverse the island in almost every direction. The most extensive fields are those in the volcanic regions around Myvatn. The northern and eastern shores of that lake are completely covered with lava; it abounds with islands consisting of the same substance; and a dreadful torrent has been poured down the river which it supplies, into Reykiadal, Adaldal, and the plain on the eastern margin of the Skialfandafliot. Another stream appears to have flowed down Bârdardal, along the western margin of



the same river, from some volcano in the interior. A considerable stretch of melted substances is also met with to the north-east of Husavik; and on the east side of the large Yökul river, which falls into the Axarfiord, another melted tract runs through the parish of Presthol. To the east of Krabla, and the sulphur mines of Reykiahlid, a large stream of lava stretches into the interior, where the Fremri or more distant sulphur mines are situated, the vicinity of which also consists of lava; and from the mountain around which these mines lie, as far as the eye can reach, nothing is seen but one interminable region of desolation. The dismal gloom of this tract is barely relieved by the columns of smoke that are constantly ascending into the atmosphere, through apertures and fissures in various parts of the surface.

Here the Odáda Hraun or "Horrible Lava" begins, and extends to a great distance towards the south and west. It is described as the wildest and most hideous tract on the whole island. Its surface is extremely rugged—consisting of broken and pointed rocks, between which are fissures and chasms of a tremendous size, that throw insuperable barriers in the way of any traveller who might wish to penetrate beyond them.

From the north-west point of the Hof or Arnarfell Yökul, a huge stream proceeds in a westerly direction, the surface of which is very slaggy and uneven; and a few miles farther south lies the Kiöl-Hraun, an extensive stream of very cavernous lava, which has flowed from Bald Yökul, and extends to the northern margin of the Hvitárvatn. Crossing the Yökul, we fall in with the tract in which the remarkable cave of Surtshellir is situated, and further west lie torrents of lava in Nordurárdal, or West Skardsheidi, and in the division, called from this very circumstance, Hraunhrepp, or the District of Lava. The whole tract from thence to the Snæfell Yökul is almost entirely covered with the same substance, of which the more remarkable streams are the Borgarhraun, Barnaborgshraun, Búdahraun, Berserkiahraun and those in the vicinity of Kolbeinstad, and Raudmelr.

In the south of Iceland lie the extensive tracts of melted rock about Thingvalla, where scarcely any thing appears but one scene of universal desolation, and rents of upwards of a hundred feet in width are seen to stretch to the length of several miles. The divisions of Grimness, Ölfus, and Mossfell, exhibit greater or less quantities of lava throughout the whole of their surface; and between Reykiavik and Cape Reykianess are not fewer than six different streams,

some of which appear to have been oftener than once in a state of fusion: In many parts of these lavas, the heat is still so great, that in winter, when the vapour is prevented by the snow from making its escape from the general surface of the ground, it is impossible to enter any of the caverns on account of the sulphureous smell which they emit. The Faxe Fiord abounds with lava; and the fishermen frequently find beds of it alternating with sand-banks, at the depth of forty fathoms. The Elld-eyar consist entirely of submarine lava; and from these islands a number of dangerous rocks stretch in a south-west direction to the distance of nearly seventy miles, which have been thrown up from time to time from the bottom of the sea.

The lavas about Mount Hekla are well known; and the whole plain between that volcano and the sea is filled with the same substance, till within a few feet of the surface of the ground. The Vestmanna islands are also of volcanic origin. Behind the Eyafialla Yökul a stream of lava juts forward between the Markarflot and a fertile tract called Thorsmark; another large torrent has inundated the extensive plain between Myrdal and Thyckvabæ Abbey; in the divisions of Sida and Fljotshverfi we meet with the recent Skaptâr and Hverfis-

fiot lavas, which cover vast beds of very ancient lava; and a little farther east, is the Brunahraun, apparently the oldest of any in Iceland.

Besides the common lavas, Iceland abounds in other mineral masses, which sufficiently indicate their igneous origin. Of these, the more plentiful are tuffa and submarine lava. Whole mountains of the former are found in every part of the island. The obsidian, or Icelandic agate, which is nothing but black vitreous lava, abounds in many districts, especially near Myvatn, where there is a mountain which takes its name from it. Of the sulphur mountains, a particular description is given in the journal.

Another proof of the universality of volcanic agency, and of the continued existence of subterraneous fires in Iceland, is the multiplicity of hot springs in which it abounds. Not that I suppose any direct or immediate communication to be kept up between these springs and some central source of heat; but that some extensive conflagration is going forward below the surface of the earth is evident: and it seems more natural to conclude that it has originated in volcanic eruptions than in the separate ignition of fossil bodies, especially as the hot springs are always found in connection with lava or

other volcanic matter. Many of these springs throw up large columns of boiling water, accompanied by immense volumes of steam, to an almost incredible height into the atmosphere, and present to the eye of the traveller some of the grandest scenes to be met with on the face of the globe. The principal are the Geysers, near Haukadal; the Reykium springs in the district of Ölfus, and the sulphur springs of Kri-suvik in the south; those of Reykiadal in the west; Hveravellir in the interior; and those of Reykiahverf and Krabla in the north.

Celebrated as this island has been for its volcanoes and hot springs, it is scarcely less remarkable on account of the enormous ice-mountains which occupy a vast portion of its surface. To these mountains the natives give the name of Yökuls, which signify large masses of ice. They have generally terreous and rocky mountains for their basis; and, in many places, exhibit magnificent glaciers, which commence at a great height, and run down with a very rapid descent into the plains. The most extensive of all the Icelandic Yökuls is that called Klofa Yökul, in the eastern quarter of the island. It lies behind the Yökuls and other mountains which line the south-east coast, and forms, with little or no interruption, a vast chain of ice and

snow mountains, which are supposed to fill a space of not less than three thousand square miles. The rest of the ice-mountains in that division, all of which appear to be connected with the Klofa Yökul, are distinguished by the names of Hof, Lon, Hofsfell, Svinafell, Myrar, Heinaberg, Kálfafell, Breidamark, Öräfa, Skei-derá, Skaptár, Kötluigiá, Myrdal, and Solheima Yökuls. Of these, the four last, and the Öräfa, are volcanic Yökuls. Though covered with coats of ice of immense thickness, when the internal parts of the mountains become ignited, the mass of ice or indurated snow is cracked and rent by the explosion which ensues; a great quantity of it is melted by the flames, or the exundations of hot water; and whole fields of ice are sometimes deposited on the neighbouring plains. Some of these Yökuls are remarkable for their vacillation; not remaining in a settled position, but moving forwards and receding again at certain indefinite periods. In the southern division of the island lie the Eyafialla, Torfa, and Tindafialla Yökuls; to the west of the Hvitárvatn stretches the chain known by the names of Bald, Bláfell, Geitland, and Eirik Yökuls; Snæfell, Gláma and Dránga, rise into view in the west; and in the north lies the Hof or Ar-

narfell Yökul, the only considerable mountain of this description in that quarter of the island.

Numerous ridges of rugged and irregular mountains stretch across the interior, and, from these, other inferior mountains branch out towards the coasts, and, in many instances, terminate in high and steep promontories. Between these ridges, in the vicinity of the coasts, are rich and beautiful vallies, in which the inhabitants have erected their dwellings; and many of the low mountains are covered with coarse grass, which affords summer pasturage to the cattle. The most extensive tract of low country is that between the districts of Myrdal and Öräfa, where the traveller pursues his journey, for the period of four days, without seeing any thing like a mountain in the immediate vicinity. The whole of the interior, as far as it has been explored, consists of a vast inhospitable desert, transversed in various directions by barren mountains, between which are immense tracts of lava and volcanic sand, with here and there a small spot, scantily covered with vegetation.

It is evident, from ancient Icelandic documents, that on the arrival of the Norwegians, and for several centuries afterwards, pretty extensive forests grew in different parts of the island, and furnished the inhabitants with wood both for do-

mestic and nautical purposes. Owing, however, to their improvident treatment of them, and the increased severity of the climate, they have almost entirely disappeared; and what remains, scarcely deserves any other name than that of underwood, consisting for the most part of birch, willow, and mountain-ash; but this want of indigenous wood is in some measure supplied by the quantities of floating timber which are drifted upon the coasts from the American continent.

That grain was produced in former times in Iceland, appears both from the names of many places, such as Akkrar, Akkraness, Akkrahverar, &c.—the word Akr signifying a corn-field, and from certain laws in the ancient code, in which express mention is made of such fields, and a number of regulations are prescribed relative to their division and cultivation. How this important branch of rural economy was laid aside, it is impossible to determine with any degree of certainty; but it is generally supposed that it was occasioned by the epidemic disease, called the Black-Death, which raged here in the fifteenth century, and carried off nearly two-thirds of the inhabitants. Many are of opinion that grain might still be raised in Iceland; but the natives are more partial to the cultivation of grass, as they consider the breeding of sheep to be much more advantageous.



The island contains several large lakes, and numerous rivers of great magnitude, many of which supply the inhabitants with abundance of fresh-water fish. To enlarge upon these is unnecessary at this place, as they are described when they occur in the narrative.

The most ancient account of the discovery and colonization of Iceland to be relied upon as authentic, is that contained in the *Landnámabok*, or the *Book of Occupation*; a work which enters with the greatest minuteness into the circumstances and transactions of the original settlers. It was begun by Ari Frode, and continued by Kolskegg, and other learned men after his death. \*

In this volume we are informed, that Naddodd, a famous Norwegian pirate, who had been obliged to settle on the Faroe islands, as the only place where he could be safe from the attacks of those whom he had plundered, on his return from

\* *Islands Landnámabok: Hoc est; Liber Originum Islandiæ.* Havniæ, 1774. 4to. It is published in Icelandic and Latin. In the preface to this volume it is asserted, that previous to the arrival of the Norwegians, the island was inhabited by Christians, who are supposed to have come from some part of the British isles. They are stated to have left behind them Irish books, bells, and crosiers; but, no traces having been found of churches or dwelling-houses, it is most probable they had only been occasional visitors, who repaired thither during the summer months for the purpose of fishing, and returned home again before winter.

an expedition against Norway, about the year 860, was driven by a tempest on the coast of Iceland. Entering one of the eastern friths, he ascended a high mountain, from which he commanded an extensive prospect of the island, but discovered no vestige whatever of its being inhabited. The following autumn he again put to sea; and observing the mountains to be covered with an immense quantity of snow, he gave to the island the name of *Snæland*, or the Land of Snow. It was again discovered in the year 864, by Gardar Svafarson, a native of Sweden, who, on proceeding through the Pentland Frith, on a voyage to the Western Islands of Scotland, in order to take possession of some property which had there been left him by his father-in-law, was in like manner driven by a storm to the westward, till he reached the eastern coast of Iceland, and circumnavigating it, discovered it to be an island; and, on that account, called it *Gardarsholm*, or the Island of Gardar. Having entered the bay, afterwards named Skialfandafjord, he landed on its eastern shore, where he erected a habitation, and spent the winter, but returned the following spring to Norway.

The favourable account which he gave of the country, excited the spirit of adventure among the Norwegians; and Floki, another celebrated pirate, resolved to proceed thither in order to

take possession of the newly-discovered island. The compass being not then in use, Floki had recourse to superstition, and performing a great sacrifice, he devoted to the gods three ravens, which, having been thus consecrated, he took out with him to guide him on his voyage. Having touched at the Shetland and Faroe Isles, he proceeded towards Iceland. The first raven which he let loose returned to Faroe; the second, after having ascended to some height in the air, returned again to the ship; but the third directed its flight towards Iceland, where Floki shortly afterwards landed. Not being pleased with the appearance of the coasts about the East Foreland, where he first touched, he sailed round the southern and western shores, till he came to Vatnsfiord in the division of Bardastrand, where he took possession of a certain extent of country; but, having devoted too much of his time to fishing, he neglected the hay-harvest: the consequence of which was, that all the cattle he had taken with him, died in the course of the winter. Full of chagrin at this loss, and the coldness of the ensuing spring, and happening to discover, from the summit of one of the mountains, that one of the bays was completely filled with ice, he determined to repair to a warmer region, and gave to the island the name by which it has ever since been known. Having spent the fol-

lowing winter near Hafnarfiord, Floki returned next summer to Norway, fully resolved to abandon, for ever, the idea of settling in Iceland.

That the name he gave to the island, and the report which he spread of it, on his return, were more the effect of prejudice and disappointment, than derived from any other cause, is evident from the very different account given by Heriolf and Thorolf, his two companions on the expedition. The former depicted it as a most delightful country; and the latter did not conceive how he could better convey an adequate idea of its richness and fertility, than by asserting, that "butter dropped from every plant" it produced.

In the year 870, Iceland was again visited by two Norwegians, of the name of Hiörleif and Ingolf, who were so highly satisfied with its appearance, that, after wintering there, they returned to Norway, in order to make every possible preparation for a permanent establishment on the island. This they effected, A. D. 874, and from this year the Icelanders date the occupation of the country. Closely as these two settlers were allied to each other in every other respect, they differed widely on the subject of religion. Of Hiörleif it is recorded, that he never offered sacrifice; whereas Ingolf appears to have

been addicted to all the idolatrous and superstitious customs of the age; and not only consulted an oracle, respecting his future destiny, previous to his departure from Norway, but on his arrival off the coast of Iceland, he threw the principal wooden pillars of his house, which he had taken with him, into the sea, and made a vow, that he would choose, as the site of his future habitation, the spot where they should be cast on shore. As mentioned in the beginning of the journal, he afterwards found these driven up near the portion of ground occupied by Reykiavik, the present capital of the island.

Nothing contributed more essentially to promote the colonization of Iceland, than the tyranny at that time exercised by Harald Harfagra over the inhabitants of Norway. This prince, not contented with the hereditary crown left him by his father, extended his ambitious views to all the petty kingdoms in that part of Scandinavia; and in the course of a short time completely subdued them, and thereby put an end to that system of liberty and independence which they had hitherto enjoyed. Such of the kings as submitted to him, he suffered to retain their kingdoms under the name of earldoms, on condition that he should receive two-thirds of the royal tribute. that was raised by their subjects.

But the greater number of these petty princes preferred a life of exile on foreign shores, to the cruel oppression under which they groaned in their native country. Accompanied by their families, and a numerous train of dependents, they emigrated towards the west, and formed numerous colonies on the Hebrides, the Orkney, Shetland, and Faroe Islands. To no quarter, however, did they flock in greater numbers than to Iceland: being attracted to that island, on the one hand, by the promising accounts that were circulated respecting its fertility, and stimulated, on the other, by the hopes of being placed in perfect security from the attacks of their oppressor. In little more than half a century, all the coasts around the island were occupied by settlers; and, in order to put a stop to the emigration, King Harald was under the necessity of imposing a heavy fine upon all who left Norway for Iceland.

On their arrival, the new settlers proceeded to take possession of such parts of the island as lay in the immediate vicinity of the place where they landed. At first, they appear to have marked off larger districts than they could properly manage; but, finding this extent of territory disadvantageous, they conformed to a regulation made in the mother-country—

that no individual should be permitted to appropriate to his use more land than he could measure off in one day, by proceeding round it with fire, and kindling the grass, or heaps of bushes raised at the different boundaries. The chiefs having been accompanied by a number of free men who had not been able to fit out an expedition by themselves, had naturally the privilege of allotting certain parts of the country for occupation to these individuals, where they erected their habitations, and enjoyed that liberty which had entirely deserted their native land. Such as had already arrived threw no obstacles in the way of those who followed, but treated them with the hospitality due to fellow-citizens, and assisted them with their advice in regard to their settlement on the island.

For some time after the arrival of the Norwegians, the patriarchal form of government seems to have obtained among them. However, they soon found it necessary to establish certain common regulations for their mutual protection and benefit; and, in doing this, they imitated as closely as possible, the mode of administration which had prevailed in Norway. The people of that country had been accustomed, from time immemorial, to frequent public assemblies, at which the

king presided, and to give their vote in the matters which came before them. To entitle them to vote on these occasions, it was not necessary to possess extensive landed property, but simply to have some land, how small soever the quantity. Physical or mental strength naturally procure for those who are possessed of them an ascendancy over their less-gifted brethren; and we feel powerfully inclined to entrust the management or protection of our concerns to such as are likely to afford us these advantages. The new settlers in Iceland, dividing themselves into smaller communities, proportioned to the size of the different regions of the island which they inhabited, elected one of their number to be arbiter of their disputes, and the *prime minister of religion*, on which account he obtained the name of *Godi*. He was generally a man of superior abilities and extensive influence in the district over which he presided. Their *Thing*, or public assembly, was held at stated periods, and their legal procedures were always solemnized by the observance of certain religious ceremonies. Dipping a ring in the blood of a sacrificed victim, not only such as were to appear as witnesses, but the judge himself took it, and repeated the customary oath: "So help me, Freya, and Thor, and the Omnipotent God!"



About the year 928, the inhabitants of Iceland formed themselves into a regular republic, and so admirably did they distribute the different powers of government, that their mutual rights were secured without any compromise of personal liberty. They divided the island into four quarters, agreeably to a division already made in its natural constitution, in each of which a chief magistrate was elected by the free suffrage of the people, whose office very much resembled that of the *Godi* before described, only his jurisdiction was much more extensive. Each quarter was subdivided into three prefectures or sheriffdoms, excepting the northern quarter, which, on account of its size, was divided into four. These were governed by an officer, whose department it was to pay due attention to the maintenance of order within his district; to call an assembly for the trial of public causes; to preside and judge on these occasions; and to see that the punishment prescribed by the laws of the republic were carried into execution. He was, at the same time, minister of religion; and upon him devolved the care of the temple, and the preservation of due respect to the rites of worship. The sheriffdoms were again divided into a number of smaller districts, called *Hrepps*, consisting of the families which lived contiguous to

each other, and generally they were of the size of the present Icelandic parishes; and over each of these was appointed a *Hreppstjóri*, or bailiff, who had the immediate inspection of his own bailiwick, and whose office principally consisted in taking care of the poor, and especially in providing against an increase of pauperism. He had likewise his inferior court, at which he was assisted by four of the most respectable members of the community; in the election of whom particular care was taken that they should be possessed of some property, in order to prevent them from being exposed to bribery or corruption. Such matters as could not be settled at this court were carried before that of the sheriff, where the *Hreppstjórar* were amenable for any breach of office. In extraordinary cases, there lay an appeal to the provincial court, or an assembly of deputies from the different sheriffdoms, which was held under the presidency of the chief magistrate of that quarter of the island. This court was not held at stated times like the others, but only convened on occasions of great importance and emergency.

Lastly, the Icelanders established a final court of appeal, which they called the *Althing*, or General Assembly of the nation, which was held annually, and lasted for sixteen days. Here, by

common consent, the laws of the republic were enacted ; and to this assembly the whole nation looked for the final and equitable adjustment of any differences which might arise among them. To the Supreme Magistrate who presided on these occasions, they gave the name of *Lögsögumadr*, or the Publisher of the Law. He was elected to this office by the free choice of the people, and generally retained it for life. His judgment, confirmed by the people, was in all cases considered as decisive. Though he possessed little or no power out of the assembly, he was always respected by his countrymen as the sovereign judge and the protector of their laws and liberties. To him was committed the custody of the written laws, and the copy in his possession was regarded as the standard. He had the power of examining and reversing the sentences passed by the inferior magistrates, and even of punishing them if it were proved that they had acted inconsistently with the spirit or dignity of their office. The degree of importance attached to the office of *Lögsögumadr*, is strikingly illustrated by the circumstance, that the Icelanders were in the habit of computing time by the periods during which it was held by the different judges. In a manuscript now before me, I find the names of thirty-seven distinguished indivi-

duals who filled this office between the years 927 and 1263, the period of the existence of the free Icelandic republic. Snorro Sturluson, the celebrated historian of the north, was twice elected chief magistrate, and possessed more power than any judge, either before, or after his time.

For their excellent code of laws, the Icelanders were principally indebted to Ulfiot, one of their own countrymen, who, animated with a truly patriotic zeal, undertook a journey to Norway, in his sixtieth year, in order to acquire a perfect knowledge of the science and practice of jurisprudence. Having attained his object, he returned to Iceland in the year 927, and immediately made a tour of the island, with the view of persuading its inhabitants to adopt and sanction such laws as might be found applicable to their local and peculiar circumstances. The consequence was, that a general meeting was held the following year at Thingvalla, in the southern quarter of the island, at which the code of laws proposed by Ulfiot was received by the unanimous consent of the nation. The farm of Thingvalla having been confiscated on account of some heinous offence committed by its possessor, it was appropriated to the public use, and became the permanent seat of the national assembly. The laws of Ulfiot may be considered

as an abstract of the *Gulathing* code, at that time in force in Norway. In the year 1118, an improved system of jurisprudence was introduced by Bergthor, at that time principal magistrate, chiefly modelled according to the famous Norwegian code *Grágás*; and in 1280, the collection of laws called *Jonsbok* was adopted, and this code still obtains in most instances in Iceland.

The existence and constitution of the Icelandic republic exhibit an interesting phenomenon in the history of man. We here behold a number of free and independent settlers, many of whom had been accustomed to rule in their native country, establishing a government on principles of the most perfect liberty, and, with the most consummate skill, enacting laws which were admirably adapted to the peculiar circumstances of the nation. Unintimidated by any foreign power, guided solely by their own natural genius, and uninfluenced by any other principle than the love of liberty, security, and independence, they combined their interests and their energies in support of a political system, at once calculated to protect the rights of individuals, and inspire the community at large with sentiments of exalted patriotism.

This state of liberty the Icelanders maintained for the space of nearly four hundred years.

It is true, their tranquillity was ultimately disturbed by a number of intestine feuds and bloody quarrels, against which the laws made no effectual provision ; but these disturbances would never have assumed so serious an aspect, had they not been kindled and encouraged by the Kings of Norway, who always regarded Iceland with an envious eye, and employed all the arts of intrigue to bring its inhabitants into subjection to their sceptre. At last Hacon succeeded in effecting their subjugation. In the year 1261, the greater number of the inhabitants became tributary to Norway; and their example was followed, four years afterwards, by the natives of the eastern shores, who thus joined them in the transfer of themselves and their island to a foreign prince. In this very surrender, however, we observe the spirit of a free people; and, in fact, the Icelanders may be said to have all along retained their liberty; for the changes that were introduced in consequence of their junction to Norway, and even those which have resulted from their connection with Denmark since the year 1387, have been exceedingly immaterial; and no military force has ever set a foot on the island. In becoming subject to Norway, they expressly stipulated that they should be allowed to retain their ancient laws

and privileges ; that they should be exempt from taxes ; and that the king should secure to them the annual importation of the most necessary articles of foreign produce, and preserve peace on the island by an earl appointed for that purpose. And, if these conditions were not fulfilled, they were to be at liberty to withdraw their allegiance from the Norwegian crown. \*

At present, Iceland is governed by a *Stiftamtman*, who is appointed by his Danish Majesty, and is bound to fill this office for the space of five years. He is generally one of the younger branches of a noble family, has a salary of about L. 300 *per annum*, and is entitled to preferment on his return to Denmark. He is likewise special governor of the southern quarter of the island in which he resides ; and has two *Amtmen*, or deputy-governors, one for the western, and another for the northern and eastern quarters. These quarters are divided into *sysseles*, or sheriffdoms, the boundaries of which are much the same as those fixed in the ancient constitution ; and they are governed by a *Sysseleman*, whose office also resembles that of the ancient sheriffs—only he has a lease of the King's taxes, and accounts to the royal treasurer for

\* Finni Johannei Hist. Eccles. Island. tom. i. p. 381.

the amount. The *sysseis* are again divided into a number of *Hrepps*, each of which is placed under the inspection of a *Hreppstjóri* or constable, answering to the bailiff of former times.

There is, besides, another public officer called the *Landfoged*, or steward, who is treasurer or receiver-general for the island, and at the same time tax-gatherer of Gullbringè *sysseis*, and police-master of Reykiavik.

In 1800 the venerable *Althing* was abrogated, and a supreme court substituted in its room at Reykiavik, consisting of a Chief-Justice, two Assessors, and a Secretary. This court meets once a month, and decides on criminal and other cases; only the Icelanders have the privilege of appealing from its decisions to the high court in Denmark. In ancient times, scarcely any other than pecuniary punishments obtained. Criminals were fined in a certain number of *merks*, each of which amounted to rather more than an ounce of fine silver, and was equal to forty-eight ells of woollen cloth; \* but as this mode of punishment was found ineffectual to the prevention of crime, the laws became gradually more severe, and at last capital punishments were introduced. Hanging was the mode in-

\* Mallet, vol. i. p. 176.



flicted for murder, drowning for child-murder, and burning for witchcraft. At present, fines, imprisonment, and whipping, are the only punishments inflicted in Iceland. Such as are capitally convicted, it is necessary to send over to Copenhagen to be beheaded ; it being a curious fact, that, for some time past, no person could be found on the island who would execute the sentence of the law.

To the Icelanders belongs the honour of being the first discoverers of America and Greenland. The latter country had been seen by one Gunnbeörn, who had been driven out to sea in a storm, some time after the colonization of Iceland, but no attempt was made to find it again till the year 982, when Eirik the Red proceeded thither on a voyage of discovery. After spending the greater part of three years, exploring the coasts, and taking possession of such places as he deemed most suitable for occupation, he returned to Iceland, and spoke so highly in praise of the newly discovered country, to which he had given the name of *Greenland*, in order to excite a favourable idea of it in the minds of his countrymen, that he prevailed on a great number of them to accompany him the following summer. Not fewer than twenty-five vessels left Iceland under his convoy, but of these only fourteen reached

the place of their destination ; the rest were either lost or driven back to Iceland.\* As the distance between the two countries was little more than two hundred miles, a regular intercourse was established between them ; and the number of settlers increased so rapidly, that, soon after the introduction of the Christian religion, about the year 1000, a number of churches were built along the east coast, and a bishop was appointed to superintend the ecclesiastical affairs of the colony. He had his residence at Gardè, and was a suffragan to the Archbishop of Drontheim in Norway. A monastery, dedicated to St. Thomas, was also erected at another small town, called Albe ; and, for the space of more than three hundred and fifty years, a regular intercourse was carried on between that country and Denmark, or Norway. In the year 1406, the last bishop was sent over to Greenland. Since then the colony has not been heard of ; and its loss is attributed to the wars which took place at that time between the Danes and Swedes, which prevented the trading-vessels from putting to sea, and to the accumulation of vast shoals of ice around the coasts, by which they have been rendered totally inaccessible.

\* Eyrbyggiasaga, cap. xxiv. Landnámabok, Part II. cap. xiv.

Different attempts have been made by order of the Danish government, to penetrate to the colony, but they have all proved unsuccessful; and some are of opinion, that no such colony ever existed on East Greenland, but that it was situate in the vicinity of the present Danish settlements on the western coast. Egede,\* however, is of the contrary opinion, and he had the best opportunities of forming a judgment on the subject. Of late, this impenetrable barrier of ice appears to have been broken, and vast masses have been carried away to the southward. The consequence has been, that the vessels which navigate the arctic seas, have penetrated much farther than usual, and have seen the ocean perfectly void of ice, between the 74° and 80° degrees of north latitude.† It would certainly prove highly interesting, both to the friends of humanity and of literature, were the expedition now fitting out from this country for those seas, to discover this ancient colony; and give us an account of the state of religion and science among them, after they have been shut out for so long a period of time, from all intercourse with the rest of the world. That the descendants of the ancient colonists may still exist, although

\* Description of Greenland, London, 1745, 8vo.

† Quarterly Review for October 1817, p. 202.

cut off from any supplies from Denmark, is rendered probable, by the circumstance, that in Egede's time, the barrier of ice, as far as he explored it, did not connect with the shore, but left a space of open water, in which the inhabitants might catch a sufficient quantity of fish for their support.

The fact that America also was first discovered by the Icelanders, though less generally known, is perfectly well authenticated by the northern historians. Biarni Heriulfson, on a voyage from Iceland to Greenland, to visit his father, in the year 1001, was driven by a violent easterly gale into the Atlantic; and, after sailing several days, he discovered a fine woody country, in general flat, and *only diversified* by small heights, which rose into view upon the coast. Not being able to persuade his men to land, he proceeded with a south-west wind for Greenland, which he reached after a voyage of six days. The description which he gave of the country, some time after, excited the curiosity of Leif Eirikson, whose father had first taken possession of Greenland. This adventurer left Norway in a vessel navigated by thirty-five men, and made first a country to the south-west of Greenland, which, from the description given of its ice-mountains, appears to have been Labra-

dor. Leaving this inauspicious region, they proceeded southwards, till they came to the flat woody country discovered by Biarni; but as they wished to explore the coasts to a greater distance, they again set sail with a north-east wind, and came in two days to an island, separated by a strait from the continent. Having proceeded up this strait, they came to a fine fresh water lake, on the shore of which they built a habitation for their winter residence. The lake abounded with the finest salmon, and the grass retained its verdure, in a great measure, the whole winter. The days were more of an equal length than in Greenland or Iceland, the sun being nine hours above the horizon at the shortest day. One of his men, who was from the south of Germany, having discovered that grapes grew there spontaneously, Leif gave to the country the appropriate name of Vinland, or Vineland, and returned the following spring to Greenland.

The American Continent was afterwards visited by Thovald, a brother of Eirik's, who was killed in an engagement with the natives; and a colony of Norwegians was settled there in the course of time, and continued to trade with the natives for the period of nearly two centuries, after the country had been discovered.

The population of Iceland is supposed to have been much greater in former times than it is at present. Numbers of the inhabitants were carried off by the plague in the year 1402; and in the years 1707 and 1708 not fewer than 16,000 persons were cut off by the small-pox. \* In the year 1801, at which time the last census was taken, the population amounted to 47,207; but is supposed since that time to have received an addition of at least 3000.

With respect to the personal appearance of the Icelanders, they are rather tall, of a frank open countenance, a florid complexion, and yellow flaxen hair. The women are shorter in proportion, and more inclined to corpulency than the men; but many of them would look handsome in a modern European dress. In youth, both sexes are generally of a very weakly habit of body, which is the necessary consequence of their want of proper exercise, and the poorness of their living; yet it is surprising what great hardships they are capable of enduring in after life. It is seldom any of them attain to a very advanced age: however, the females commonly live longer than the men. Owing to the nature of their food, their want of personal cleanliness,

\* Von Troil.

and their being often obliged to sit long in wet woollen clothes, they are greatly exposed to cutaneous diseases. They are also frequently attacked with obstinate coughs and pulmonary complaints, by which perhaps more are carried off annually than by any other disease.

It has been said, that, in general, the Icelanders are of a sullen and melancholy disposition; but, after paying the strictest attention to their appearance and habits, I must pronounce the statement inaccurate, and one which could only have been made by those who have had little or no intercourse with that people. On the contrary, I have been surprised at the degree of cheerfulness and vivacity which I found to prevail among them, and that not unfrequently under circumstances of considerable external depression and want. Their predominant character is that of unsuspecting frankness, pious contentment, and a steady liveliness of temperament, combined with a strength of intellect and acuteness of mind seldom to be met with in other parts of the world. They have also been noted for the almost unconquerable attachment which they feel to their native island. With all their privations, and exposed, as they are, to numerous dangers from the operation of physical causes, they live under the practical influence of one of their

common proverbs : *Island er hinn besta land sem solinn skinnar uppá.* "Iceland is the best land on which the sun shines."

In the persons, habits, and customs of the present inhabitants of Iceland, we are furnished with a faithful picture of those exhibited by their Scandinavian ancestors. They adhere most rigidly to whatever has once been adopted as a national custom, and the few innovations that have been introduced by foreigners are scarcely visible beyond the immediate vicinity of their factories. Their language, dress, and mode of life, have been invariably the same during a period of nine centuries; whilst those of other nations have been subjected to numerous vicissitudes, according to the diversity of external circumstances, and the caprices of certain leading individuals, whose influence has been sufficiently powerful to impart a new tone to the society in which they moved. Habituated from their earliest years to hear of the character of their ancestors, and the asylum which their native island afforded to the sciences, when the rest of Europe was immersed in ignorance and barbarism, the Icelanders naturally possess a high degree of national feeling, and there is a certain dignity and boldness of carriage observable in numbers of the peasants, which at once



indicates a strong sense of propriety and independence.

The Icelandic is justly regarded as the standard of the grand northern dialect of the Gothic language. While the Swedish and Danish, and even the Norwegian, which is a kind of middle dialect, have been more or less subject to the influence of the Teutonic or German branch, that, originally spoken in Scandinavia, has been preserved in all its purity in Iceland. In the middle ages, it was known by the name of *Dönsk Tunga*, or the Danish Tongue; the Icelanders at first called it *Norræna*, because they had brought it along with them from Norway, which name pretty much resembles that of *Norns*, or *Norse*, by which the corrupt dialect, spoken till within these few years in some parts of Orkney, has been designated; and, it was not till after it had ceased to be spoken on the continent, that it assumed the name of Icelandic. The remoteness of the island, and the little intercourse which its inhabitants have maintained with the rest of the world, have effectually secured the purity and originality of this ancient language; and it is a curious fact, that while our ablest antiquaries are often puzzled, in endeavouring to decipher certain words and phrases in writings which date their origin only a few centuries

back ; there is not a peasant, nor indeed, scarcely a servant girl in Iceland, who is not capable of reading with ease the most ancient documents extant on the island.

The early and successful application of the Icelanders to the study of the sciences forms a perfect anomaly in the history of literature. At a period when the darkest gloom was spread over the European horizon, the inhabitants of this comparatively barren island, near the north pole, were cultivating the arts of poetry and history ; and laying up stores of knowledge, which were not merely to supply posterity with data respecting the domestic and political affairs of their native-country, but were also destined to furnish very ample and satisfactory information on a great multiplicity of important points connected with the history of other nations. To this a wonderful combination of circumstances proved favourable. The Norwegians, who first went over to Iceland, were sprung from some of the most distinguished families in the land of their nativity. They had been accustomed from their infancy to listen to the traditionary tale of the deeds of other years ; they had frequented the public assemblies, where they saw the value and importance of knowledge ; and, in the course of their numerous piratical expeditions.

and invasions, they had obtained an intimate acquaintance with the situation, politics, history, &c. of the different countries of Europe. Being in the habit of clothing all events of any importance in poetic language, an accurate knowledge of these events was secured to posterity, while the share that some of themselves, or their immediate ancestors had had in many of them, naturally excited a desire to recite them in the family circle; and the undisturbed enjoyment of tranquillity, during a long winter of eight months continuance, afforded them the best opportunities of bending their attention to the study of the different branches of literature.

The art of writing \* was first introduced into Iceland by Isleif, Bishop of Skalholt, about the year 1057; and the oldest monuments which we have of written composition, are the works of Ari Frode, who flourished about the same period. After the introduction of Christianity, several of the Icelanders went to France and Germany to prosecute their studies at the best universities of the age; but it is worthy of notice, that the writer just mentioned, and Snorro Sturluson, two of the

\* This is to be understood only of the regular use of the Latin characters; but it is evident from various parts of the Edda, and also of the Sagas, that the Runic characters were previously used for inscriptions on stones, &c.

most distinguished of the northern historians, never studied out of their native island. The historical compositions of the Icelanders, generally known by the name of Sagas, are exceedingly numerous, and many of them worthy of the fullest credit. The most valuable are: Heimskringla, Sturlunga, Eigla; Niála, Gunnlauga, Eyrbyggja, Vatnsdæla, Orkneyinga, Landnâma, Kristni, Hungurvaka, and a great number of annals, the minuteness and simplicity of which furnish the strongest internal proof of their agreement with truth; and their authenticity is established by a multiplicity of the most satisfactory external evidence. On the pre-eminence of the Icelandic poets, it is not necessary to enlarge here, as a particular account will be given of them and their compositions in the third number of the Appendix.

The most flourishing period of Icelandic literature appears to have been from the beginning of the twelfth, till about the middle of the fourteenth century. During the years immediately preceding the Reformation, the sciences were greatly on the decline; and, had it not been for the blaze of light which that most important event shed over the north of Europe, their cultivation in Iceland might have entirely grown into disuse. A fresh impulse, however, was

thereby given to the sleeping energies of Icelandic genius, and a succession of literary characters followed, whose names would do honour to any country, or any age. One circumstance, which very much contributed to this revival of learning, was the introduction of printing. This took place about the year 1530. Jon Areson, the last Catholic Bishop of Holum, was a man of the most haughty and turbulent disposition, in consequence of which he was involved in numerous broils and disputes; and, being very ignorant of letters, he was at a loss for some person who could compose in Latin, and, at the same time, give publicity, by printing, to his orders and acts of excommunication; but prevailed at last upon Jon Matthieson, a native of Sweden, to go over and establish a printing-press on the island. The first printed book was the *Breviarium Nidarosiense*. The doctrines of the Reformation having been embraced by the Icelanders about ten years afterwards, the press fell into their hands, and was employed by them for the publication of the Bible and other religious and useful books. Since that time they have always been in possession of a printing-press; but the one they have at present is of no use, being under the direction of an individual, whose sentiments are little accordant with those

of his countrymen, on which account no person will purchase the publications which issued from it some years ago.

The three last centuries have produced many learned men; and, at the present day, Iceland can boast of sons who have risen to great eminence in the different departments of literature. Such as study at the University of Copenhagen, are generally distinguished from their fellow-students by their quickness of apprehension, their unwearied application, and their unsatiable thirst for the acquisition of knowledge.

On inquiring into the state of mental cultivation in Iceland, it is not so much the literary fame of a few select individuals, who have enjoyed superior advantages, which strikes our attention; as the universal diffusion of the general principles of knowledge among its inhabitants. Though there be only one school in Iceland, and that solitary school is exclusively designed for the education of such as are afterwards to fill offices in church or state; yet it is exceedingly rare to meet with a boy or girl, who has attained the age of nine or ten years, that cannot read and write with ease. Domestic education is most rigidly attended to; and it is no uncommon thing, to hear youths repeat passages from the Greek and Latin authors, who have never been

farther than a few miles from the place where they were born. Nor do I scarcely ever recollect entering a hut, where I did not find some individual, or another, capable of entering into a conversation with me, on topics which would be reckoned altogether above the understandings of people in the same rank of society in other countries of Europe. On many occasions, indeed, the common Icelanders discover an acquaintance with the history and literature of other nations which is perfectly astonishing.

There is nothing which operates more powerfully on the formation of the human character than religion. According to the ideas which men entertain of the Supreme Being, the relation in which they stand to him and to each other, and a future state of retribution, will be the predominating bias and disposition of their minds, and the general tenor of their conduct in life. The religion adopted by the northern nations, some ages previous to the introduction of Christianity among them, was a religion of terror and of blood. There was nothing in it to mollify the mind of man, or instil into it the milk of human kindness. The deities they worshipped, were invested with the most ferocious and diabolical characters; and such only were supposed to merit their favourable regards as dis-

tinguished themselves in battle, and were thereby qualified for taking part in those warlike feats which they expected to form the principal source of gratification in a future state.

The primeval system of religious belief among the Scandinavians was a kind of theism. They worshipped Thor, whom they regarded as the omnipotent thunderer, and the supreme disposer of human affairs. He appears to have been originally worshipped in the open air, in groves, or on some rising ground, where a large stone was erected as an altar, on which human sacrifices were offered to appease his wrath, and procure exemption from the direful effects of his vengeance. No traces are found of temples being constructed for the service of this deity, till after the introduction of a number of inferior gods into the Scandinavian creed, who were associated with Thor, as objects of religious fear and adoration.

This change is generally ascribed to Odin, a mighty Scythian warrior, who pushed his way through the south of Russia and Germany into Scandinavia. Spreading the terror of his arms wherever he came, and finding that his successes had inspired the people with the belief that he was a super-human being, he improved on the idea, caused himself to be proclaimed a deity,



and received divine honours from his followers. He was the god of war and victory, and was most significantly styled, "The Father of Slaughter and Desolation." Being represented as delighting in sanguinary combat, and beholding with complacency such as distinguished themselves by their courage and military prowess, his worshippers rushed on to the carnage, vowing they would send a certain number of souls to their deity in Valhalla, the abode of warriors, where they expected to meet all who had been slain with sword in hand, and pass the hours in an eternal round of conflict and conviviality. Freya, who presided over the seasons, and was regarded as the dispenser of fertility and riches; Niord, the ruler of the winds and seas; Brage, the god of eloquence and poetry; and a number of inferior deities were now received by the northern nations, and had altars and temples erected for the celebration of their worship. But the veneration paid to Thor, does not appear to have been in any degree diminished by this association. He was still considered as the most powerful and terrible of the gods; and the respect shewn to Odin, seems to have been greater in Denmark and Sweden than in the neighbouring country of Norway.

On the arrival of the Norwegians in Iceland, they immediately constructed temples, which they called Hofs, to Thor, and instituted the same rites that had obtained in their native country. Some of them carried over with them the wood of their Norwegian temples, and the very earth on which the altars had stood. A striking instance of this is mentioned in the Journal, \* where a description is given of one of the earliest and most celebrated of the heathen temples erected on that island, and the mode of sacrifice used on solemn occasions. Those who may wish to peruse a full and particular account of the mythology which prevailed among the northern nations, and of which the knowledge has been preserved and handed down to us by the Icelanders, are referred to Mallet's Northern Antiquities, where they will find the most satisfactory information on this subject, and many other points connected with the literary history of Scandinavia.

Little more than a century had elapsed from the colonization of the island, when an attempt was made to introduce the Christian religion among its inhabitants. In the year 981, Thorvald Kodranson proceeded on a piratical expedi-

\* Vol. II. p. 65.

tion to Germany, and happening to meet a Bishop in Saxony, named Frederick, he was baptized by him, and spent some time in his house ; after which he prevailed on the Bishop to accompany him to Iceland, in order to preach the new doctrine, and baptize his parents, and any other of his friends who might be disposed to become Christians. They made the tour of the island together ; and as the Bishop was ignorant of the language, the office of interpreter devolved on Thorvald, who manifested great zeal in his endeavours to convert his countrymen to the faith of Christ. But his conduct appears to have been little calculated to inspire them with love to that religion which he professed to have embraced ; for, on a certain occasion, he did not scruple to kill two of them for having circulated a satirical verse which had been composed on him and the Bishop, and they both quitted the island shortly after, not having met with that success which they had anticipated. However, although few received baptism, a number of the inhabitants in the northern quarter absented themselves from the temples, broke in pieces their idols, and refused any longer to pay the customary tax in support of idolatrous worship ; and the first church was built by Thorvard Spakbödvarson, at *As*, in the year 984, in spite of the

opposition and threatenings of his heathen neighbours.

Thorvald was succeeded by one Stefner, whom Olave, King of Norway, sent over, A. D. 996, for the express purpose of converting the Icelanders to the Christian faith; but he appears to have met with as little success as his predecessor; only the subject became more generally known, and certain regulations, which were adopted at the national assembly, for preventing the spread of innovation, had a tendency to excite discussion among the inhabitants.

Olave next dispatched a priest, named Thangbrand, on this important mission; and though the heathen used every effort in opposing the progress of his work, and employed several of their best poets to assault him with the keenest invective, he succeeded in baptizing a number of them. Severe fines were now imposed upon such as turned Christians, and some were obliged to quit the island on account of the persecution which was raised against them.

At last, in the year 1000, two of those who had been exiled, Hiallti and Gissur, returned to Iceland, with the full determination of advocating the cause of Christianity in the presence of their countrymen. They arrived at the time of the general assembly, and proceeded instantly thither,

where they were welcomed by their friends, who defended them against an attack which was meditated by the pagans. The following day they went in solemn procession to the Lögberg, accompanied by seven men, dressed in sacerdotal garments, and carrying large crosses in their hands. The whole assembly was struck with the novelty of the scene ; and, after Hialti had offered incense, he and Gissur began to point out the superiority of Christianity to Heathenism in so bold and intrepid a manner, that none of their enemies had the courage to contradict them. The consequence was, that such as were brought to the determination of changing their religion, took witnesses to that effect ; and, separating from their heathen countrymen, they joined the party that had professed the faith of Christ. While thus engaged, intelligence was brought to the assembly, that a volcanic eruption had commenced at no great distance, which the heathen immediately ascribed to the indignation of the gods at the defection of such numbers from their ancient creed. "Can it be matter of surprise," they exclaimed, "that the gods should be angry at such speeches as those we have now heard?" With this question they hoped to silence the advocates of the Christian religion, and prevent any more of their countrymen from

embracing it ; but Snorro Goda, though still a Pagan, was so struck with the inconclusiveness of the argument, that, referring them to the streams of lava in the midst of which the assembly was held, and which had visibly flowed long before the island was inhabited, he pointedly asked them, " At what then were the gods angry, at the period when the very lava on which we now stand was burning ?" No answer having been made, the assembly broke up, and such as had espoused the new faith petitioned that laws should be enacted for securing to them the peaceable profession of their religion.

The Heathen now began to institute a solemn appeal to their gods, and resolved to offer, as an expiatory sacrifice, two human victims from each quarter of the island, that the Christian religion might not be permitted to spread over the whole country. On which Hialti and Gissur convoked an assembly of the Christians, and proposed that an equal number of their party should devote themselves as martyrs to the honour of their Redeemer ; and, to stimulate their zeal, Hialti himself came forward and offered to lay down his life in support of the Christian cause.

The following day, Thorgeir, at that time supreme magistrate, convened the assembly for the purpose of bringing the dispute to a termi-

nation. He pointed out to them the pernicious consequences which were likely to arise from their having two distinct codes, and advised them to the exercise of mutual toleration under the protection of the same common laws. The effect produced by his speech was so great, that both parties agreed to abide by whatever decision he should give in the case. He therefore enacted, that all the inhabitants of Iceland should be baptized, and worship one God; that such as were still inclined to offer sacrifice should do it privately; but that the ancient regulations should still be in force respecting the exposition of infants, \* and the eating of horse-flesh. The rite of baptism was now administered to the whole population of the island at the hot-baths,

\* Such as did not choose to bring up their children were at liberty to expose them, and the practice was very common in regard to female infants, especially if there happened to be many young females in a family. They wrapped the child carefully up in a cloth, put a piece of meat into its mouth, and either concealed it under the roots of a tree, or between two stones, which they covered with a third, in order to prevent any beast from devouring it. From the instances on record of this inhuman custom, it appears in almost every case to have originated with the father; that there was frequently a long dispute ere the female parent would consent to surrender her beloved offspring; and no doubt many a stolen visit was paid to the spot, where the dear babe was brought to so untimely an end. *Hist. Eccles. Island. tom. i. p. 68.*

which they preferred to immersion in cold water. \*

Measures were now taken to provide the inhabitants with places of worship ; and a number of priests were ordained to conduct it according to the forms of the church of Rome. At first they were under the inspection of foreign bishops ; but, in the year 1057, Isleif, a native Icelander, who had studied some time at the university of Erfurt, was installed into the see of Skalholt, where he exercised the episcopal office till his death, A. D. 1080, when he was succeeded by his son Gissur. This prelate having instituted a regular system of tithes, found that the island was able to support more than one bishop ; and, consulting the good of the ecclesiastical establishment more than his own private emolument, he readily complied with a request which had been made by the inhabitants of the north, that they might have a bishop of their own for the more convenient administration of church-affairs. Another episcopate was accordingly erected at Holum, and the office was first conferred upon Jon Ögmundson in the year 1107. The Icelandic bishops were originally under the archbishop of Bremen ; they afterwards became

\* See *Kristni Saga*, cap. xii.



subject to the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Lund in Sweden, and were ultimately suffragans of the archbishop of Drontheim in Norway.\* The first code of ecclesiastical law was that known by the name of *Jus Ecclesiasticum Grimkelianum*, but this was revised and augmented in the year 1123, when it was introduced as the standing law of the Icelandic church.

It might naturally have been expected, that the immense distance of Iceland from the immediate seat of the Papal government would, in a great measure, have secured its inhabitants from the introduction of those superstitious and ridiculous ceremonies which were at that time palmed upon the world, instead of the purity and simplicity of primitive Christianity; at least, it was not so likely that these evils should gain the same ground, or spread to the same extent that they did in other countries, the contiguity of which to Rome exposed them to continual usurpations on the part of that power. But these fond conjectures are contradicted by historical facts. The Icelanders appear to have equalled the blindest of their fellow-devotees in their attachment to the hierarchy, and their unqualified adoption of its grossest absurdities; in

\* Hist. Eccles. Island. tom. i. p. 104.

consequence of which, a great portion of their original heathenism was retained under a new form, and they continued the dupes of the most abject superstition. Several of them undertook pilgrimages to Rome; and considerable sums were raised for carrying on the Crusades. Saints and reliques were held in the greatest veneration. Voluntary contributions were made for the erection of monasteries; and the Papal Nuncio for the northern kingdoms of Europe kept an agent in Iceland for the sale of indulgences.

In this state did the island continue during the long period of five centuries. But Christian III. on the establishment of the Protestant religion in Denmark, issued orders that the Papal authority should be put down, and that the pure doctrines of the Gospel should be preached in Iceland, instead of the fables and legends which had hitherto occupied the religious creed of its inhabitants. Considerable opposition was made on the part of the clergy, especially by Jon Areson, bishop of Holum, who endeavoured to throw every possible obstacle in the way of the Reformation; and, arming a body of men, he proceeded to the south, and arrested the bishop of Skalholt, but was taken soon afterwards by the King's officers,

and beheaded for various crimes which he had committed. In the year 1551 the reformation was fully introduced into Iceland; and, in the course of a short time, the doctrines of the New Testament became generally known among the inhabitants.

The form and ceremonies of the Icelandic church are strictly Lutheran, though, from the poverty of the people, their churches are less elegant, and a greater degree of simplicity pervades their worship than I have found in other Lutheran countries. Formerly there were two bishops, one at Skalholt, and the other at Holum; but, in the year 1797 the bishoprics were united, and an episcopal see erected at Reykjavik for the whole island. The next ecclesiastical dignity to the bishop is the archdeacon, who supplies his place in case of sickness, or a vacancy of the see; and there are, besides, eighteen provosts or deans, each of whom has the superintendence of the clergy within the limits of his district. The total number of parishes in Iceland amounts to 184; but as many of them occupy a great space of ground, it has been found necessary to build in some parts two or three churches in a parish, which has increased the number of churches to 305. Some of the priests have chaplains to assist them in the

performance of public duty. They are all natives of the island, and are maintained partly by cultivating small glebes attached to the churches, and partly from certain tithes raised among the peasants. The provision made for their support is exceedingly scanty. The richest living on the island does not produce 200 rix-dollars; twenty and thirty rix-dollars are the whole of the stipend annexed to many of the parishes; and there are some in which it is even as low as five.

Small as the pittance is which is thus afforded to the Icelandic clergy, and much as their attention must be directed to the management of their farms, they are, nevertheless, in general, very assiduous in the discharge of their public functions, and particularly attentive to the education of the young. Every clergyman in Iceland keeps what is called a register of souls, which contains an accurate statement of the age, situation, conduct, abilities, and proficiency of each individual in his parish. The books in the possession of the family are also entered on the list; and, as this record is made annually, to be presented to the dean at his visitation, a regular view is thus obtained of the moral and religious state of the parish.

Previous to the union of the bishoprics, the Icelandic church had two consistories, or ecclesiastical courts, one of which was held annually at Flygamire for the northern, and the other at Thingvalla for the southern diocess; but they are now combined in the *Synodalrett*, or Synod, which meets about the middle of July every year at Reykiavik. It consists of the bishop, the governor, the archdeacon, two or three of the deans in rotation, and certain individuals among the inferior clergy. In cases coming before this court, the bishop has the casting-vote in every thing relative to doctrine or ecclesiastical privileges, and the governor in matters of civil concernment. The principal business transacted on these occasions regards the distribution of certain monies which are annually granted by government for relieving the widows of the clergy, and augmenting the scantier stipends of the priests. About 300 rix-dollars is appropriated to each of these purposes.

In regard to sentiment and style of preaching, the Icelandic clergy may be divided into two classes; those of the old, and such as are of the new school. The former profess to receive the Bible as an authoritative and obligatory revelation of the will of God, and bow with reverence to its decisions. They do not exalt human rea-

son to be the arbiter of what ought, and what ought not to be embraced as dogmas of faith; but, conscious of their ignorance and proneness to error, they consider it at once their duty and their privilege, to believe whatever God has been pleased to communicate in his word. Accordingly, in their sermons, they insist on the grand *distinguishing doctrines of Christianity*: the total depravity and helplessness of man; the eternal divinity, and vicarious atonement of the Son of God; the personality, and saving operations of the Holy Spirit; the necessity of regeneration, and holiness of life; and the eternity of future punishment. I had an opportunity of meeting with many of these men in the course of my travels; and some of them, whom I heard from the pulpit, convinced me, that they were themselves deeply penetrated with a sense of the importance of those truths which they were engaged in preaching to others; that they had entered the ministry from no worldly motive, but were actuated by a sincere desire to advance the spiritual reign of their Divine Master, and promote the best interests of their fellow-men; and that they were living under a habitual impression of that solemn account which all, who have taken upon them the charge of souls, will have to give to the Chief Shepherd at the day of final decision.

They are men who are dead to the world, and devoted in heart and life to the service of their Redeemer. Their private walk exhibits the genuine tendency of the holy doctrines they teach; and their public discourses are earnest, energetic, animated, pointed, and faithful.

Such of the clergy as are of the new school, the number of whom is happily not very great, treat divine things in quite a different manner. Instead of drawing the matter of their sermons from the Scriptures, they gather it from the writings of heathen philosophers; and the morality found in these authors, which, at the best, is but dry and insipid, absolutely freezes when transplanted into Iceland. The divine inspiration of the Bible is discarded, and all the cardinal and fundamental points of the Christian faith are either entirely omitted, or when they are brought forward, it is only with a view to turn them into ridicule. The influence of such Socinian and semi-deistical principles on the individuals who propagate them, is abundantly manifest. They are entirely men of the world. The awful realities of an approaching eternity have made no suitable impression upon their minds; and levity, callousness, and indifference, mark the whole of their conduct. Nor are the effects resulting from the dissemination of their

tenets, on such as imbibe them, less visible and injurious. Their minds become imbued with scepticism and infidelity; every vestige of religion disappears, and immorality of one description or another generally occupies its place.

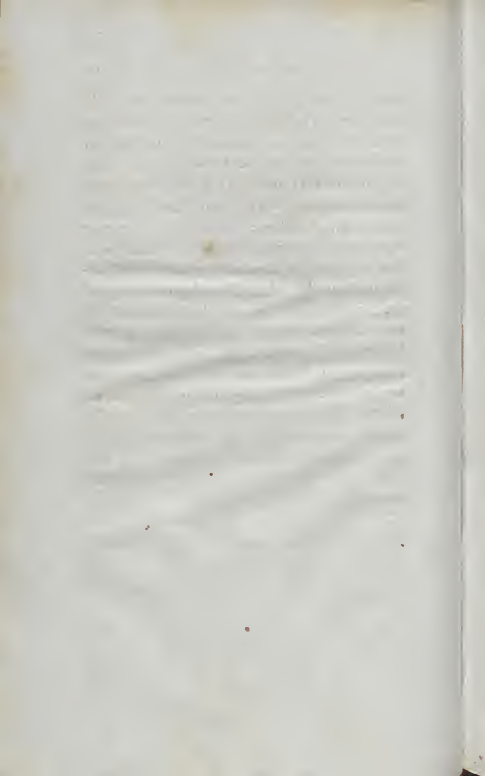
In their general habits and dispositions, the Icelanders are a very moral and religious people. They are carefully instructed in the principles of Christianity at an early period of life, and regularly attend to the public and private exercises of devotion. Instances of immorality are in a great measure confined to such as frequent the fishing places, where they are often idle for days together; and where such as have made proficiency in wickedness, use every effort to ensnare and corrupt their young and inexperienced companions. In passing through the island, my stay at any particular place was too short to admit of my ascertaining the true state of vital and practical religion among its inhabitants; yet, making every allowance for the proneness of men to content themselves with a mere external form of godliness, and granting that there is often a correct moral deportment, without a single particle of love to God in the heart, I cannot but indulge the conviction, that in a country where the principles of revealed truth are so clearly and so generally known, and where the



tone of morals is so high, there must be many whose minds have been savingly impressed with divine things, and who have experienced the Gospel to be "the power of God unto salvation." The greater number of these individuals are in all probability known only to God, having little or no intercourse with each other; and their situation may not unfitly be compared to that of the generality of real Christians in Scotland about thirty or forty years ago, when none of those institutions existed which now draw them together, make them acquainted with each other, and stimulate them to greater zeal and diligence in the service of their blessed Redeemer.

It may appear strange, that such a degree of religious knowledge should exist in a country where, of late years, few have had immediate access to the Holy Scriptures; but it is accounted for by the circumstance, that almost every family is in possession of a volume of excellent sermons, written by Bishop Vidalin of Skalholt, about the beginning of last century, which contains a great deal of Scripture illustration, and that numerous passages from the sacred writings are produced in proof of the doctrines taught in the Icelandic catechism. The scarcity of Bibles was severely felt. Numbers had been using every possible exertion, for a long series of years, to

procure a copy of the sacred volume, but without effect. The poverty of the inhabitants was such, that they could not print a new edition themselves; they did not know to what quarter to apply for aid; and many began to apprehend that the word of the Lord would become extinct among them, and especially that their posterity would be left destitute of this inestimable boon. But here foreign benevolence came most opportunely to their aid. The plentiful supply of the Scriptures sent them by the British and Foreign Bible Society, and other friends to the best interests of humanity, was most joyfully and gratefully received; and while the Icelanders are now diligently employed in perusing the records of eternal life, their ardent prayers are ascending to heaven for the present and eternal happiness of their spiritual benefactors.



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# ICELAND,

§c. §c.

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## CHAP I.

*Voyage from Copenhagen to Iceland—Copenhagen Roads—Island of Hveen—Tycho Brahe—Elsineur—Gottenburgh—Shetland—Ice-Mountains—Cape Reykianess—Land at Reykiavik—Description of the Town—Visit to the Archdeacon at Gardè—Hafnarfiord—Preparations for an Inland Journey—Divine Service in the Cathedral.*

HAVING, by the blessing of God, brought the printing of the Icelandic Scriptures to a termination, and seen the foundation laid of a Bible Society for the Danish dominions, on the principles of the British and Foreign Bible Society, I began to make the necessary arrangements for my voyage to Iceland. The natural formation of that island rendering it impossible to con-

vey any quantity of Bibles from one place to another, it was requisite to forward a proportionate number to each harbour. In the execution of this measure, I would here acknowledge my obligations to the Icelandic merchants in Copenhagen, who not only allowed the copies to be sent by their respective vessels without charging any freight, but furnished me with much important information, derived from their local knowledge of the country. To Westy Petràeus, Esq. in particular, I am deeply indebted for the facilities which he afforded me on the occasion, and for conveying, in his own vessel, no less than 1183 Bibles, and 1668 New Testaments, free of expense.

On the 8th of June, 1814, I embarked on board the *Seyen*, commanded by Captain Petràeus, brother to the gentleman just mentioned, who also accompanied us, and did every thing in his power to provide for my accommodation and comfort. We got under weigh about five o'clock, P. M. The evening was serene; and the prospect, which embraced the Danish metropolis, the two opposite coasts of Zealand and Scania, and the island of Hveen, was extremely picturesque and beautiful, and peculiarly calculated to inspire the mind with a train of delightful meditations. Lifting up my heart to Him who dwelleth on high, I implored his blessing on the important undertaking in which I had embarked, and prayed that he would graciously be pleased to render the precious seed which I

was honoured to carry over to a distant island, productive of a most luxuriant harvest.

There was something peculiarly gratifying in the idea, that our vessel, instead of proceeding on any predatory or murderous expedition, was freighted with provisions for the inhabitants of a barren island; grain, and other articles for the support of temporal life; and the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, the germ and staff of spiritual existence. Considering every circumstance, I could not help viewing the following lines of Cowper as strikingly appropriate:—

“ Soft airs, and gentle heavings of the wave,  
Impel the fleet, whose errand is to save,  
To succour wasted regions, and replace  
The smile of opulence in sorrow's face.  
Let nothing adverse, nothing unforeseen,  
Impede the bark that plows the deep serene,  
Charg'd with a freight, transcending in its worth  
The gems of India, nature's rarest birth,  
That flies, like Gabriel on his Lord's commands,  
An herald of God's love to Pagan lands.”

Not, however, that I regarded Iceland as a pagan land. On the contrary, from all that I had been able to learn, I was persuaded that there were few places in Europe where Christianity is professed, to which the epithet could with less justice be applied, than to that island, notwithstanding its manifold local disadvantages. Yet, as genuine Christianity can only be main-



tained by the continued propagation of its principles, of which the Bible is the repository, it is evident the Icelanders must soon have made a retrograde motion, had not measures been adopted for providing them with a fresh supply of the Holy Scriptures.

Early the following morning, we passed the island of *Hveen*, famous on account of its having been the residence of the celebrated astronomer Tycho Brahe. A more eligible spot he could not perhaps have found, as the island lies high, and the coasts on both sides being low, a most extensive horizon presents itself to the view. The observatory, which he erected here, and to which, from its destination, he gave the name of *Uraniaborg*, was raised at great expense, part of which was borne by the king of Denmark, and the rest defrayed by the astronomer himself. He is said to have expended no less than 100,000 rix-dollars on its erection. It was not only built in a highly ornamental style, but regularly fortified; yet it did not remain in a perfect state for more than twenty years, and now there is scarcely a single vestige remaining to tell the inquisitive traveller where it stood. Some years ago, I recollect having spent a night here with Major Stuart, a natural son of the Pretender, in whose possession the place at that time was; but all I could discover was merely the remainder of a vault, and a few slight traces of the fortification. Its history, in connection

with that of its master, furnishes a striking lesson of the uncertainty and vicissitude of every sublunary object.

About nine o'clock, we made *Elsineur*, which, with the castle of *Cronborg*, we passed on the one hand, while we left behind us the town of *Helsingborg*, in Sweden, on the other. The two countries are divided here only by the Sound, (*Öresund*), which does not exceed four British miles in breadth. In times of peace, *Elsineur* roads are crowded with the flags of all nations, it being necessary for every vessel to call on passing, in order to pay the Sound dues. In consequence of an unremitting influx of strangers from all parts of the busy world, most of whom had no other object in view than the acquisition of earthly riches, that town used to present a melancholy spectacle of indifference to the momentous concerns of religion. Adversity, however, has a natural tendency to generate reflection; and we may indulge the hope, that the severe stroke with which its inhabitants have been visited by the total failure of their resources for these last seven years, has not been without effect in leading many to turn their attention to the things which belong to their everlasting peace.

From *Elsineur*, we proceeded in company with upwards of seventy vessels into the *Cattagat*, in which, for the two following days, we had either calms or contrary winds, so that we made but little progress; but a fresh breeze

sprung up on the 12th, which carried us into the harbour of Wrangö, a few miles below *Gottenburgh*. We were under the necessity of putting in here, in order to wait for a Swedish convoy-ship to take us past Norway: the Swedes not being without suspicions that our going to Iceland was merely a pretence, and that it was our real intention to supply the Norwegians with grain. By this means we were detained more than twelve days; but to me the loss was amply compensated, by the opportunities that were afforded me of visiting my friends in *Gottenburgh*. Our interviews were short, yet highly interesting, and tended in no small degree to strengthen those bonds of Christian love, which no length of time shall ever be able to dissolve. The Bible Society, which had been formed at this place, towards the close of the former year, by the active and enlightened zeal of the late Rev. Dr. Brunmark, was going on prosperously: only it was with concern I learned that they were soon to lose one of their valuable secretaries, my dear and much respected friend, the Rev. Professor Rosen, who was about to enter on a living to which he had lately been presented in the country.

On the 21st we left the Swedish coast, in company with a large fleet, that proceeded under the same convoy to the westward. We had scarcely got clear of *Marstrand Castle*, when it blew a violent gale of wind, which lasted several hours, and completely dispersed the convoy.

It was succeeded by a series of calms, in which we had ample room for the exercise of patience; and it was not before the evening of the 30th, that we descried *Fair Isle*, and the eastern coast of *Shetland*. We entertained the fullest expectation, of being able the same night to pass, what the seamen call "The Hole," *i. e.* between the islands just mentioned; but the wind veered round to the N. W. and increased, during the night, to such a degree, that we were driven back to the eastward of the Orkneys. The sight of my native country excited the tenderest emotions in my mind, and nothing but the importance of the mission on which I was proceeding, could have reconciled me to the idea of passing it without paying it a visit.

The first view we obtained of *Iceland*, was on the evening of the 12th of July. At the distance of forty miles we could discover some of the Ice Mountains, towering to an immense height in the horizon, surrounded below with clouds, and completely covered with snow. From about the middle of the highest, a black rugged ridge commenced, which continued to dip gradually towards the west, till it was intercepted by two small conical snow-capped mountains, that bore the most perfect resemblance to sugar loaves. When the tediousness of the voyage is taken into consideration, an allowance will easily be made for my attaching the idea of beauty to these masses of perennial snow, notwithstanding the revolting presenti-

ment of cold which necessarily forced itself into my mind. The weather becoming foggy, we lost sight of the land for the two following days; but on the morning of the 15th, we descried a high land directly a-head, and, on its clearing up about nine o'clock, we were happy to find we had made the south-west extremity of the island, or *Cape Reykianess*, which it was necessary for us to pass, before we could reach *Reykjavik*, the place of our destination. On the left we had the *Elld-eyar*, or Fire Islands; so called from their having been thrown up at different periods by the agency of submarine volcanoes. They consist entirely of barren and precipitous rocks, and are almost always covered with sea-fowl, on which account the Danish traders have given them the name of *Fugleskierene*. Passing between the innermost of these rocks and the Cape, which is also of volcanic origin, and presents a very bold and rugged appearance, we were rapidly carried by the tide into the Faxè Fiord \*, and, having now got into smooth water, and both wind and current being in our favour, the close of our voyage was the most agreeable that can be imagined.

As we sailed along, I was delighted by the successive opening of the creeks and bays on our right, and especially the discovery of *Hafnarfiord*, the school of *Bessastad*, the *Ness*, and other places in the vicinity of *Reykjavik*. Nor was my

\* *Fiord* signifies a bay or frith.

curiosity less gratified by the survey of the *Esian*, *Akkra*, and other mountains on the left side of the bay. Their lofty height, the beautiful girdle of silver clouds that surrounded them considerably below the top, the magnificent appearance of the summit above, and the solemn gloom which covered the inferior regions:—all conspired to impress the mind with reverential and admiring ideas of that Power who laid the foundations of the earth, and at whose wrath the mountains tremble and shake. About eight in the evening, we got our pilot on board, when a number of reciprocal inquiries took place; and a little past ten we anchored before the town of *Reykjavik*, where the Danish flag was displayed from the tops of the mercantile houses, in honour of our arrival. The first act of kindness shewn us by the natives, was their mounting us on their shoulders, and carrying us ashore from the boat. On landing we were met by a crowd of men, women, and children, who filled the air with the exclamations, “Peace; come in peace; the Lord bless you,” &c. salutations that were at once calculated to prepossess a stranger in favour of the religious disposition of the Icelanders. At the head of the beach we were met by the superior class of the inhabitants, by whom we were welcomed to the island, and among whom I was happy to recognise some of my own countrymen. We then proceeded to the house of Mr. Knudsen, the partner of Mr. Petræus, where we made an excellent supper on fresh

salmon, and returned on board about one o'clock in the morning.

The day after my arrival was principally occupied in getting my luggage ashore from the vessel, and paying my respects to the Right Rev. the Bishop of Iceland, His Excellency the Governor, the Landfoged, and others, who, in the warmest terms, expressed their approbation of the object I had in view, in visiting the island. The bishop in particular, to whom I was favoured with a letter of introduction from the Right Rev. the Bishop of Zealand, testified his conviction of the great good that would result from the present instance of foreign benevolence, confirmed the accounts that had already been received by the Bible Society, respecting the extreme want of the Scriptures on the island, declared how sensible he was of the obligations under which his countrymen lay to their spiritual benefactors: and kindly promised to render me every assistance in his power, towards facilitating the attainment of my object.

*Reykjavik*, which about fifty years ago, consisted merely of a few houses, has lately risen into some notice, having become the residence of the governor, the Episcopal see, the seat of the Supreme Court of Judicature, and the principal mercantile station on the island. It is situated on the south side of a considerable inlet of the Faxè Fiord, upon a low marshy ground, between two eminences that are partially covered with grass, and studded with a number

of small cottages. It consists of two streets, the longer of which, built only on the one side, stretches along the shore, and is entirely occupied by the merchants: the other, which strikes off at the west end of the town, and runs almost in a direct line back to the margin of a small lake, contains the houses of the Bishop, Landfóged, and others not immediately engaged in trade. About the middle of this street, on the east side, lies the public burying-ground, which is neatly enclosed with a new earthen wall, and has two gates, one to the street, and the other at the south-east corner opposite to the church. At the east end of the town, behind the range of houses along the beach, and in a parallel line with them, are the houses of the Governor, and Sysselmand; and a little behind these, to the south-west, is the church, which stands by itself, on a gentle rise of the green, occupying the space between the town and the lake. It is a heavy building of stone, and might make a commodious place of worship, were it not that the roof, which is covered with red tiles, is sadly out of repair, and it is not without danger that the congregation assemble in it in stormy weather. On the rising ground at the end of the governor's house, from which it is separated by a small rivulet, lies the house of correction, a large white-washed stone building, which, at a distance, has the most respectable appearance of any about the place. The dwelling-houses, with two exceptions, are all constructed of wood in the Nor-



wegian fashion, and have generally a storehouse or two, and a small garden attached to them. On the height to the west is the observatory, a small building of wood ; and on the summit of the opposite eminence stands the school monument, which the students have raised with much pains from the calcined stones in the vicinity. At a short distance in the bay, are several small islands, the principal of which is *Videy*, which, on account of its agreeable situation, the richness of its pasture, and the number of eider-ducks that annually frequent it, is reckoned superior to any other spot in the southern parts of the island. It was formerly famous for its monastery, founded in the year 1226, but belongs at present to the crown, and is occupied by Chief Justice Stephenson. In many places it rests on beautiful pillars of basaltic lava, which, in conjunction with the crater a little to the west of the houses, leaves no room to doubt of its having been thrown up by a submarine volcano. Similar appearances are visible on the opposite coast near Reykiavik, where are also some hot springs, from which the bay most probably derives its name.

It is rather a striking coincidence, that the capital of Iceland should, as it were, by mere accident, happen to be built on the very spot where Ingolf, the first of the Norwegian emigrants that settled on the island, fixed his habitation. In conformity to a superstitious practice common in those days, that adventurer, on ap-

proaching the eastern coast, threw the principal wooden pillars of his former habitation into the sea, vowing he would settle wherever they were cast on shore. After some time his slaves, whom he sent in search of them, found them driven up at this place, and Ingolf, true to his vow, fixed his abode at *Reykjavik*, though reproached by his own slaves for preferring so rugged and barren a spot to the fine districts they had passed on their way from the east.\*

On the 17th I rode, in company with my friend Mr. Petræus, to *Gardè*, the residence of the very Rev. Marcus Magnusson, the archdeacon of Iceland, and dean of Guldbringè and Kiosar Syssels. In our way we fell in with the first effects I had seen of subterraneous fire—a tract of lava, rugged and wild, which, at first sight, threatened to put a stop to our journey. To whatever side we turned, nothing presented itself to our view but the dismal ruins of mountains, which have been so completely convulsed by the reciprocal contention of the elements beneath, that, after having emitted immense quantities of lava, their foundations have given way, and the whole structure has fallen in, and continued to burn till the more fusible parts were entirely calcined. Large masses of rock, which one would scarcely suppose had been affected by fire, lie intermingled with the lava, which has burned with the most dreadful violence. These

\* Landnámabok. Part I. cap. 6, 7, 8.

ruins are scattered in every direction, and assume the most forbidding and gloomy aspect. Having gained the summit of the hill to the west of the lava, a more agreeable prospect presented itself. *Gardè*, from which this lava takes the name of *Gardè-hraun*,\* lay directly before us; and, a little to the right, the narrow peninsula of *Alytaness*, which juts out into the *Hafnarfiord*, and is adorned with the church and school of *Bessastad*, and a number of beautiful cottages. Besides the church, a pretty large building of wood, *Gardè* consists of several small houses, most of which are occupied by the archdeacon. On our arrival, he met us at the door, and gave us a welcome reception. After some desultory conversation, we came to the subject of the Scriptures; and I was happy to be informed that the copies of the New Testament that had been sent him in 1812, had soon been disposed of, and that the desire of obtaining them was at last so keen, that the peasants would have paid double the price, if it had only been in their power to obtain them. He produced a specimen of the high estimation in which the Divine oracles are held by the Icelanders, and the assiduity with which they apply to the study of them. It was a copy of the Bible in folio, a great part of which had been devoured by the tooth of time; but the defective

\* *Hraun*, pronounced *Hroyn*, is the Icelandic for lava, and properly signifies a rough and rugged tract formed by melting or precipitation.

pages had all been replaced, and the text supplied in the most accurate manner. The handwriting was such as would do honour to any writing-master in Europe. On my putting the question, whether it had not been written by a clergyman, or some other person in a public capacity, I was told, to my no small surprise, that it had been done by a common peasant, and that such instances of elegant penmanship are by no means uncommon in Iceland.

Having received, from the archdeacon, repeated assurances of assistance in the prosecution of my object, we left *Gardè*, and rode over a rough stream of lava to *Hafnarfiord*, which is situated on the north side of the bay of the same name, and near its termination. Just before coming to the harbour, as we were scrambling over the sharp crusts of the broken bubbles of lava, some of which were upwards of fifteen feet in height, I received peculiar gratification from the sight of a small hamlet neatly built of lava, and a garden in full verdure, which lay in the heart of one of these. This spot is completely sheltered from wintry blasts by the lofty walls formed by the surrounding crust, and has a fine southern exposure. The scenery was strikingly grotesque; and the contrast between the verdure and regularity observable in the garden, and the blackness and distorted forms of the lava, was inimitably grand. *Hafnarfiord* consists only of two mercantile houses, with their storehouses, and a few cottages inhabited by the work-

ing people. It is, however, remarkable, on account of its dry dock, which owes its erection to the enterprising spirit of Mr. Sivertsen, and is the only thing of the kind on the island. We were here kindly received by that gentleman, who is already known to the friends of the Bible Society by the share he took in the distribution and sale of the New Testaments sent over in 1812. On our return to *Reykjavik*, the way led us through a tract of the lava still more horrific than that described above. The road, which in most places did not exceed the breadth of an ordinary foot-path, was so filled with sharp-pointed pieces of lava, that our poor horses could only proceed by cautiously stepping over one stone after another; and every now and then we were annoyed by large masses jutting out from the sides, which threatened to lacerate our feet, or, if we were off our guard, to precipitate us from our horses. Besides melted masses, resembling those on the other side of the tract, we encountered large and dangerous chasms, between which, at times, there was scarcely sufficient space left for our horses to pass. The gloom of night added to the horrors of the scene, and it was not without the most powerful apprehension of danger that we reached the opposite side of the tract. We arrived in town about one o'clock in the morning.

On my arrival in Iceland, it was with deep regret I learned that the most favourable opportunity for the distribution of the Bibles and New

Testaments this season was irretrievably lost. Had I come a month sooner, I should have arrived in the very middle of what is called the *Handels-tid*, or period of traffic, when several hundreds of the inhabitants repair to this place from all quarters of the island, and barter their home productions for foreign commodities, and articles of necessary use for the winter. They had now all returned to their respective abodes, and there was no other way of acquainting them with the supply that had arrived, except by sending an express to the different corners, or travelling myself around the coast. The latter mode I preferred, on various accounts, as I should thereby have it in my power to ascertain the actual wants of the people in a spiritual point of view; leave copies as specimens on passing along; visit the different sea-ports, to which copies of the Scriptures had been forwarded from Copenhagen, and make the necessary arrangements with the merchants and others for their circulation in the vicinity; and especially, as there was reason to hope, that by the blessing of God, on my conversation with such of the clergy as should fall in my way, I might be the humble instrument of stirring them up to greater diligence and zeal in the work of the Lord, by informing them of the present appearances with respect to religion abroad, the lively interest which Christians of all denominations take in its diffusion, and the energetic and successful means employed by them for that purpose.

Their entire exclusion, by invincible local circumstances, from almost all access to the sources of religious intelligence, has a necessary tendency to engender a partial coldness and indifference about the common interests of the gospel, and to render this part of the vineyard of Christ which they occupy, frigid and barren as the island they inhabit. A visit from a stranger, especially one who travelled among them with the end I had in view, would, it was presumed, excite a more lively concern about the Holy Scriptures, and thus contribute to advance the cause of pure and undefiled religion.

My journey being therefore determined on, it now became a question, whether I ought to proceed directly across the desert and uninhabited tract in the interior, to the northern parts of the island, and then pursue my route along the coast, back to this place; or visit the coast first, and then return across the mountains. After consulting my friends, and maturely weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the different routes, I was induced to adopt the former, chiefly from the consideration, that Captain Von Scheel, \* one of the Danish officers employed in surveying the coasts, was to proceed in that direction in the course of a few days, and that I would derive much valuable information and advice from him relative to a variety of subjects with which I was necessarily unacquainted. On

\* Now Major, and Knight of the Dannebrog.

my communicating my wishes to that gentleman, he very kindly expressed his happiness in having me for a companion, and we accordingly fixed on the 25th as the day of our departure.

The intermediate days were taken up in making the necessary preparations, and adopting certain measures for the circulation of the Scriptures in the southern districts during my absence. Travelling in Iceland is attended with much more trouble and difficulty than in any other part of Europe. Here there is neither coach nor curricule, cart nor waggon, for the conveyance of one's person and baggage. Every thing is carried on horseback. The first thing, therefore, that a traveller has to think of is the procuring of horses, which he may either hire or purchase; but the latter mode is preferable, as in that case he has them more at his command; and it is also attended with less expense, especially if the journey be of any length. The common horses, called by the natives *puls* or *klifia-hestar*, i. e. horses of burden, are at present sold for twenty-five or thirty shillings; and a good riding horse, (Icel. *rid-hest*) costs upwards of five pounds Sterling. They are in general from thirteen to fourteen hands high, strongly made, lively, persevering, and carry from sixteen to twenty stones weight, the distance of a *Thingmannaleid*,\* every day. In breaking such as

\* A *Thingmannaleid* is the distance the natives were accustomed to travel each day when they rode to the *Althing*, or General Assembly, and makes at an average twenty-five British miles.



they design for the saddle, the natives make it their grand object to inure them to a short easy amble, at which many of them advance with almost incredible swiftness. As there are no inns on the island, the traveller must also provide himself with a tent, which is the more necessary on account of the deserts he has sometimes to traverse, and even at the farms he will prefer it to the best accommodations that may be offered him. A good experienced *Fylgimadr*, or guide, is the next requisite, and, if the cavalcade be large, a *Lestamadr* to take care of the horses and baggage is equally necessary. Travelling chests must also be procured, together with provisions, and small money, with which to reward any trivial services that may be shewn by the peasants. For those who penetrate into the interior, a compass is indispensable, as they are apt to get bewildered in snowy or foggy weather; and if they do not keep in the proper direction, may easily wander into deserts, where both themselves and their horses must perish with hunger.

On the 24th, which was the Lord's day, I attended worship in the Cathedral. The service was begun by the Archdeacon, who had come to town on purpose to place a new minister. After finishing the liturgical service at the altar, he ascended the pulpit and pronounced a short prayer, and then read the gospel for the day, on which he also founded his discourse. As it was the first Icelandic sermon I had ever heard, it was not to be expected I should understand every

word. Indeed, there were almost whole sentences, in which, to borrow the language of the Apostle, we were barbarians to one another; yet, having gained some knowledge of the Icelandic beforehand, and being acquainted with its kindred dialects, the Swedish and Danish, I could easily collect the scope and substance of his discourse, and, from its general tenor, do not hesitate to pronounce it strictly evangelical. Towards the close, he gave a summary view of the means by which the gospel has been propagated, from the time it began to be spoken by the Lord Jesus and his Apostles, down to the present day; and, by a noble prosopopœia, reminded Iceland of the rich share she had enjoyed of this blessing, and the responsibility she lay under for the use of her mercies. In particular, he called the attention of the inhabitants of *Reykjavik* to the privileges which had been bestowed upon them in this respect; but added, that it was a lamentable but notorious fact, that their degeneracy seemed to keep pace with the excellence of the ministers that were sent to labour among them. He then proceeded to place the minister, which he did by simply stating his presentation by the King of Denmark, and exhorting both him and the congregation to the discharge of the duties they mutually owed each other. After sermon, the Rev. Arne Helgason, who had been presented to the living, went to the altar, and three females stepped forward and knelt, in order to receive the sacrament. The celebration of this

rite commenced by the clergyman's chanting the Lord's prayer, and the words of the institution; after which, the choristers sung a sacramental hymn, and the communicants were served at the same time with the elements. Several short prayers were then repeated, to which responses were given by the choristers; and the service concluded with the singing of a psalm, and the enunciation of the levitical benediction.

The worship was well attended, and would have had a most solemn effect, had it not been for the crying of young children, who were allowed to remain, to the great annoyance of the congregation,

## CHAP. II.

*Leave Reykiavik for the North—Mode of Travelling—Mossfell Church—Skálabrecca—Mode of Salutation in Iceland—Hospitality—Description of Icelandic Tents—Dreadful Fissure of Abnannagiá—Thingvalla Church—Seat of the Ancient Court of Justice—Tract of Lava—Fissure of Hrafnagiá—Hot Springs of Laugarvalla—The Geysers—Haukadal—Ari the Learned—Remarkable instance of Intelligence in a Girl—White River—White River Lake—Desert—Ice Mountains—Valley of Eyafjord—Groupe of Icelanders reading the New Testament—Factory of Akureyri—Want of Bibles, and anxiety to obtain them—Visit to the Sheriff at Kiarne—Female Library—Domestic Worship.*

AT an early hour on the morning of the 26th of July, I began to pack up my baggage, and make the final preparations for my departure to the north. The horses being caught, my servant proceeded to load them, which was accomplished in the following manner. Large square pieces of a thin fibrous turf were laid on the horses backs, above which was placed a kind of

wooden saddle, called, in Icelandic, *klifberi*, that served the double purpose of keeping the turf together, and supporting the baggage, which was suspended on two wooden pegs, fixed one on each side of the saddle. The whole was fastened by means of two leathern thongs that went round the belly of the horse. Having partaken of an excellent breakfast at the Sysselmand's, we sent the baggage on before us; and, bidding adieu to our friends in *Reykjavik*, we set off about twelve o'clock, accompanied by Mr. Edmund Hodgson, a gentleman from England, and Mr. Vidalin, one of the Bishop's sons, who intended to proceed with us as far as the Geysers. Mr. Knudsen also conducted us to the *Laxá*, or Salmon River,\* which falls into the bay about four miles to the east of *Reykjavik*, and abounds in the excellent species of fish from which it derives its name. A little farther on, we fell in with our baggage, and could not help smiling at the striking resemblance our whole company bore to a band of tinkers. However, I was soon reconciled to the mode of travelling, on discovering that it was quite oriental, and almost fancied myself in the midst of an Arabian caravan. In fact, there exist so many coincidences between the natural appearances of this island, together with the manners

\* This river is otherwise called the *Hellará*, or Cavernous River, from the numerous holes in the lava that forms its bed.

and customs of its inhabitants, and what is to be met with in the East, that I must claim some indulgence from the reader, if I should occasionally allude to them, especially as they tend to throw light on many passages of Scripture. Our horses formed a pretty large cavalcade, amounting to not less than eighteen in number. The first was led by one of the servants; and the rest were tied to each other in a line, by means of a cord of hair fastened to the tail of the one that went before, and tied round the under jaw of the one that followed. Owing to this mode of leading them, it is of importance to have horses that are accustomed to it, otherwise they are sure to drag behind, and when any of those that go before happen to leap over a torrent, or begin to trot, the unbroken ones are taken by surprise, heave up their heads, and generally break the rein. In this case, if your servant be careless, and no person brings up the rear, you may proceed for a mile or two without discovering that the half of your cavalcade is amissing. The Arabs have an effectual method of guarding against this inconvenience, by fixing a small bell round the neck of the last camel in the row. Sometimes the horses are suffered to go loose, in which case they are driven before the travellers; and, should any of them stray from the path, a certain call from the guide is sufficient to bring them back.

The first part of the road was by no means

calculated to inspire us with very favourable ideas of the country; for little else appeared around us but vast fields of stones and comminuted lava. On the left hand, at no great distance, we had the continuation of the *Esian* mountains, the western extremities of which face *Reykjavik*; and a little before us, on the same side, lay the *Skálafjall*, whose three pyramidal tops were towering high above the clouds. About six in the evening we arrived at *Mossfell*, which stands on an eminence, and commands an extensive, though rather barren prospect. The church is built of wood, has a coat of turf around the sides, and the roof consists of the same material. It has only two small windows at the east end, and a sky-light to the south; and the whole structure does not exceed thirteen feet in length, by nine in breadth. We did not find the clergyman at home; but his wife treated us with plenty of fresh cream, and we were quite delighted with the frankness and agility with which she performed the rites of hospitality.

Leaving *Mossfell*, we entered a moor, which, from west to east, the direction in which we travelled, was certainly not less than eighteen miles. The ride was dreary in the extreme. For more than five hours we did not see a single house, or indeed any living creature, excepting a few golden plovers, which, from their melancholy warble, only added to the gloominess of

the scenery. At midnight we reached the western margin of the Thingvalla Lake, and stopped at a small cottage called *Skálabrecca*. All, of course, was shut; but we followed Captain Von Scheel, who scaled the walls, and each of us endeavoured to find some window or hole in the roof, through which we might rouse some of the inhabitants. It was not, however, till the Captain had forced open one of the doors, and called as loud as he was able, that we effected our purpose. The salutation he made use of was, *Her se Gud*, "May God be in this place;" which, after he had repeated it near a dozen of times, was answered with *Drottinn blessa þik*, "The Lord bless thee." My imagination led me instantly to the field of Boaz, Ruth ii. 4.; and I felt all the force of our Saviour's injunction: "When ye enter the house, salute it; and if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it." Math. x. 12, 13. The common salutations of the Icelanders are most palpably oriental. On meeting a person, you hail him with *Sæl vertu*, which exactly corresponds to the Hebrew *Shalom lach*; or the Arabic *Salam aleik*: neither of which signify "peace," in the occidental sense of the word, but "I wish thee happiness, or prosperity." It would appear, from the Edda, that the ancient Scandinavians used *Heill* instead of *Sæll*, whence, through the medium of the Anglo-Saxon, our English "hail," which occurs as a salutation in many parts of the



Bible, \* The person you salute generally replies; *Drottinn blessa ydr*, or *Blessa ydr Drottinn*, "The Lord bless you." When you meet the head of a family, you wish prosperity to him, and all that are in his house, (see 1 Sam. xxv. 6.); and, on leaving them, you say, *Se i Guds Fridi*, "May you remain in the peace of God;" which is returned with, *Guds Fridi veri med ydr*, "The peace of God be with you." Both at meeting and parting, an affectionate kiss on the mouth, without distinction of rank, age, or sex, is the only mode of salutation known in Iceland, except sometimes in the immediate vicinity of the factories, where the common Icelander salutes a foreigner whom he regards as his superior, by placing his right hand on his mouth or left breast, and then making a deep bow. When you visit a family in Iceland, you must salute them according to their age and rank, beginning with the highest, and descending, according to your best judgment, to the lowest, not even excepting the servants: but, on taking leave, this order is completely re-

\* Both expressions are still used in Swedish poetry, as in the beautiful hymn of Hammarsköld, on the Shepherds at Bethlehem:

"*Hell, säll dig* Messias, Du syndares tröst!  
*Sällt* er det at bära Din bild i sitt bröst  
 Ditt heliga namn på sin tunga \*."

\* *Poetiska Studier*. Stockholm, 1813.

versed ; the salutation is first tendered to the servants, then to the children, and, last of all, to the mistress and master of the family.

The remoteness of the sleeping apartment, which lay at the inner end of a long narrow passage, could not but render it difficult for the people to hear us ; however, they soon began to make their appearance ; and, instead of looking sulky, or grumbling at us for having disturbed them in their soundest repose, they manifested the utmost willingness to serve us ; and assisted us in unloading the horses, and loosing our tents, which we pitched close to the lake. The Icelandic tents pretty much resemble those of the Bedoween Arabs, and are erected in the following manner : two poles, of from five to six feet in length, are stuck fast in the ground, at the distance of seven or eight feet, and joined together at the top by a third pole, over which the curtain, consisting of white wadmél, or coarse woollen cloth, is spread, and braced tight by means of cords fastened to the eaves, and tied at the other end to hooked wooden pins, which are driven into the ground at different distances round the tent. The flaps are provided with small holes around the border, and are fastened close to the ground in the same manner, except at the one end, where a small piece is left loose to serve the purpose of a door. In these tents the natives live several weeks on the mountains every summer, while they are

collecting the *lichen Islandicus*, and are extremely fond of this kind of Nomadic life.

Our friend, Captain von Scheel, lay on an excellent bed, supported by two long wooden poles, fixed at each end to the top of his travelling chests, about a foot and a half above the ground; and this commodious method I also adopted on my arrival in the north: but at present I was obliged to spread my couch on the ground, from which I was separated only by the flat pieces of turf that had served as packsaddles; and my riding-saddle, placed on its back, formed an admirable pillow. To prevent the horses from running away, their fore-feet were tied together with a rope of hair, in the one end of which was an eye, and the other was wound round the ankle-bone of a sheep, and thus fixed in the noose. As the morning was rather cold, we got a supply of warm milk, which proved very refreshing; and a little before two o'clock, I sat down on one of the wooden boxes, at the door of my tent, and read the 103d Psalm, in my small pocket-Bible—so clear are the summer nights in this northern latitude. Lifting up my heart to my Heavenly Father, I humbly presented my tribute of praise for the mercies of the past day, and retired to rest in the possession of a high degree of comfort and peace.

Having reposed about six hours, I drew aside the curtain of my tent door, when the *Thingval-la-vatn* presented itself full before me, near the

middle of which the two black volcanic islands of *Sandey* and *Nesey* rose into view. On the opposite side, a rugged range of mountains, above which the sun had just risen, stretched along to the right; and the prospect was bounded on the south by a number of mountains, diversified in size and form, but all of which appeared to owe their birth to the convulsive throes of the earth, occasioned at some remote period by the violence of subterraneous fire. The inhabitants of the cottage seemed very poor; and though they were in possession of a few books, had no part of the Scriptures. I therefore presented the peasant with a Bible, which he received with every demonstration of gratitude and joy.

After bathing in the lake, the bottom of which consisted of the finest particles of lava, and partaking of a dish of warm coffee, which I contrived to boil on the ground, we set off for *Thingvalla*, across a plain entirely covered with lava; but, as it was smoother and less broken, we rode over it without much difficulty. The track we followed led us all at once to the brink of the frightful chasm, called *Almannagiá*\*, where the solid masses of burnt rock have been disrupted,

\* The etymology of this epithet I have not been able to learn with any certainty. Either it denotes the chasm capable of containing *the whole population* of Iceland, or that through which *all* must pass who travel this way; or, what is more likely than either, the fissure in which the generality of the people pitched their tents when they attended the *Althing*, or General Assembly, held in the neighbourhood.

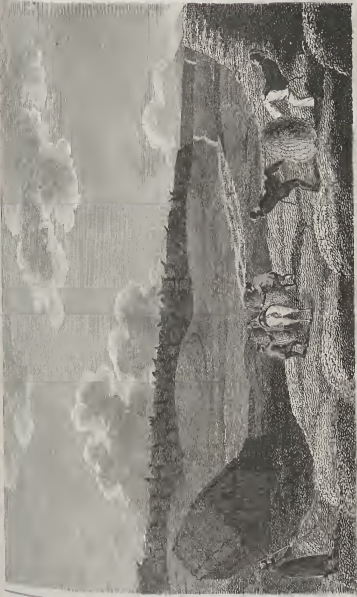
so as to form a fissure, or gap, not less than an hundred and eighty feet deep; in many places nearly of the same width; and about three miles in length. At first sight, the stupendous precipices inspired us with a certain degree of terror, which, however, soon left us, and we spent nearly half an hour in surveying the deep chasms, running nearly parallel with the main one, almost below our feet. On the west side of the rent, at no great distance from its southern termination, it is met by another opening, partially filled with large masses of broken rock, down which the traveller must resolve to proceed. Binding up the bridles of our horses, we made them descend before us, while we contemplated with surprise the undaunted nimbleness with which they leaped from one step of this natural staircase to another. In our own descent, it was not without impressions of fear that we viewed the immensely huge pieces of rock that projected from the sides of the chasm, almost overhead, and which appeared to be but slenderly attached to the precipice. When we arrived at the bottom, we found ourselves situated in the midst of a fine green; and, after stopping once more to admire the wild and rugged grandeur of the scenery, we again mounted our steeds, and, reaching a pass in the eastern cliffs, which, owing to the sinking of the ground, are considerably lower, we made our egress with the utmost ease.

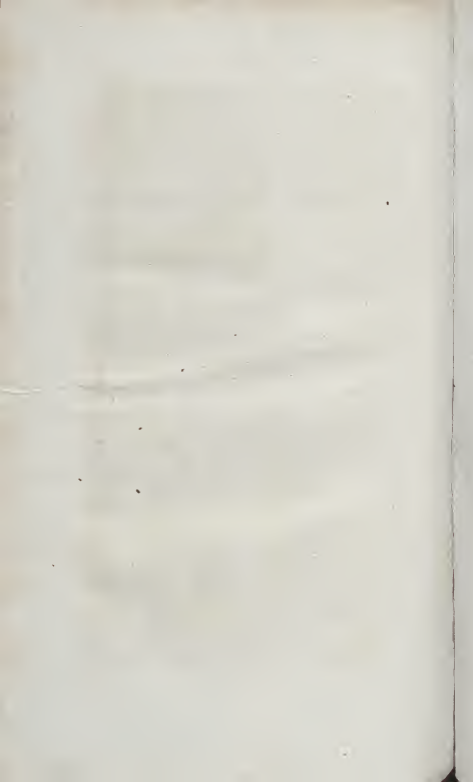
We now entered the *Thingvalla*, or Court Valley; and, crossing the river *Öxerá*, by which

Engraved by A. Swan 1856.

HAY - MAKING AND VIEW OF THE ALMANNAGIÁ FROM THINGVALLA.

Designed by Engelström.





it is divided, came about one o'clock to *Thingvalla* church, where we were kindly received, and resolved to await our baggage, which had proceeded by a more circuitous route. The pastor is an aged man of sixty-nine. His parish consists of twelve families; and though he could not give me any certain statement, yet he did not believe that there were more than two, or, at most, three of them that were in possession of a copy of the Bible. He promised to inform his parishioners of the supply that had come to the island. The church is very small, not much larger than that of *Mossfell*, and is filled with barrels, books, and chests, which serve the purpose of seats, and, on a shelf before the altar, is a coffin, which the clergyman has prepared for himself; and which, in all likelihood, he must soon occupy.

What renders *Thingvalla* the most remarkable, perhaps, of any spot to which importance is attached in the annals of Iceland, is its having been the seat of the *Althing*, or general assembly of the nation, for the period of nearly nine hundred years. In 928, when the Ulfiotian Code was received by the inhabitants, the supreme court of justice, which had been held for several years at a place called Hof, in the Kiosar district, was removed to this plain; and the public concerns of the people continued to be discussed, and public justice administered here, till the year 1800, when the dreadful convulsions which the vicinity had suffered from earth-



quakes, were made a pretext for the removal of the court to *Reykjavik*, where it is now held. Nor was it merely the seat of civil judicature. The consistory or ecclesiastical court, under the presidency of the Bishop of Skalholt, was also convened annually at this place ; and numbers repaired to *Thingvalla*, who had no interest pending at either court, merely for the sake of meeting their friends. It accordingly holds a conspicuous place in all the Sagas or ancient traditionary accounts, and is peculiarly worthy of notice, on account of its being the spot where the Christian religion was publicly acknowledged in the year 1000 : A decision which was hastened by the following circumstance.—While the heathen and those who professed Christianity were engaged in all the ardour of dispute, a messenger came running into the assembly with the intelligence, that subterraneous fire had broken out in the district of Ölfus, and that it threatened the mansion of the high priest Thoroddr. On hearing this, the heathen exclaimed : “ Can it be matter of surprise that the gods should be angry at such speeches ? ” To which Snorri Godi, an advocate of the Christians, replied by as pointed a question : “ At what were the gods angry then, at the period when the very lava on which we now stand was burning ? ” The force of the argument was felt : the assembly adjourned for that day ; and when they again met, an act was passed for the abolition of all public acts of idola-

try, and the introduction of Christianity as the authorised religion.

Previous to the year 1690, the court was held in the open air, surrounded by a scenery, the wildest and most horrific of any in nature, and awfully calculated to add to the terrors of justice, and maintain the inviolability of the civil code. "It is," says Sir George Mackenzie, \* "a spot of singular wildness and desolation; on every side of which, appear the most tremendous effects of ancient convulsion and disorder; while nature now sleeps in a death-like silence amid the horrors she has formed." As the aged clergyman was unable to walk about with us himself, he begged we would allow his son to shew us the wonders of the place. We accordingly followed him a little to the north-west of the church, when we entered on a long and narrow tract of solid lava, covered with the richest vegetation, but completely separated from the rocks on both sides, by two parallel fissures, which, in most places, are upwards of forty fathoms in depth, and in some places no bottom can be found at all. They are filled with the most beautiful pellucid water, till within about sixty feet of the brink on which we stood. It was impossible for us to look down into the dreadful abyss on either side, without being sensible of the most disagreeable emotions; and when, with the terrors of our situation, we combined the idea of

\* Travels in Iceland, p. 318. 1st Edit.

the awful period when the rocks rent and the mountains fell, we felt a desire to remove as quickly as possible to a safer and more agreeable scene. The place is called *Lögbergit*, or “the Law Mount;” \* and the ruins of the house occupied by the chief magistrate are still to be seen. A little below this, near the side of the river, we were shewn the spot, where, in ancient times, many a miserable wight was burned for witchcraft. On removing a little of the earth, we discovered the remains of burnt bones and ashes. Such females as were convicted of child murder, were drowned in a pool formed by the river *Överá*, in the *Almannagiá*, just before it reaches the cataract by which it descends into the plain. The other culprits were beheaded on *Thorsleifsholm*, a small island in the middle of the river.

After dining on an excellent dish of fresh salmon trout, a species of fish in which the lake abounds, and equally good curds and cream, we left *Thingvalla*, and pursued our journey round the north end of the lake. The whole of the tract consisted of lava, and, at almost every turn

\* The administration of public justice on certain hills was not only common throughout Scandinavia, but was also practised in Scotland, and different other nations. Hence, the term “Law” is still applied to many hills in Scotland, as Largo-law, Berrilaw, in Fifeshire, &c. We also meet with Dingwall in the north of Scotland, Tingwall in Shetland and the Isle of Man; all of which are manifestly the Icelandic Thingvalla—compound of *Thing*, a forum or court of justice, and *valla*, which signifies a field or plain.

of the narrow path, we fell in with chasms and apertures, which wore the most perilous aspect. The dreariness, however, of the scene, was in some measure enlivened by the small bushes of birch and willow, that every now and then reared their heads among the rough cakes of lava. In the ascent on the opposite side of the lake, is another large fissure, called *Hrafnagiá*, or "the fissure of the ravens," which forms an almost exact counterpart to the *Almannagiá*, with which it runs parallel to the distance of more than two miles. It is supposed, that the whole of the intervening space was originally of the same altitude with the heights on both sides; but in one of the terrible convulsions, to which this part of the island has been subjected, the ground has sunk to its present level; and, disrupting at the same time from the adjoining rocks, these and other rents in the neighbourhood have been formed. We had here to pass a natural bridge, consisting of a thin crust of lava, little more than two feet in breadth; yet, as the Icelandic horses are uncommonly sure-footed, and generally accustomed to traverse such rugged tracts, we preferred riding to walking, and, in the good providence of God, arrived in safety on the opposite side. We now entertained the hope of entering a more auspicious region; but after crossing a dismal stream of lava, the surface of which was covered with grey moss, and in many places exhibited large caves, we were suddenly arrested by sharp vitrified masses of broken lava, which

appears to have proceeded from a volcano close to us on the left, and on its reaching this spot to have cooled and contracted, and thus the numerous crevices have been formed which presented themselves everywhere around us. Proceeding, with wary step, we ultimately succeeded in getting across this rough and difficult tract; and descending by the south side of a large mountain, whose surface discovered but scanty traces of vegetation, we entered a fine valley, the grass of which, though coarse, was nearly two feet in length. The numerous peaked mountains to the left, and the yellowish volcanic cones at their base, exhibited one of the most romantic prospects we had yet beheld. We next crossed a barren moor, and, after winding round the foot of some lofty mountains, reached the farm of *Laugarvalla*, situated close to the lake of the same name, about half past eight in the evening.

Having pitched our tents on a beautiful green at some distance from the houses, and feasted luxuriously on some rich cream which we obtained from the farmer, we went, before retiring to sleep, to visit the hot springs on the margin of the lake. From most of them, the water is thrown up at irregular intervals, yet not to any great height; three feet being the highest we observed. They erupt, however, with great impetuosity, and a considerable quantity of steam makes its escape. In the hottest we tried, Fahrenheit's thermometer stood at 912°. They appear to be

of a strong sulphureous quality, and the incrustations formed by their depositions are extremely delicate and beautiful.

The prospect we had on the morning of the 28th, far transcended what we had enjoyed the preceding day in the vicinity of *Thingvalla*. We had the *Laugarvalla Lake* direct before us, and, a little to the south, another larger lake connected with it, and known by the name of *Apa-vatn*. The large volumes of steam which rose from the spouting springs close to the farm; those which made their escape from the numerous caldrons at the south side of the lake; and especially the column, eclipsing all the rest, which was emitted from the *Reykia-hver*, at the distance of seven miles to the north-east, had the grandest effect; and, viewed in conjunction with the widely extended plain, intersected in various parts by beautiful serpentine rivers, the long range of mountains to the eastward, over which *Mount Hekla* reared her three snow-clad summits; those in the neighbourhood of *Skalholt*, and the lofty *Eyafialla Yökul*,\* presented altogether a landscape which only wanted wood to render it the most completely picturesque of any in the world. The clearness, too, and serenity of the atmosphere, made every object appear to double advantage. Every finer feeling of the mind was called into exercise, and I do not recollect that I ever re-

\* *Yökul* signifies an ice mountain, and is derived from *Iaki*, a lump or fragment of ice.

peated with more exquisite delight the following lines of the Christian poet :

“ Parent of good ! thy works of might  
 “ I trace with wonder and delight,  
 “ In them thy glories shine ;  
 “ There’s nought in earth, or sea, or air,  
 “ Or heav’n itself, that’s good or fair,  
 “ But what is wholly thine.”

We had enjoyed uninterrupted good weather since leaving *Reykjavik*, but now there was not a cloud to be seen in the whole horizon ; the sun shone with dazzling splendour, and the heat was so intense, that it was with some degree of reluctance we left the shade of our tents in order to prosecute our journey. What proved most annoying, was an immense quantity of large musquitoes, by which our horses were sadly tormented ; and, though we tied handkerchiefs over our faces, it was scarcely possible to prevent them from biting us. From *Laugarvalla*, our way lay along the base of several sloping mountains to the north-west of *Skalholt*, till we came to the *Bruará*, a broad and rapid river, which, after receiving the joint waters of the *Laugarvalla* and *Apa* lakes, has its confluence with the majestic *Hvítá*, or white river, a little below *Skalholt*. As there was no ferry in the neighbourhood, we were under the necessity of fording it, in the idea of which, there is something very revolting to a stranger, especially when he stands on the bank, and surveys the breadth and rapidity of the

stream. Getting the baggage tied as high on the horses as possible, and having been apprised of the necessity of keeping their heads against the current, to prevent its getting too powerful for them, we descended into the river, and our horses, after a severe struggle, succeeded in bringing us safely across.

We had now a pleasant ride over the marshes to the hot springs, called the *Geysers*, at which we arrived about a quarter past four in the afternoon. At the distance of several miles, on turning round the foot of a high mountain on our left, we could descry, from the clouds of vapour that were rising and convolving in the atmosphere, the spot where one of the most magnificent and unparalleled scenes in nature is displayed:—where, bursting the parted ground, Great Geyser

“ ——— hot, through scorching cliffs, is seen to rise,  
With exhalations steaming to the skies !” \*

Electrified, as it were, by the sight, and feeling impatient to have our curiosity fully gratified, Mr. Hodgson and I rode on before the cavalcade; and, just as we got clear of the south-east corner of the low hill, at the side of which the springs are situated, we were saluted by an eruption which lasted several minutes, and during which the water appeared to be carried to a great

\* Ἡ μὲν γὰρ θ' ὕδατι λιαροῦ βέσι, ἀμφὶ δὲ καπνὸς  
Γίνεται ἐξ αὐτῆς ὡσεὶ πυρὸς ἀιθομένειο. ILLAD 22. line 149.



height in the air. Riding on between the springs and the hill, we fell in with a small green spot, where we left our horses, and proceeded, as if by an irresistible impulse, to the gently sloping ground, from the surface of which numerous columns of steam were making their escape.

Though surrounded by a great multiplicity of boiling springs, and steaming apertures, the magnitude and grandeur of which far exceeded any thing we had ever seen before, we felt at no loss in determining on which of them to feast our wondering eyes, and bestow the primary moments of astonished contemplation. Near the northern extremity of the tract rose a large circular mound, formed by the depositions of the fountain, justly distinguished by the appellation of the *Great Geyser*, \* from the middle of

\* The very appropriate term *Geyser* is derived from the Icelandic *geysa*, "to rage, burst forth with vehemence and impetuosity." Among many other classical works, it occurs in the *Edda*, towards the close of the ancient and sublime poem, entitled the *Völuspá*, where the following description is given of the final conflagration :

" Sol tekur sortna,	<i>The sun turns pole ;</i>
Sigur fold i mar ;	<i>The spacious earth</i>
Hverfa af himni	<i>The sea engulphs ;</i>
Heithar stiornar :	<i>From heaven fall</i>
<i>Geyser</i> cimi	<i>The lucid stars :</i>
Vith aldur nara ;	<i>At the end of time</i>
Lækur háf hiti	<i>The vapours rage,</i>
Vith himin síalfan	<i>And playful flames</i>
	<i>Involve the skies."</i>

which a great degree of evaporation was visible. Ascending the rampart, we had the spacious bason at our feet more than half filled with the most beautiful hot chrystalline water, which was but just moved by a gentle ebullition, occasioned by the escape of steam from a cylindrical pipe\* or funnel in the centre. This pipe I ascertained by admeasurement to be seventy-eight feet of perpendicular depth; its diameter is in general from eight to ten feet, but near the mouth it gradually widens, and opens almost imperceptibly into the bason, the inside of which exhibits a whitish surface, consisting of a siliceous incrustation, which has been rendered almost perfectly smooth by the incessant action of the boiling water. The diameter of the bason is fifty-six feet in one direction, and forty-six in another; and, when full, it measures about four feet in depth from the surface of the water to the commencement of the pipe. The borders of the bason, which form the highest part of the mound, are very irregular, owing to the various accretions of the deposited substances; and at two places are small channels, equally polished with the interior of the bason, through which the water makes its escape, when it has been

It is also used by the poet Eystein, when depicting the same tremendous scene, in the 70th verse of his *Lily* :

“ Svo geyjar thá eldr oc æsist  
 Iörd oc fiöll i heimi öllum,  
 Ad ecki finnst thá upp ad skyium  
 Obrunnid, oc nidr ad grunni.

*Then raging fire shall spout on high  
 From every field and mountain top,  
 And all shall burn, from th' utmost sky  
 Down to the earth's remotest prop.”*

filled to the margin. The declivity of the mound is rapid at first, especially on the north-west side, but instantly begins to slope more gradually, and the depositions are spread all around to different distances, the least of which is near an hundred feet. The whole of this surface, the two small channels excepted, displays a beautiful siliceous efflorescence, rising in small granular clusters, which bear the most striking resemblance to the heads of cauliflowers, and, while wet, are of so extremely delicate a contexture, that it is hardly possible to remove them in a perfect state. They are of a brownish colour, but in some places approaching to a yellow. On leaving the mound, the hot water passes through a turfy kind of soil, and, by acting on the peat, mosses, and grass, converts them entirely into stone, and furnishes the curious traveller with some of the finest specimens of petrification.

Having stood some time in silent admiration of the magnificent spectacle which this matchless fountain, even in a state of inactivity, presents to the view, as there were no indications of an immediate eruption, we returned to the spot where we had left our horses; and, as it formed a small eminence at the base of the hill, and commanded a view of the whole tract, we fixed on it as the site of our tents. About thirty-eight minutes past five, we were apprized, by low reports, and a slight concussion of the ground, that an eruption was about to take place; but only a few small jets were thrown up, and

the water in the bason did not rise above the surface of the outlets. Not being willing to miss the very first symptoms of the phenomenon, we kept walking about in the vicinity of the spring, now surveying some of the other cavities, and now collecting elegant specimens of petrified wood, leaves, &c. on the rising ground between the Geyser and the base of the hill. At fifteen minutes past eight we counted five or six reports, that shook the mound on which we stood, but no remarkable jet followed: the water only boiled with great violence, and, by its heavings, caused a number of small waves to flow towards the margin of the bason, which, at the same time, received an addition to its contents. Twenty-five minutes past nine, as I returned from the neighbouring hill, I heard reports which were both louder and more numerous than any of the preceding, and exactly resembled the distant discharge of a park of artillery. Concluding from these circumstances that the long expected wonders were about to commence, I ran to the mound, which shook violently under my feet, and I had scarcely time to look into the bason, when the fountain exploded, and instantly compelled me to retire to a respectful distance on the windward side. The water rushed up out of the pipe with amazing velocity, and was projected by irregular jets into the atmosphere, surrounded by immense volumes of steam, which, in a great measure, hid the column from the view. The

first four or five jets were inconsiderable, not exceeding fifteen or twenty feet in height; these were followed by one about fifty feet, which was succeeded by two or three considerably lower; after which came the last, exceeding all the rest in splendour, which rose at least to the height of seventy feet. The large stones which we had previously thrown into the pipe were ejected to a great height, especially one, which was thrown much higher than the water. On the propulsion of the jets, they lifted up the water in the bason nearest the orifice of the pipe to the height of a foot, or a foot and a half, and, on the falling of the column, it not only caused the bason to overflow at the usual channels, but forced the water over the highest part of the brim, behind which I was standing. The great body of the column (at least ten feet in diameter,) rose perpendicularly, but was divided into a number of the most superb curvated ramifications; and several smaller sproutings were severed from it, and projected in oblique directions, to the no small danger of the spectator, who is apt to get scalded, ere he is aware, by the falling jet.

On the cessation of the eruption, the water instantly sunk into the pipe, but rose again immediately, to about half a foot above the orifice, where it remained stationary. All being again in a state of tranquillity, and the clouds of steam having left the bason, I entered it, and proceeded within reach of the water, which I found to

be 188° of Fahrenheit, a temperature of more than twenty degrees less than at any period while the bason was filling, and occasioned, I suppose, by the cooling of the water during its projection into the air.

The whole scene was indescribably astonishing; but what interested us most, was the circumstance, that the strongest jet came last, as if the *Geysier* had summoned all her powers in order to shew us the greatness of her energy, and make a grand finish before retiring into the subterraneous chambers in which she is concealed from mortal view. Our curiosity had been gratified, but it was far from being satisfied. We now wished to have it in our power to inspect the mechanism of this mighty engine, and obtain a view of the springs by which it is put in motion: but the wish was vain; for they lie in “a tract which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture’s eye hath not seen;”—which man, with all his boasted powers, cannot, and dare not approach. While the jets were rushing up towards heaven, with the velocity of an arrow, my mind was forcibly borne along with them, to the contemplation of the Great and Omnipotent JEHOVAH, in comparison with whom, these, and all the wonders scattered over the whole immensity of existence, dwindle into absolute insignificance; whose almighty command spake the universe into being; and at whose sovereign fiat the whole fabric might be reduced, in an instant, to its original nothing. Such scenes exhibit only “the hiding of His power.” It is mere-

ly the surface of His works that is visible. Their internal structure He hath involved in obscurity; and the sagest of the sons of man is incapable of tracing them from their origin to their consummation. After the closest and most unwearied application, the utmost we can boast of is, that we have heard a whisper of His proceedings, and investigated the extremities of His operations\*.

On the morning of the 29th I was awakened by Captain von Scheel, at twenty-three minutes past five o'clock, to contemplate an eruption of the spring, which Sir John Stanley † denominates the *New Geyser*, situated at the distance of an hundred and forty yards to the south of the principal fountain. It is scarcely possible, however, to give any idea of the brilliancy and grandeur of the scene which caught my eye on drawing aside the curtain of my tent. From an orifice, nine feet in diameter, which lay directly before me, at the distance of about an hundred yards, a column of water, accompanied with prodigious volumes of steam, was erupted with inconceivable force, and a tremendously roaring noise, to varied heights, of from fifty to eighty feet, and threatened to darken the horizon, though brightly illumined by the morning sun. During the first quarter of an hour, I found it impossible to move from my knees, on which I had raised my-

\* Eccles. iii. 10. and Job xxvi. 14. in the Heb.

† Account of the Hot Springs in Iceland, p. 23.

self, but poured out my soul in solemn adoration of the Almighty Author of nature, to whose controul all her secret movements and terrifying operations are subject:—"who looketh on the earth, and it trembleth; who toucheth the hills, and they smoke\*." At length I repaired to the fountain, where we all met, and communicated to each other our mutual and enraptured feelings of wonder and admiration. The jets of water now subsided; but their place was occupied by the spray and steam, which, having free room to play, rushed with a deafening roar, to a height little inferior to that of the water. On throwing the largest stones we could find into the pipe, they were instantly propelled to an amazing height; and some of them that were cast up more perpendicularly than the others, remained for the space of four or five minutes within the influence of the steam, being successively ejected, and falling again in a very amusing manner. A gentle northern breeze carried part of the spray at the top of the pillar to the one side, when it fell like a drizzling rain, and was so cold that we could stand below it, and receive it on our hands or face without the least inconvenience. While I kept my station on the same side with the sun, a most brilliant circular bow, of a large size, appeared on the opposite side of the fountain; and, on changing sides, having the fountain between me and the sun, I discovered

\* Psalm civ. 32.



another, if possible still more beautiful, but so small as only to encircle my head. Their hues entirely resembled those of the common rainbow. After continuing to roar about half an hour longer, the column of spray visibly diminished, and sunk gradually, till twenty-six minutes past six, when it fell to the same state in which we had observed it the preceding day, the water boiling at the depth of about twenty feet below the orifice of the shaft.

The external structure of this fountain is very different from that of the *Great Geyser*. The crater, or pipe, which is about nine feet in diameter, and forty-four in depth, is not entirely circular; neither does it descend so perpendicularly as that of the other. At the orifice it becomes still more irregular, and, instead of opening into a bason, it is defended on the one side by an incrustated wall, about a foot and a half in height, while on the other it is level with the surface of the ground.

The name given to this fountain by the natives is *Strockr*, which is derived from the verb *strocka*, "to agitate, or bring into motion," and properly denotes a *churn*. Previous to the year 1789, this name was attached to what Sir John Stanley calls the Roaring Geyser, situate at the distance of eighty yards from the Great Geyser;\* the remains of which are still to be seen, as Sir George Mackenzie rightly conjectures †, in the

\* Account of the Hot Springs in Iceland, p. 32.

† Travels in Iceland, p. 215.

irregular, but most beautiful cavity on the rise of the hill. This information I had from the peasant of *Haukadal*, who appeared to be a judicious and well-informed man. He further told me, that in point of the height of its jets, the *Old Strocker* rivalled the Geyser ; but immediately after an earthquake in the above mentioned year, it greatly diminished, and in the course of a few years became entirely tranquil. The same year, *Strocker*, which had not before attracted any particular attention, began to erupt, and threw up water and steam to an amazing height. This account entirely coincides with Sir John Stanley's observations : " One of the most remarkable of these springs," he says, " threw out a great quantity of water, and, from its continual noise, we named it the Roaring Geyser. The eruptions of this fountain were incessant. The water darted out with fury every four or five minutes, and covered a great space of ground with the matter it deposited. The jets were from thirty to forty feet in height. They were shivered into the finest particles of spray, and surrounded by great clouds of steam."\* And, treating of *Strocker*, to which, as was observed above, he gave the name of the New Geyser, he adds in a note, " Before the month of June, 1789, the year I visited Iceland, this spring had not played with any great degree of violence, at least for a considerable time. (Indeed, the formation

\* Account, p. 32.

of the pipe will not allow us to suppose, that its eruptions had, at no former period, been violent). But, in the month of June, this quarter of Iceland had suffered some very severe shocks of an earthquake ; and it is not unlikely, that many of the cavities communicating with the bottom of the pipe had been then enlarged, and new sources of water opened into them."\* This conjecture is rendered certain by the fact, that during the dreadful earthquake which happened in the year 1784, not only did the three more remarkable fountains gush forth with uncommon violence, but no less than thirty-five spouting springs made their appearance, many of which, however, afterwards abated in their fury. †

During the night there had been two large explosions of the *Great Geyser*, but the servant who observed them not awakening us, we were deprived of the sight. However, the loss was made up by the comfortable sleep we enjoyed, of which we had much need, having been fatigued by the ride, and the walks we took after our arrival the preceding day.

At ten minutes before ten, we were attracted to the mound by several loud reports, which were succeeded by a partial eruption ; none of the jets exceeding five feet in height. About half past ten the reports were reiterated, but no jets ensued ; only a gentle rise was observable in

\* Account, p. 41.

† Bishop Finsson in *The Transactions of the Icelandic Society*.

the contents of the bason. At eleven we were again gratified with a most brilliant eruption. The jets were ten or twelve in number, and the water was carried to the height of at least sixty feet. Vast clouds of steam, which made their escape during the eruption, continued to roll and spread as they ascended, till they filled the whole of the horizon around us; and the sun, though shining in full splendour, was completely eclipsed; but the points of the jets, receiving his rays as they rose through the vapour, wore the most charming lustre, being white and glistening as snow. The instant all was over, Mr. Hodgson and I repaired to the foot of a small cataract, at the northern base of the mound, over which the streamlet is precipitated in its way down to the river, and had a pleasant bath in the warm water as it fell upon us from the rock above.

A small preliminary eruption again took place at seventeen minutes past one, and another four minutes before two. The bason continued filling, till within three minutes of three, when, after a number of very loud reports, the water burst, and the spouts rose with a noise and velocity which I can compare to nothing more aptly than to those of a quantity of large rockets fired off from the same source. This eruption was the longest of any we saw: a space of eight minutes and ten seconds elapsing from the first propulsion of the water from the bason, till it again subsided into the pipe. The jets were also much higher than in any of the former erup-

tions, yet none of them exceeded an hundred feet.

Our two friends now left us, for the purpose of visiting some other hot springs on their return to *Reykjavik*; but we resolved to spend another night at this place, chiefly for the sake of our horses, that they might be sufficiently rested before we entered the mountains. In the course of the afternoon and evening, there were several indications of a fresh eruption, but they only proved strong ebullitions, which always take place till the bason gets filled. At thirty-five minutes past nine we had another fine spectacle, which was little inferior to any of the preceding, and lasted for the space of five minutes.

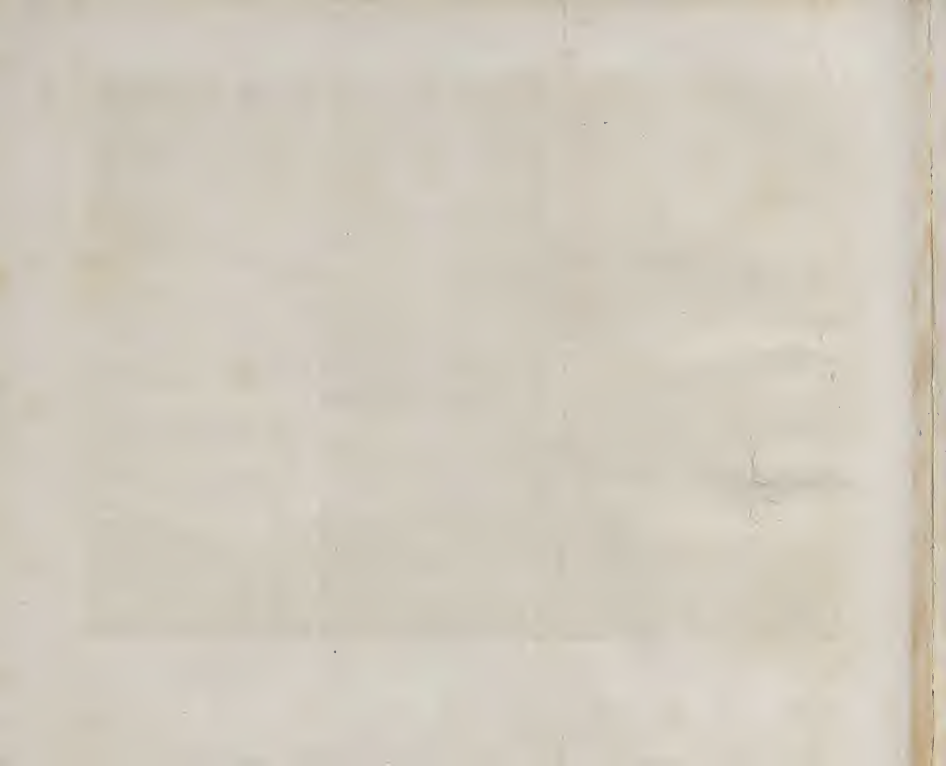
The most enrapturing scene, however, that we beheld, was exhibited on the morning of the 30th. About ten minutes past five, we were roused by the roaring of *Strockr*, which blew up a great quantity of steam; and when my watch stood at the full quarter, a crash took place as if the earth had burst, which was instantaneously succeeded by jets of water and spray, rising in a perpendicular column to the height of sixty feet. As the sun happened to be behind a cloud, we had no expectation of witnessing any thing more sublime than we had already seen; but *Strockr* had not been in action above twenty minutes, when the *Great Geyser*, apparently jealous of her reputation, and indignant at our bestowing so much of our time and applause on her rival, began to thunder tremendously, and emitted such



Sketch'd by G. H.

Engraved by W. Mitchell.

THE GEYSERS, AS SEEN JULY. 50. 1814.



quantities of water and steam, that we could not be satisfied with a distant view, but hastened to the mound with as much curiosity as if it had been the first eruption we had beheld. However, if she was more interesting in point of magnitude, she gave the less satisfaction in point of duration, having again become tranquil in the course of five minutes; whereas, her less gaudy, but more steady companion, continued to play till within four minutes of six o'clock. \*

\* On my return this way from the north, about the middle of August, 1815, I again pitched my tent for two days, beside these celebrated fountains, and found their operations still more magnificent and interesting than they were the preceding year. The Great Geyser continued to erupt every six hours in a most imposing manner. In some of the eruptions, the jets seemed to be thrown much higher than any I observed last year, several of them reaching an elevation of not less than *an hundred and fifty feet*.

It would appear, from the observations which have been made at different times, that the height of the jets is very irregular. In Olafsen and Povelsen's time, the water was carried to the height of near *three hundred and sixty feet*. When seen by Von Troil, in 1772, it rose to *ninety-two feet*. Sir John Stanley states the highest jet observed by his company, in 1789, to have been *ninety-six feet*. Lieutenant Ohlsen, a Danish officer, who visited the Geyser in 1804, found by a quadrant, that the highest jet rose to *two hundred and twelve feet*. In 1809, Mr. Hooker mentions its rising to upwards of *an hundred feet*; and Sir George Mackenzie states *ninety feet* to have been the height to which he saw the water thrown in 1810.

What rendered my second visit to the Geysers peculiarly interesting, was my discovery of the key to *Strockr*, by the application of which, I could make that beautiful spring play



Our attention was so much taken up with these two principal fountains, that we had little time or inclination to watch the minutiae of the numerous inferior shafts and cavities with which

when I had a mind, and throw its water to nearly double the height observable in its natural eruptions. The morning after my arrival, I was awakened by its explosion about twenty minutes past four o'clock; and hastening to the crater, stood nearly half an hour contemplating its jet, and the steady and uninterrupted emission of the column of spray which followed, and which was projected at least an hundred feet into the air. After this, it gradually sunk into the pipe, as it had done the year before, and I did not expect to see another eruption till the following morning. However, about five o'clock in the afternoon, after a great quantity of the largest stones that could be found about the place had been thrown into the spring, I observed it begin to roar with more violence than usual; and, approaching the brink of the crater, I had scarcely time to look down to the surface of the water, which was greatly agitated, when the eruption commenced, and the boiling water rushed up in a moment, within an inch or two of my face, and continued its course with inconceivable velocity into the atmosphere. Having made a speedy retreat, I now took my station on the windward side, and was astonished to observe the elevation of the jets, some of them rising higher than *two hundred* feet; many of the fragments of stones were thrown much higher, and some of considerable size were raised to an invisible height. For some time, every succeeding jet seemed to surpass the preceding, till, the quantity of water in the subterraneous caverns being spent, they gave place to the column of steam, which continued to rush up with a deafening roar for nearly an hour.

The periodical evacuation of *Strockr* having been deranged by this violent experiment, no symptoms whatever of a fresh eruption appeared the following morning. As I wished, however, to see it play once more before I bid an everlasting fare-

the tract abounds. The *Little Geyser* erupted perhaps twelve times in the twenty-four hours; but none of its jets rose higher than eighteen or twenty feet, and generally they were about ten or twelve. The pipe of this spring opens into a beautiful circular bason about twelve feet in diameter, the surface of which exhibits incrustations equally beautiful with those of the Great Geyser. At the depth of a few feet, the pipe, which is scarcely three feet wide, becomes very irregular; yet its depth has been ascertained to be thirty-eight feet. There is a large steam-hole at a short distance, to the north-west of the Little Geyser, which roars and becomes quiescent with the operations of that spring. A little further down the tract are numerous apertures, some of which are very large, and, being full of clear boiling water, they discover to the spectator the perilous scaffolding on which he stands. When approaching the brink of many of them, he walks over a dome of petrified morass, hardly a foot in

well to these wonders of nature, and, especially, being anxious to ascertain the reality of my supposed discovery, I got my servant to assist me, about eight o'clock, in casting all the loose stones we could find into the spring. We had not ceased five minutes, when the wished-for phenomena recommenced, and the jets were carried to a height little inferior to what they had gained the preceding evening. At half past nine, I was obliged to set out on my journey; but often looked back on the thundering column of steam, and reflected with amazement at my having given such an impulse to a body which no power on earth could controul.

thickness, below which is a vast boiling abyss, and even this thin dome is prevented from gaining a due consistence, by the humidity and heat to which it is exposed. Near the centre of these holes is situated the *Little Strochr*, a wonderfully amusing little fountain, which darts its waters in numerous diagonal columns every quarter of an hour.

Nor is it in this direction alone that orifices and cavities abound. In a small gully close to the Geyser, is a number of holes, with boiling water; to the south of which, rises a bank of ancient depositions, containing apertures of a much larger size than the rest. One of these is filled with beautifully clear water, and discovers to a great depth various groupes of incrustations which are very tempting to the eye of the beholder. The depth of this reservoir is not less than fifty feet. On the brow of the hill, at the height of nearly two hundred feet above the level of the Great Geyser, are several holes of boiling clay; some of which produce sulphur, and the efflorescence of alum; and at the base of the hill, on the opposite side, are not less than twenty springs, which proves that its foundations are entirely perforated with veins and cavities of hot water.

About eleven o'clock, we were under the necessity of lifting our tents, and removing from a place where we had seen some of the grandest of the works of God; and proceeded on to *Haukadal*, which lies at the distance of three quarters of a mile to the north of the Geysers, and, on ac-

count of its being the place where Ari Frode, the first historiographer of the north, received his education, has nearly as strong a claim on the attention of the historian as the neighbouring fountains have on that of the naturalist. Ari was one of the most learned Icelanders of his day, and wrote several books of history, the greater part of which have been lost, and all that we now have of his works are the Schedæ and Landnámabok, the latter of which, was continued by other learned men after his death. He was born in the year 1068, and came to Haukadal in the year 1075, where, in company with Teitr, the son of Bishop Isleif, he long enjoyed the tuition of Hallr hinn Milldi, who is said to have been the most liberal and beneficent man on the island. The present occupant is in good circumstances, and possessed of a very frank and obliging disposition. He conducted us into the house, which is uncommonly orderly and clean, and felt no small degree of pleasure in relating to us the different foreign guests that had visited him. He purchased a copy of the New Testament, as did also a young man in the vicinity of the Geysers.

As we had rode on about half an hour before our baggage horses, we went a little to the west of *Haukadal*, to see the remains of St. Martin's bath. On the eastern brink of the small river which intersects the plain, is a large stone, eight feet in length, by about five in diameter, the one end of which projecting into the water, contains

a small hole about twice the size of a man's hand, through which boiling water issued about twenty years ago. It is now quite dry, and in a great measure filled up with minute depositions which have been left on the subsiding of the water. Forty years ago, there was another sharp point attached to the stone, in which was a pipe conveying cold water to the bath, which was situated below the projection, so that those who bathed had it in their power to cool or heat the bath at pleasure, by opening either of the coeks fixed in the pipes. The hot water still issues forth in the middle of the river. In the days of ignorance and superstition, this bath was supposed to possess miraculous powers; and numbers resorted to it from various parts, in order to find relief from the diseases with which they were afflicted.

The general appearance of the intervening ground between the *Geysers* and *Haukadal* plainly indicates, that, in former times, it also has been the seat of hot springs. Indeed, the whole tract consists of a stream of lava that has flowed down into the plain from some of the mountains to the north of *Haukadal*, and which appears, on advancing as far as the *Geysers*, to have stopped, and thrown up the mountain called *Langafell*, at the base of which these springs are situated. When we consider the remoteness of the period at which this must have happened, it appears truly surprising that subterraneous heat should still exist, in the degree ne-

cessary to account for the stupendous operations of the springs, while it has never so far accumulated as to produce a volcanic eruption. \*

\* That the Geyser existed previous to the time of Saxo Grammaticus, that is to say, upwards of six centuries ago, is rendered extremely probable, by the following passage in the Preface to his History of Denmark. Treating of Norway, he adds: "Ab hujus latere occidentali, insula, quæ glacialis dicitur, magno circumfusa reperitur oceano, obsoletæ admodum habitationis tellus, rerumque veri fidem excedentium, et insolitorum eventuum miraculis prædicanda. Illic fons est, qui fumigantis aquæ vitio, nativam rei cujuslibet originem demolitur. Sanè quicquid fumi hujus exhalatione respergitur, in lapideæ naturæ duritiam transmutatur. Quæ res mirabilior an periculosior existat, in dubio positum constat: cum fluidam aquæ teneritudinem tantus obsideat rigor, ut admotum quidlibet fumidoque ejus vapore perfusum, in lapidis proprietatem, forma duntaxat superstite, subitâ conversione transmutat. Ibidemque complures alii latices referuntur, qui modo crescentis lymphæ copiis adacti, plenisque exundantes alveis crebras in sublime guttas jaciunt, modo torpentibus scatebris vix ab imo conspecti, profundis subductionis terræ latibulis absorbentur. Quo fit, ut exuberantes proxima quæque spumarum candore conspergant, exinaniti nullo visus ingenio capiantur."

It is truly mysterious, that the most profound silence should prevail on the subject of these surprising phenomena throughout the Icelandic annals. Supposing them to have existed on the first occupation of Haukadal, it seems difficult to conceive why no mention is made of them by Ari Frode, and other learned men, who were either connected by family ties, or lived on familiar terms with its inhabitants. On the other hand, it is equally surprising, that not the least notice should be taken of their appearance, allowing them to have broken forth subsequent to that period. The first description given of them by a native Icelander, is that of Bryniolf Svenson, Bishop of Skalholt, inserted in Stephani Notæ Uberiores to the Preface of

Our way now lay over a considerable portion of this lava, which was for the most part covered with heath, but every now and then presented springs from which a large quantity of cold crystalline water issued into the plain. The surface also exhibited in many places, bushes of willow and birch, but scarcely ever of that size to entitle them to the name of underwood. On crossing *Fliotsá*, a broad but shallow river, we came to a hamlet called *Holum*, where, as it was the last house on this side of the desert, we regaled ourselves with a plentiful draught of cream. The family, which was numerous, looked exceedingly poor; and, as they had only an old defective copy of the second part of the Old

Saxo. The Bishop flourished about the middle of the seventeenth century. His words are :

“ Saxoni' attestor, qui anno superiore tale naturæ miraculum his oculis non sine maxima admiratione conspexi in Haukadal, quod Scalholto duobus miliaribus cum semissis distat, prædium cathedrali templo subjectum. Paulatim namque ebulliens aquæ fervor in cratere profundissimo subsiluit; et incremento sensibili intumuit, donec craterem impleret ad labra prorsus. Tum vero magno cum tumuli ingenitus fervor aquam in sublime evomuit, præsentissimo proprius astantium cum periculo, quos, nisi caverent, ignitæ guttæ in delapsu ad internecionem comburerent. At vero exacto, ut arbitrabar, horæ spatio, pariter et æstus dcfervere, et aqua subsidere atque detumere. Nos autem cum primum accedere sumus ausi, vacuetactum repente craterem animadvertimus, et prorsus jam exsiccatum: nec uspiam aquæ vestigium, præter hoc ipsum exinanitum conceptaculum, comparuit. Eruptionem, autem rusticus alteram, intra viginti quatuor horas expectare se dicebat. Tanto namque spatio intermittere ut plurimum, et recipere.”

Testament, I gave the children a copy of the New, in the hopes that the uncommonness of the gift might excite attention to its contents. Their mother immediately summoned them to give me a kiss, in token of their thankfulness for the boon. I now requested them to read a little, when the youngest girl, who might be about fourteen years of age, performed her task with much propriety, though somewhat intimidated by the presence of strangers. She then handed the Testament to her sister, who was upwards of eighteen, and read with so sonorous a voice, that two hundred people might have heard her with ease. It was pleasing to observe, from her manner, and the emphasis she laid on the proper words, that she not only understood, but seemed to feel the importance of what she read. It was part of the evangelic history of the sufferings of the Redeemer.\* After making a remark or two on the importance of the Holy Scriptures, and the necessity of perusing them with diligence, we proceeded on our journey, followed by the blessings of a grateful family.

We pursued our course nearly in any easterly direction, across a desert of deep sand, which proved very fatiguing to our horses, till we ar-

\* On my return this way the following year, I was still more gratified to find, that this girl had made an astonishing use of the New Testament during the winter; for there was not a passage to which I made the most indirect allusion, which she did not quote with the same facility and accuracy as if she had read it from the book.



rived at the banks of the *Hvítá*, or White River, which we found flowing in a serpentine course, now spreading its waters over an extensive sandy bed, and now confined to a narrower channel between walls of columnar rock. We rode along the western bank, till we came to the vicinity of the Blue Mountain (*Bláfell*), when we struck off to the left, and encamped about seven in the evening, at a short distance from the base of the mountain. Our station consisted of a sandy hill, partially overgrown with moss, coarse grass, and a few dwarfy willows, close to a rivulet which falls into the *Hvítá*, a little farther down. Directly behind us rose the huge extinct volcano of *Bláfell*, the summit of which was enveloped in mist, and its sides, which were entirely destitute of vegetation, presented, in many places, deep ravines filled with snow. At a considerable distance towards the west, we could descry the fantastic summits of a long range of volcanic hills: while, in an easterly direction, the eye was carried over an extensive plain, bounded in the distance by the chain of mountains to the north of *Hekla*, which, at that time, was free from smoke and flames, and only distinguishable by the mantle of snow, from which she derives her name. Our situation appeared gloomy in the extreme; but, after kindling a fire, and partaking of some refreshment, we retired to rest, and soon buried in sleep all the unpleasant reflections occasioned by the prospect of the desert.

Next morning, being the Lord's Day, we assembled in Captain Von Scheel's tent, when one of the servants read the third and fourth chapters of the Gospel by John, in Icelandic; after which we were under the necessity of prosecuting our journey, the horses having eaten all the grass in the vicinity during the night, and we had a ride of more than thirty miles to the next station. During the first three hours, we had rather a tedious ride up the steep ascent covered with broken lava, which extends along the west side of the mountain, till we gained its summit, called *Bláfells-háls*, where there is a passage between that mountain and the immense chain of ice-mountains in the interior. From this elevation we had a most commanding prospect of the whole level tract of country, which, beginning at *Haukadal*, and stretching past *Skalholt*, opens into the extensive plains between mount *Hekla* and the sea. Several miles behind *Thingvalla*, lay the large volcanic mountains called *Skjaldbreid* and *Tindafjall*; and between us and this latter mountain, a regular chain of high conical mountains commenced, which stretched to a considerable distance along the base of the neighbouring *Yökul*. The blackness of their appearance formed a perfect contrast to the whiteness of the perennial snows behind them. What particularly struck us, was the majesty of the vast ice mountain, which extends from a little to the east of *Tindafjall*, in a westerly and northerly direction, to the distance of not less

than an hundred miles across the interior of the island. Though forming but one connected mass of ice and snow, it is divided into four parts in the geographical descriptions. The south-east division, which lay next us, is known by the name of *Bláfells-Yökul*: a little farther north it assumes the name of *Eiriks-Yökul*; and the most northerly is called *Bald-Yökul*. The fourth division is that of *Geitlands-Yökul*, which terminates the mountain to the west, and stretches along the north-east parts of the SysseL of *Borgarfjord*. At the spot on which we now stood, it was in our power to receive strong mental impressions either of heat or cold, according to the direction in which we turned. When we looked to the west and north, we had nothing before us but regions of ever-during ice; whereas, on turning to the south, we were reminded by the clouds of smoke ascending from the *Geysers*, of the magazines of fire that lay concealed in that neighbourhood.

Descending by the west end of *Bláfell*, which here consists of immense irregular masses of dark brown tuffa, we came again, in the course of a short time, to the *Hvitá*, near its egress from a large lake, to which it gives the name of *Hvitárvatn*. The whole of the western margin of this lake is lined with magnificent glaciers, which, before meeting the water, assume a hue of the most beautiful green. It abounds with excellent fish, and used to be much frequented in former times by the peasants in the south. At the ford-

ing-place, the river may be about an hundred yards across; and we found it in some places so deep, that our horses were on the point of swimming. It is certainly the most formidable river in this quarter of Iceland; and is often unfordable for weeks together, when travellers, coming from the desert, are not unfrequently reduced to great straits, by the consumption of the food they had provided for their journey.

On leaving the *Hvitá*, we encountered a long tract of volcanic sand, with here and there insulated stones, of an immense size, which must have been erupted from the *Kerlingar-fiälla* volcanoes, situated at the distance of fifteen or twenty miles in an easterly direction. Most of these volcanic mountains form beautiful pyramids; and some of them are of a great height, and partially covered with snow. The cone, in the remote distance, is most perfectly formed, and is quite red in appearance, arising from the scorix deposited on its sides. None of these volcanoes have ever been explored; nor have I so much as met with their names in any description of the island that I have seen. From the peasant at *Holum*, who has proceeded several times to the vicinity in search of moss, I learned that a very extensive tract of lava stretches between them and the ancient road, called *Spreingi-sand*; and at one place he observed much smoke, which he supposed arose from springs of boiling water.

At four o'clock we came to the Black River (*Svartá*), fording which, we fell in with an

extensive tract, known by the name of the *Kialhraun*, which has been at least twice subjected to fiery torrents from a volcano in the neighbourhood of Bald-Yökul, if not from the Yökul itself. This lava is upwards of twenty miles in length; and, in some places, five or six in breadth. Here the road divided: that called *Kialvegur*, leading to *Skagafjord*, lay to the left, across the lava; whereas the way to *Eyafjord*, which we pursued, ran along its eastern margin, now on one side of the Black River, and now on the other. After travelling about eight miles farther, over a very stony tract, we came to the station of *Gránaness*, which we found to be the termination of a very ancient stream of lava, mostly covered with moss and willows, and having only a little grass in the cavities, which have been formed by the bursting or falling in of the crust. Inhospitable as it appeared, we were obliged to stop, as we were exposed to a heavy rain, and the next green spot was about fifty miles distant.

On the afternoon of Monday, the first of August, we commenced the worst stage on our whole journey. Our road, which at times was scarcely visible, lay along the west side of the *Hof*, or *Arnarfell Yökul*, a prodigious ice mountain, stretching from the volcanoes above mentioned, in a northerly direction, for upwards of fifty miles, when it turns nearly due east, and extends to nearly thirty miles in that direction. The appellation of *Langi Yökul* is also given to

this mountain on the maps, but improperly, as that designation exclusively belongs to the extensive chain of ice mountains already described, as known by the subdivisions of *Bláfell*, *Geitland*, *Eirik*, and *Bald Yökuls*. On passing it, however, we certainly found it sufficiently long: for we rode at no great distance from it for the space of twenty hours, and were all the time exposed to a cold piercing wind which blew from that quarter. About eleven at night we came to the *Blanda*, or Mixed River, the waters of which were of a bluish colour, and, dividing into upwards of a dozen of branches, they rendered our passage both tedious and troublesome. Near the north-west corner of the *Yökul*, a great number of curiously shaped hills presented themselves to our view, which we found, on approaching them, to be partly volcanic, and partly immense masses of *Yökul*, intermixed with drosses and fragments of lava, which have been separated from the mountain during some of its convulsions, and hurled along to their present situation by the inundations it has poured down upon the plains. At ten minutes before three o'clock in the morning, as we had got quite surrounded by these hills, and were almost shivering with cold (the waters being covered with fresh ice), we were gratified with a view of the sun, rising in all his glory directly before us. The gloom in which we had been involved now fled away; and we obtained a very extensive prospect of the surrounding country. It was a

prospect, however, by no means pleasing; for to whatever side we turned, nothing was visible but the devastations of ancient fires, or regions of perpetual frost :

— *Pigris ubi nulla campis  
Arbor æstivâ recreatur aurâ.*

We were not only far from the habitations of men, but deserted even by the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air. Here “no voice of cattle is ever heard: both the fowl of the heavens and the beast are fled; they are gone.”\*

Leaving a region “where all life dies, death lives, and nature breeds perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things,” we entertained the hope of meeting soon with a more enlivening prospect. In this, however, we were disappointed: for, we had advanced only a short way, when we entered a stream of lava, which we found rugged and wild in the extreme, and which it took us near an hour to cross. Deep ravines and chasms presented themselves in every quarter; and in many places were huge blisters, full of cracks, which the raging element has formed in its progress. The idea of a fiery torrent, nearly two miles in breadth, proceeding from an ice mountain, will appear to many the wildest and most incongruous that can possibly be conceived: yet such, in reality, was the fact now exhibited before us.

\* Jerem. ix, 10.

We could evidently see the stream of lava descending from the Yökul, at the distance of about a mile to our right, and pursuing its course in a westerly direction among numerous small conical hills, which it has thrown up as it advanced. This lava is called the *Lamba-hraun*, from the circumstance of a number of lambs having been once found in it.

Our way lay next across several considerable hills of yellowish tuffa, with here and there appearances of lava, assuming a basaltine configuration. About nine in the morning we halted at a small green spot, nearly five miles to the north of *Illvidris-hniukar*, a number of variously shaped volcanic hills, which, at a very remote period, have poured forth burning streams to a great distance on the north side of the Yokul; but, finding the grass insufficient for the following night, we set off again about three o'clock in the afternoon, and travelled upwards of eight miles over barren stony mountains, till we arrived at the *Yökulsá*, or the River of the Ice Mountains, which flowed with great rapidity in a deep channel, the banks of which were composed of clay and loose earth, and on this account very difficult of descent. The fording of this river is attended with considerable danger; owing to the large stones at the bottom, which the traveller is prevented from seeing by the muddiness of the water. In fording it, my horse stumbled with me three times, and had nearly precipitated me into the stream: but the Lord



preserved me, and caused me to experience the literal fulfilment of that gracious promise: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee."\* Having ascended the northern bank, we came to a tract of marshy ground, where we pitched our tents, and retired immediately to sleep, being much fatigued with the long ride.

Before reaching this part of the desert, we had been rather alarmed by the appearance of two rivers on the maps, which, from their size as there delineated, wore as formidable an aspect as any on the island. They are described as taking their rise from some common source to the south-east of *Arnarfells-Yökul*; and, after separating, the one pursues its course down *Öxnadal*, and pours its waters into the bay of *Eyafjord*, and the other runs past *Holum* into the *Skagafjord*. But no such rivers appear ever to have existed. The *Yökul River*, we had just forded, is the only river of any consequence to the north of the *Yökul*; and the *Öxnadal* and *Kolbeinsdal* rivers are by no means of the size laid down on the maps, and take their rise in the mountains, between the coast and *Vatna-hialli*, the name by which the desert tract to the north of the *Yökul* is designated.

At eight o'clock, on the morning of the 3d, we renewed our journey across the mountains.

\* Isaiah xliii, 2.

The road was very rough and unbeaten, and mostly up-hill till about noon, when we gained the summit of the mountain-pass, and began to descend on the other side. The descent was at first exceedingly stony and precipitous, and in many places we could not discover any tract. There were, however, heaps of stones cast up at various distances to point out the way, and in some places a heap of bones, from which we could conclude, that the horses of some former travellers had fallen a sacrifice to the badness of the road, while it at the same time warned us of the danger to which our own were exposed. After travelling over several wreaths of snow, and descending about two miles, we could discern from the rise of the mountains before us, that we approached the valley of *Eyafjord*. Having proceeded about two miles farther, we came to the side of a wide and deep gulley, which the mountain-torrent had made in its way down to the valley. The road now lay along the south side of this gulley, in a zig-zag direction, but was nevertheless so precipitous, and approached at times so near the fissure, that if we had rode on any other but Icelandic horses, we certainly could not have ventured where we did. The change in the prospect was indescribably delightful. The green grass with which the valley was richly clad, the beautiful river by which it was intersected, the cottages which lay scattered on both sides, and the sheep and lambs which were grazing in every direction, and which, from their

distance below us, appeared only as small specks; these circumstances, combined with the height of the mountains that boldly faced each other, and then sloped gently down into the valley, proved an agreeable relief to the eye, which for four days had scarcely beheld a tuft of grass, or indeed any thing but stones and snow. Our very horses seemed to be animated with the prospect before them, and mended their pace of their own accord. At half past two, we arrived at the foot of the descent, which altogether could not be less than two thousand five hundred feet.

As our baggage horses did not make their appearance on the heights behind us, we allowed our horses to feast on the luxuriant grass in the valley, while we entered the gulley in order to view the scenery. A little way up it opens most majestically on the view, being divided by the torrent into two semicircles, and the cliffs, which surround the opening at the height of between four and five hundred feet, rising into beautiful domes and turrets of various sizes. It resembled a vast amphitheatre, and inspired the mind with sentiments of wonder and awe.\*

On returning from the fissure, we were surprised to find that the men and horses had not yet arrived, and began to entertain suspicions lest some evil had befallen them on the mountain; but after some time, we discovered them proceeding along the opposite side of the valley, having descended by another road, though nei-

ther so near, nor so easy of descent as that which we had taken.

We now made the best of our way to the first farm in the valley, which is called *Tiörnabæ*, and lay at a little distance before us. It is situated exactly in the middle of the valley, upon a beautiful green mount, and consists of several houses which lie together in a cluster, besides smaller ones for the cattle at a short distance from each other. In general, the Icelandic houses are all constructed in the same manner, and, with little or no variation, exhibit the plan of those raised by the original settlers from Norway. The walls, which may be about four feet in height by six in thickness, are composed of alternate layers of earth and stone, and incline a little inwards, when they are met by a sloping roof of turf, supported by a few beams which are crossed by twigs and boughs of birch. The roof always furnishes good grass, which is cut with the scythe at the usual season. In front, three doors generally present themselves, the tops of which form triangles, and are almost always ornamented with vanes. The middle door opens into a dark passage, about thirty feet in length, by five in breadth, from which entrances branch off on either side, and lead to different apartments, such as, the stranger's room, which is always the best in the house, the kitchen, weaving room, &c. and at the inner end of the passage lies the *Badstofa*, or sleeping apartment, which also forms the sitting and common work-

ing-room of the family. In many houses this room is in the garret, to which the passage communicates by a dark and dangerous staircase. The light is admitted through small windows in the roof, which generally consist of the amnion of sheep, though of late years glass has got more into use. Such of the houses as have windows in the walls, bear the most striking resemblance to the exterior of a bastion. The smoke makes its escape through a hole in the roof; but this, it is to be observed, is only from the kitchen, as the Icelanders never have any fire in their sitting-room, even during the severest cold in winter. Their beds are arranged on each side of the room, and consist of open bedsteads raised about three feet above the ground. They are filled with sea weed, feathers, or down, according to the circumstances of the peasant; over which is thrown a fold or two of wadmél, and a coverlet of divers colours. Though the beds are extremely narrow, the Icelanders contrive to sleep in them by couples, by lying head to foot. Sometimes the inside of the rooms are pannelled with boards, but generally the walls are bare, and collect much dust, so that it is scarcely possible to keep any thing clean. It is seldom the floor is laid with boards, but consists of damp earth, which necessarily proves very unhealthy.

In the stranger's room is a long table with a parallel bench, next to the wall on the one side, and the place of chairs is commonly supplied on the other by large chests, containing the clothes,

valuables, &c. of the inhabitants. From the ceiling are also suspended numerous habiliments, and articles of domestic economy; and in some houses, a bed is put up here with curtains, for the accommodation of travellers. Foreigners always complain of the insupportable stench and filth of the Icelandic houses, and, certainly, not without reason; yet I question much if these evils do not exist nearly in the same degree in the Highlands of Scotland, the country hamlets of Ireland, or the common Bauer huts in Germany.

One of the side doors in front, opens into what is called the *Skemma*, a separate apartment containing dried fish and other winter-stores, riding accoutrements, &c. Otherwise this name seems originally to have denoted a gynæceum, which was solely occupied by the female part of the family. The other door is that of the smithy, which, however, in some parts of the island, stands by itself. To these are appended several smaller out-houses for the reception of the cows, and, at a short distance, are those appropriated for the sheep. The whole, together with the hay stacks in the yard, forms a group not altogether unpleasant to the eye of the traveller on approaching it.

The numerous flocks of sheep which surrounded *Tiörnabæ*, convinced us that the peasant was in good circumstances. On riding up to the door he came out to us, and after learning who we were, he conducted us, with looks of kind-

ness, into the best room in the house, and immediately provided us with cream to quench our thirst till his wife got something prepared for us to eat. In the meantime, our servants fixed the tents at the back of the house. On learning that I had Bibles with me, the peasant, who is a young man, and newly married, regretted that he had not been able, as yet, to furnish his house with a copy, and expressed a wish to see one of those I had in my trunks. Having taken a Bible and a New Testament to shew his wife, he soon returned, having resolved to take both, and paid the price with the utmost cheerfulness. I had scarcely turned to re-enter my tent, when two servant girls came running with money in their hands, and wished to have each a New Testament. As my stock was small, and I had a considerable extent of country to supply from it, chiefly as samples, I was sorry I was under the necessity of putting them off till next year, but testified my approbation of their wish to possess the word of God ; and begged them to read, in the mean time, the copies that had come into the family.

Taking into consideration the remoteness of the surrounding cottages from the nearest market-place to which it was intended to forward Bibles next year, I sent for two of the poorest people in the vicinity, and gave each of them a Testament. One of them had a Danish Bible, which he endeavoured, as well as he could, to collect the sense of, but he understood the language very

imperfectly. He thanked me repeatedly, with tears in his eyes, and rode home quite overjoyed at the gift he had received. The other, a young man about nineteen, had been dispatched by his poor and aged parents, to learn the truth of the message that had been sent them. There was an uncommon degree of humble simplicity in his countenance. On receiving the Testament, it was hardly possible for him to contain his joy. As a number of people had now collected round the door of my tent, I caused him to read the third chapter of the Gospel of John. He had scarcely begun, when they all sat down, or knelt on the grass, and listened with the most devout attention. As he proceeded, the tears began to trickle down their cheeks, and they were all seemingly much affected. The scene was doubtless as new to them as it was to me; and, on my remarking, after he had done, what important instructions were contained in the portion of Scripture he had read, they gave their assent, adding, with a sigh, that they were but too little attended to. The landlady especially seemed deeply impressed with the truths she had heard, and remained sometime after the others were gone, together with an aged female, who every now and then broke out into exclamations of praise to God, for having sent "his clear and pure word" among them. It is impossible for me to describe the pleasure I felt on this occasion. I forgot all the fatigues of travelling over



the mountains ; and, indeed, to enjoy another such evening, I could travel twice the distance. I bless God for having counted me worthy to be employed in this ministry ; to dispense his holy word among a people prepared by him for its reception, and to whom, by the blessing of his Spirit, it shall prove of everlasting benefit : nor can I be sufficiently thankful to the Committee of the British and Foreign Bible Society for having constituted me the almoner of their bounty, and sending me on an errand, which, while it brings felicity to others, proved a source of so much enjoyment to my own mind.

Early next morning we pursued our route down the valley. The ride was the most agreeable imaginable. The valley is well inhabited, being covered with luxuriant verdure, and affording an excellent pasturage to the sheep and cattle, which form the principal riches of the Iceland peasant. The mountains by which it is sheltered on both sides, are between 3000 and 4200 feet in height ; and are clad with grass more than half way up to the summit. The cottages looked far superior to those in the south, and the churches, several of which we passed, had also a more decent appearance. In that of *Grund*, which we surveyed while the peasant was getting our horses ready, I was surprised to find an old portrait of General Monk hanging on the wall, to the right of the altar, with a few acrostic lines, savouring strongly of

the times in which they were written. How it came here is more than I could learn.

On the right hand side of the valley, we could observe *Nupufell*, famous for its having been the seat of the Icelandic printing press, which Bishop Gudbrand improved on his being installed into the see of *Holum*. Jon Jonson, whose father had brought the original press from Sweden about the year 1530, was prevailed upon by the Bishop to undertake a voyage to Copenhagen, in order to acquire a more perfect knowledge of the art, and, on his return, received this farm as a perpetual residence for himself and his successors in office ; but the Bishop soon found the place inconvenient, on account of the distance, and got the press removed to *Holum*, where he rendered the establishment more complete.\* On the same side of the valley lay *Thverá Abbey*, which was erected by Biörn, Bishop of *Holum*, in the year 1155, and governed according to the rules of the Benedictine monks, by a series of five and twenty abbots, till the time of the Reformation, when it was secularised along with the other monasteries and abbeys on the island. †

A little farther on, we came to *Hrafnagil*, the residence of the very Rev. Magnus Erlandson, Dean of the Eyafjord district. On delivering a

\* *Historia Ecclesiastica Islandiae*, tom. iii. pp. 372—375. HAVNIA, 1772—1778, 4 vol. in 4to.

† *Ibid.* tom. iv. pp. 41—55.

letter to him, which I had from the Bishop, he kindly told me, that, independent of the Bishop's recommendation, I should have found him ready to lend me all the assistance in his power, in the promotion of the good work in which I was engaged; and as he was to commence his autumnal visitation the day following, he promised to inform the clergy of his district of the new edition of the Scriptures, and request them to institute an inquiry into the state of their parishes with respect to Bibles, that the necessary quantity of copies might be sent to this quarter.

About four o'clock we arrived at the factory of *Akur-eyri*, where I was conducted by Captain Von Scheel into his house, and introduced to his lady, who, with her husband, strove to procure me all the comforts necessary for my refreshment, after so fatiguing a journey.

*Akur-eyri*, or, as it is called in Danish, *Oesford*, is one of the principal trading stations on the northern coast of Iceland. It is situated on the west side of the Eyafjord bay, and consists of three merchants' houses, several storehouses and cottages, amounting in all to about eighteen or twenty. The trade is much the same with that of the other stations, consisting chiefly in bartering rye and other articles of foreign produce for wool, woollen goods, salted mutton, &c. It was formerly famous for its herring-fishery; the herrings frequenting the bay in such quantities, that between 180 and 200 barrels have been caught at a single draught; but they have of

late years almost entirely disappeared, to the no small disadvantage of the peasantry in the district, who were furnished with them at the rate of a rixdollar per barrel. The Danish officers, Captain Von Scheel, and Captain Frisac, have resided here with their families during the time they have been in Iceland. The latter gentleman had just sailed with his family for Copenhagen, and Captain Von Scheel intended also sailing with his, by a vessel lying in the bay. There is a small garden or two attached to several of the houses; but the proper gardens lie behind the town, on the face of a hill, where they have an excellent southern exposure. They produce chiefly cole-rape and potatoes. The latter article came in season while I was at the place, which was considered very early in Iceland.

On the 5th, I was happy in having an opportunity of executing a commission which I had received from Bishop Vidalin. Previous to my departure from *Reykjavik*, his lordship jokingly said, that, on my arrival in the north, it would be in my power to settle a serious dispute which had arisen between two of his clergy, and that he invested me with full power to that effect. The subject of difference was a copy of the Scriptures, which had been lent from a church on the mainland, but had been so long in possession of that of *Grimsey*, that the priest refused to give it up to the church to which it originally and properly belonged. Nor can his

unwillingness to part with the treasure be matter of surprise, when it is taken into consideration that it was the only copy on an island lying at the distance of sixty miles from the Mainland, and that there was scarcely an individual among its inhabitants who could purchase a copy, though sold at the most moderate price, even supposing, what rarely or ever happens, that a Bible were exposed for sale in any of the northern districts. Finding that the clergyman was equally poor, I not only gave a copy to the parish gratis, but also one to himself, in the conviction, that without making the Scriptures part of his daily study, he would be but very indifferently qualified to instruct his parishioners in the will of God. The same evening I sold a Bible and a New Testament to a peasant, who had come to town from a neighbouring parish on purpose to buy them. His wife had been in town in the forenoon, and though she was requested to wait till the general distribution took place, the desire of obtaining copies excited in the family on her return, was so great, that her husband could get no rest till he set off on purpose to try if his application would not be more successful. I still endeavoured to persuade him to wait, as I had got so few copies, but he would take no refusal, and insisted, that if he did not get the Bible now, I would at least receive the payment, that he might be sure of a copy when it came. Besides what I gave him, he wished to have six New Testa-

ments, that each of his children might be furnished with a copy.

We were honoured, the day following, with a visit from Conferenceraad Thorarinson, the Governor or Amtman of the northern and eastern quarters of the island. After bidding me welcome to Iceland, he expressed, in very high terms, his approbation of the object of my journey, and informed me that he had received an official communication from the Sysselmand of one of the eastern districts, relative to a quantity of Bibles and New Testaments which had arrived at one of the trading stations. After consulting with him and Captain Von Scheel about the prosecution of my journey, I was induced to alter the plan I had originally formed, and, instead of taking the western route to Reykiavik, I resolved to proceed along the eastern and southern coasts of the island, as I had still sufficient time left, and the numerous rivers which meet the traveller in that direction are crossed with less difficulty in autumn than in spring.

The same day, I formed a most interesting and valuable acquaintance with the Sysselmand, Secretary Brieme, whom I accompanied in the evening to *Kiarnè*, the place of his residence, about two miles to the south of *Akur-eyri*. The situation is charming, having the whole valley straight before it, and the view of several other inferior valleys which break off from that of Eya-fjord on the left hand. The house was undergoing a thorough repair; and the garden con-

sisting of two divisions, with striking moral sentences written above the doors, was laid out with a great deal of taste, and watered by small streams which are diverted into it from a neighbouring rill. On entering the house, I was first shewn into the Secretary's office, which contains a collection of books of minor importance, such as miscellanies, journals, &c. ; from the office I was conducted into his parlour, where I found two excellent libraries ; the one consisting of books on law, political economy, &c. ; those in the other were of a mixed nature, but all works of merit and importance. After a short interval, Mrs. Brieme and the family were introduced, all of whom had something very interesting in their appearance ; and having partaken of a dish of blue berries and cream, I was desired to walk up stairs and see Mrs. B's library, which I found in a neat little room, well arranged, and consisting, for the most part, of choice theological works. Mrs. B. is distinguished for her piety ; and, besides attending to the management of a numerous family, she devotes a considerable portion of her time to the education of her children, and the improvement of her own mind. Her library contains about an hundred volumes. Among the English authors, of which she possessed translations, either in Icelandic or Danish, I observed Hervey's Meditations, Newton on the Prophecies, Blair's Lectures on Christ's Sermon on the Mount, Sherlock on Death, &c. She has Guldberg's and Bastholm's translations of the

New Testament, and Bishop Balle's excellent Biblical Lectures. I was also pleased to find a copy of the Icelandic New Testament of 1807; which, from the marks it contained, afforded proof of its having been read with attention. The Secretary has two Icelandic Bibles in folio; but he nevertheless intends to purchase some copies of the new edition for the greater convenience of his children.

From this interesting apartment, I proceeded to a large room adjoining, which is properly the bed-room of the servants. The beds were clean and neatly arranged, and, what is but too little attended to in Iceland, the place was well aired. It gave me peculiar pleasure to be informed, that this apartment also formed the domestic chapel. Here, the whole family, which consists of twenty members, assembles every evening, when a psalm is sung, and, after a chapter of the Bible has been read, an appropriate prayer is presented by the head of the family. Besides this exercise, the Secretary spends an hour or two, in the long winter evenings, in reading to the family, while at work; and, what cannot be sufficiently commended, he has substituted the reading of the historical books of Scripture for that of the Sagas, which was formerly in universal use, and is still kept up by most of the peasants. Considered as furnishing many important data to the history of the north, which, without their aid, would be extremely dark and imperfect, the Sagas are certainly of great value, and, in the



hands of the learned, may be turned to a good account ; but to encourage their perusal by the common people, would only be to nourish those seeds of superstition and credulity which they are but too prone to cultivate, and which, in their vegetation, cannot but have a baleful influence on their sentiments and conduct in life.

The exercise of domestic worship is attended to, in almost every family in Iceland, from Michaelmas to Easter. During the summer months the family are so scattered, and the time of their returning from their various employments so different, that it is almost impossible for them to worship God in a collective capacity ; yet there are many families, whose piety is more lively and zealous, that make conscience of it the whole year round. The inhabitants of this, and several of the neighbouring vallies, are the most enlightened and intelligent of any on the island. They pay great attention to the education of their children ; and, being favoured with a richer share of the bounties of nature than their brethren in other districts, they are better enabled to provide them with such books as are necessary for their instruction and improvement. Yet, even here, the Bible is a scarce book ; and instances have been known of peasants offering five and six specie dollars, that is about L.1, 5s. for a copy, without being able to obtain it.

On the 7th, which was the Lord's day, as there was no sermon in the vicinity, I ascended the rising ground behind the factory, and, falling

in with a dry and sheltered spot, I lay down on the grass, and, after spending some time in prayer to the Father of Lights, and God of all my mercies, I took my Bible out of my pocket, and began to enjoy some of the heavenly strains of the sweet singer of Israel. While my thoughts were borne on high by the elevations of his sacred muse, I heard the notes of harmony behind me; which, on turning about, I found proceeded from a cottage, at a little distance to the left. The inhabitants, consisting of two families, had collected together for the exercise of social worship, and were sending up the melody of praise to the God of salvation. This practice is universal on the island. When there is no public service, the members of each family (or where there are more families they combine) join in singing several hymns; read the gospel and epistle for the day, a prayer or two, and one of Vidalin's sermons. Where the Bible exists, it is brought forward; and several chapters of it are read by the young people in the family. What an encouragement for the distribution of the Scriptures!

### CHAP. III.

*Excursion to Holum—Mödruvalla Abbey—Clergymen of Audabrecca and Steinstad—Translator of Milton—Hialltadals-heidè—Ascent of the Yökul—Holum—Gisle Jonson—Cathedral—Gudbrand Thorlakson—Removal of the Press—Abolition of the School and Episcopal See—Situation and present state of Holum—MSS.—Icelandic Meals—Extent of Hospitality—Hot Springs—Return to Akur-eyri.*

BEFORE setting out on my journey to the east, I resolved to make a short excursion to the neighbourhood of *Skagafjord*, in order to deliver two letters which I had received, to the Deans, from Bishop Vidalin, relative to the distribution of the Scriptures in that quarter. I accordingly left *Akur-eyri* in the forenoon of the 8th of August, in company with Captain Von Scheel, who had the kindness to conduct me as far as *Mödruvalla Abbey*, the residence of the Conferenceraad Thorarinson, where we arrived about one o'clock. The Abbey is agreeably situated a little to the north of the *Hörgá* river, at the foot of a long

range of very high mountains, which stretches along the west side of it, to the bay of *Eyafjord*. The houses are all built in a superior style, and the dwelling-house is constructed quite in the Danish fashion. The rooms, furniture, &c. are also finished with as much taste as those of most houses in Denmark. Nor is the church at all inferior. It was constructed, about twenty years ago, by carpenters brought from Denmark on purpose. The internal arrangement is neat and commodious; the pulpit being raised at the end, above the altar, is directly in front of the congregation, and not on one of the sides, near the middle, as is generally the case in the Icelandic churches. It may contain about three hundred people.

We were received by the Conferenceraad and family in the most polite and engaging manner, and treated with an excellent collation. It gave me pleasure to find that this gentleman entered fully into the views and design of the Bible Society; and, on my mentioning how desirable it would be to have a similar institution formed in Iceland, he highly approved of the idea, and engaged to lend his aid in its formation. He also kindly undertook to have ready for me, by my return from Holum, a copy of the Bishop's letter to the Dean, authenticated by his own signature, to serve as an introduction to the clergy in the east, for which I had not made any provision before I left *Reykjavik*, not having had any idea that I should proceed in that direction.

A little past three, I took leave of this most respectable family, and proceeded up the dales accompanied by the clergyman, Sira Jon Jonson of *Audabrecka*, \* whom the Conferenceraad had sent for on purpose to conduct me to the next station. For this favour I consider myself under great obligations to that gentleman, as I not only found in Sira Jon, the learned and intelligent clergyman, but the tender-hearted philanthropist, and the pious and zealous servant of Jesus Christ. He is forty-two years of age, rather little in stature, and remarkably active. He was five years conrector of the school at *Holum*, and one year employed in the same way in *Reykiavik*, where, by his access to the libraries, he has had an opportunity of becoming acquainted with foreign literature in a greater degree than most of his brethren. I was surprised to hear

\* On travelling in Iceland, an Englishman would almost be tempted to believe that all the clergymen are Baronets, as the names *Sira Jon*, *Sira Thomas*, *Sira Marcus*, &c. are constantly ringing in his ears; but in ancient Scotch writings, we not only find "Sir," or "Schir," prefixed to the names of persons of different ranks, but it appears to have been given as a title to ordinary priests, till after the period of the Reformation. In English, "Sire" is made use of in addressing the Monarch, and the same is the case in French; nor can a more endearing term be used than that which characterises him as the "father" of his people. It is highly probable, that the Icelandic *Sira* has the same signification—it being still common for the people in Norway, to address their clergymen by the title of "Father;" and "the fathers" is a term well known to the readers of Ecclesiastical history. See Dr. JAMIESON'S *Etymological Dictionary of the Scotch Language*,<sup>e</sup> and M'CRIE'S *Life of Knox*.

with what readiness he could quote the German and French authors, how perfectly he was versed in the principles of deism, and the intimate knowledge he had of the books that have been written in defence of revealed religion. He also quoted several English writers, particularly Young, who is his favourite poet. In his pastoral capacity he is strictly orthodox; zealous and indefatigable in his endeavours to instruct his parishioners in the doctrines and duties of religion; and strict in his regard to character, in the admission of communicants to the Lord's Supper. He is particularly attentive to the rising generation, and views their instruction as forming the weightiest and most important part of his ministerial charge. His parish is one of the most populous, containing upwards of four hundred souls; yet he keeps a register in which their characters and circumstances are regularly entered.

Besides attending to the spiritual wants of his people, Sira Jon devotes a considerable portion of his time to the healing of their bodies, and is celebrated all over the north for his skill in medicine. Since last new year, he has had more than two hundred cases. His house is literally a Bethesda. On passing it, I alighted, and was conducted into a small room which I found answered the purposes of a parlour, a library-hall, and an apothecary's shop. In the loft were several people who had come for medical advice, among whom I observed a female severely af-

flicted with the dropsy. His stock of foreign medicines is but small, owing to their high price, and the difficulty he has in obtaining them; and though he makes all the use he can of the plants which grow on his native soil, he finds numberless cases to which they cannot be applied. He seems to take great delight in the study of this art, and views it as, what it is in reality, a very suitable appendage to the pastoral character.

As we passed along the foot of the mountains, I was so charmed with the conversation of my interesting companion, that I forgot the length of the road, and was quite regardless of the romantic nature of the scenery, which must otherwise have attracted a considerable share of my attention. We had scarcely entered the beautiful valley called *Öxnadal*, when Sira Jon made a sudden stop, and pointing to a house on the opposite side of the river, told me it was the abode of their celebrated poet. "What!" I exclaimed, somewhat taken by surprise, "is it there the translator of *Milton* resides?" "Yes," was his reply; "he is still alive, and it is some time since he finished his translation of that sublime poem." I now stopped my horse, and felt at a loss to determine whether I should return to the poets' that evening, or postpone my visit till my return from the west. The latter I was under the necessity of adopting, as my baggage horses had gone on before me.

After riding about an hour farther up the valley we reached *Steinstad*, the abode of Sira Hall-

grimr, who is clergyman of the church of *Bacha* on the opposite side of the valley. He is a man of about six or eight and thirty, and has been twelve years priest of this parish, which contains nearly two hundred souls. He is distinguishedly serious and modest, and though he did not talk the hundredth part with me that *Sira Jon* did, I was no less pleased with the whole of his deportment and conversation. A deep sense of genuine piety seemed to penetrate his whole frame. His wife also appeared to be an excellent Christian, and exemplified in her own person and the cleanliness and arrangement of her house, that part of the Apostle's description of the Christian character: "Whatsoever things are of good report," &c. It was not long till she provided for us a good supper; and I was much gratified to observe the serious and grateful manner in which they partook of the bounties of providence. It is universally the custom in Icelandic families, to give thanks to God with clasped hands before and after meals. When the first thanksgiving is finished, the guests turn to the master of the house, (the mistress never sits at table, being engaged in serving,) and say: *Gif mér mat med Guds fridr*, "Let me now partake with the peace of God;" and when the meal is over, and thanks have been returned to the Author of all good, they salute both master and mistress with a kiss, and thank them for their kindness.



From these clergymen I learned, that the standard of morality was never higher in the north of Iceland than it is at the present day. Crimes are almost unheard of; and such as do make their appearance, are of the less flagrant and notorious kind. The sin of drunkenness, to which certain individuals were addicted, previous to the commencement of the war, has been in a great measure annihilated by the high price of spirituous liquors. Some would draw the conclusion from this circumstance, that the virtue of the Icelanders is merely accidental; but he who is perfectly acquainted with the sinful propensities of the human heart, hath taught *all* his disciples to pray: "Lead us not into temptation;" and I shall ever admire the propriety of the remark made by Sira Jon: "Our poverty is the bulwark of our happiness."

Happening, on the morning of the 9th, to meet one of the Deans, to whom I had letters from the Bishop, on his return from the factory, to which place he had rode the day before, I was fortunately enabled to make such arrangements with him relative to the disposal of the copies of the Scriptures which had been sent to *Skagafjord*, as rendered it unnecessary for me to proceed to that quarter. About ten o'clock, I rode in company with Sira Jon, and Sira Halgrimr, to *Bægisá*, the dwelling of the poet, Sira Jon Thorlakson. Like most of his brethren at this season of the year, we found him in the meadow, assisting

his people in hay-making. On hearing of our arrival, he made all the haste home which his age and infirmity would allow ; and, bidding us welcome to his humble abode, he ushered us into the apartment, where he translated my countryman into Icelandic. The door is not quite four feet in height, and the room may be about eight feet in length, by six in breadth. At the inner end is the poet's bed, and close to the door, over against a small window not exceeding two feet square, is a table where he commits to paper the effusions of his muse. On my telling him, that my countrymen would not have forgiven me, nor could I have forgiven myself, had I passed through this part of the island without paying him a visit, he replied, that the translation of Milton had yielded him many a pleasant hour, and often given him occasion to think of England ; but as his residence was so far north, and he had now lived so long without seeing any of Milton's countrymen, he had not entertained the most distant idea that ever he was to be favoured with such a gratification.

Of his translation of *Paradise Lost*, only the three first books have been printed. They are inserted in the xiii. xiv. and xv. volumes of the publications of the Icelandic Literary Society ; but as this Society closed their labours in the year 1796, our poet was deprived of a channel through which he might communicate the remainder of his translation to the public. To print it at his own expense was altogether out of

the question, as the whole of his annual income from the parishes of *Bægisá* and *Backa* does not exceed thirty rix-dollars, \* and even of this sum he must give nearly the one half to Sira Halgrimr, who officiates for him in the latter parish. The following lines he has composed in allusion to his poverty, the common lot of poets :

“ Fátæktin er min Fylgjeona,  
Frá því eg kom i thennann  
Heim ;  
Vid höfum lafud saman svona,  
Siötlu Vetur fát i tveim ;  
Enn hvört vid skiliumz hédan  
af  
Hann veit er oekur saman gaf.”

Literally : “ Ever since I came into this world, I have been wedded to poverty, who has now hugged me to her bosom these seventy winters all but two ; and whether we shall ever be separated here below, is only known to Him who joined us together.”

That the entire poem has never been printed, is a real loss to Scandinavian literature ; as it not only rises superior to any other translation of Milton, but rivals, and in many instances, in which the Eddaic phraseology is introduced, almost seems to surpass the original itself. Besides supporting its prevailing character, a quality required of every translator, Thorlakson has nicely imitated its peculiar turns, and more refined modifications ; and though, on certain occasions, he has found it impossible to give the particular effect of certain sounds, yet this defect is more than compensated, by the multiplicity of happy combinations, where none exist in the original, which is to be ascribed to the richness the Icelandic possesses of such com-

\* About £ 6, 5s. Sterling.

binations, and the complete command the translator has had of his native language.

The kind of verse he has employed is that called *Fornyrda-lag*, or "the versification of antiquity," which is remarkable for its natural ease and simplicity, and hardly requires any farther study than what regards the alliteration. It is of this kind of versification that the *Völuspá* and other sublime poems in *Sæmundar Edda* consist: a circumstance which furnishes the strongest internal proof of their antiquity, as all the *Skalds*, who lived subsequent to the ninth century, prided themselves in rendering their poetry in the highest degree intricate and artificial. I was fortunate enough to obtain a well written copy of the Icelandic Milton, carefully revised by the translator himself, so that it may be regarded as possessing all the accuracy of an autograph. Should circumstances prove favourable, I may, perhaps, at some future period, get it printed in England.

For some years past, our poet has been occupied with a translation of Klopstock's *Messiah*. The first fourteen books are ready, and the fifteenth was begun last spring. He acknowledged, however, the impossibility of his reaching the bold and adventurous heights of that poet so happily as he had done the flights of Milton, being now upwards of seventy years of age. Alluding to his halting, he said, it could not be matter of surprise, since Milton had used him several years as his riding-horse, and spurred

him unmercifully through the celestial, chaotic, and infernal regions. He has also translated Pope's Essay on Man, besides different Danish and German poems, and has composed numerous original pieces of a miscellaneous nature, the most beautiful of which is the poem of thanks to the British and Foreign Bible Society, inserted in the Appendix.

The situation of his abode is truly poetic. It lies near the junction of the three beautiful valleys called *Hörgardal*, *Öxnadal*, and *Bægisárdal*, the rivers of which also join at the same time, and form a broad and rapid stream. Close behind the farm is a number of beautiful cascades, at various heights up the mountain; and the prospect is bounded on every side by stupendous mountains, some of which exceed 4000 feet in height, and assume at the summit the most rugged and fantastic forms.

After spending about an hour at *Bægisá*, we again took leave, and proceeded on to *Hörgárdal*, when Sira Jon Jonson bade me adieu, and took the road to his home, while Sira Halgrimr conducted me up the valley to *Mirká*, where he introduced me to the priest, whose name is also Sira Jon Jonson, a venerable and intelligent man, of seventy-three years of age. He had already been apprised of my arrival in the north, and had just finished his investigation relative to the Scriptures, from which it appeared, that though his parish be small, upwards of fifty of his parishioners had subscribed for the Bible.

Having served up excellent cream, the aged pastor changed his clothes, and getting his horse saddled, insisted on accompanying me to the end of his parish. I was much edified by his pious conversation, and he seemed no less interested, on the other hand, by the accounts I gave him of the Bible Societies, and other instruments employed by Providence in these latter days for advancing the reign of righteousness and peace. Having procured me a guide for the following day at *Flaugasæl*, the last house in the valley, he returned, after giving me the parting kiss, and wishing me the divine blessing on my undertaking. As the inhabitants of the cottage were extremely poor, I gave them a copy of the Scriptures. It was a treasure they had never had before, and what they did not suppose they would ever be so happy as to possess. The ground about the house being wet and boggy, I could not find any suitable place for my tent, so that I proceeded about two miles farther up the *heidè*, \* and pitched it on the western bank of the *Hörgá* river.

One of the principal inconveniences to which the inhabitants of the vallies in the north of Iceland are exposed, is what they call the *Skrida*, or falling of part of the surface of the mountain into the valley below. It generally begins high up, by the disruption of a cliff, or the loosening of the earth after rain, which, accumulating fresh

\* *Heidè*, a heath or mountain road.

strength, and receiving new accessions as it proceeds, spreads wider and wider, and, with a tremendous noise, hurls every thing before it into the middle of the plain. It is no uncommon thing for whole cottages to be interred by such disruptions. In order to be secure from inundations, they are generally erected close to the foot of the mountains, and are thus constantly exposed to accidents of this nature. On viewing the threatening attitudes of the impending rocks, one must naturally suppose that few would have the courage to fix their habitation in so dangerous a situation ; but necessity inspires with intrepidity, and habit wears off the impressions of fear. Indeed, I was forcibly struck one morning at my own insensibility of danger, when, on coming out of my tent, I found that I had pitched it the preceding evening directly at the base of a mountain, the cliffs of which wore the most menacing aspect. \*

At half past five next morning, the peasant of *Flaugasæl* came to guide us across the mountain, as my servant was not thoroughly acquainted with the road. The first six miles lay alternately across bogs and deep gullies, which have been cut by the mountain torrents. About nine we came to the termination of the deep bed of the river, along which we had passed, where it received its contents from a precipice, rising to a

\* Such are the cliffs which Job calls ערוץ נחלים *arutz nehelim*, "the terrible places of the vallies." Chap. xxx. 6.

great height before us, and which it was necessary for us to pass ere we could proceed. The mountains on both sides were so precipitous, that we found it impossible any longer to ride along them, and betook ourselves to the snow, with which the hollow was filled, the ice below being sufficiently strong to prevent us from falling through into the river. At times, we had to lead our horses over large fissures and rents, through which we could hear the water at a great distance below us. On arriving at the precipice, it became a question of no small difficulty how we were to get past it, especially as the rocks on both sides were almost equally steep, and the snow did not rise high enough that we could, without danger, attempt climbing them. The left hand side seemed the least formidable, as it was easier to get at the stones from the snow; but there was a rent in the ice which our guide would on no account pass. He accordingly led us up the opposite side, which was nearly perpendicular; the baggage being carried up by the men, while the poor horses, with much trouble, found their way alone. After we had made this troublesome ascent, we found, to our no small disappointment, that there was no possibility of proceeding, the melted snow having so completely loosened the stones which had fallen from the adjoining cliffs, as to form, if I may so express myself, a stony bog. We were, therefore, under the necessity of descending the same way we had climbed up. Happening to get first



down, I led my horse to the opposite side, and succeeded in getting him across the rent in the ice, which, when my guide saw, he was ashamed not to follow. The horses and baggage were at length got over, though not without considerable trouble; and, about eleven o'clock, we found ourselves safe and well on the opposite mountain; for which I am peculiarly bound to praise God for his preserving care,—as I have since heard that a clerk, from a neighbouring factory, perished here some years ago, owing to his missing a step in endeavouring to cross the chasm.

We now renewed our ascent; and, about noon, we reached the summit of *Hialladals-Yökul*, where we stopped a little, in order to give the horses some rest. Though the summit of the Yökul was at least 2000 feet above the level of the sea, we were surrounded by mountains of a still greater height, on which there was scarcely any snow, and which every where afforded the most lucid proofs of their submarine formation. What is remarkable, I found the temperature of the atmosphere twelve degrees warmer in this hyperborean region than it was below in the valley.

Leaving the snow, we encountered a tract of large stones, forming, what the prophet calls, “a way not cast up,”\* through which we had to pass, till we arrived at the brow of a mountain, which we descended by a path that ran in

\* Jerem. xviii. 15.

a zig-zag direction, and brought us, at length, into the fine valley of *Hialtadal*. I now rode forward alone, admiring, as I proceeded, the richness of the pasture, and the majestic grandeur of the scenery; and after passing several beautiful cottages, I came, about four o'clock, to *Holum*, the limit of my journey in this direction for the present year. I here received a cordial welcome from Mr. Gisle Jonson (to whom I had a letter from the Governor), who was formerly con-rector of the school taught at this place, but on its removal to the south, he purchased a considerable part of the grounds belonging to the episcopal see, and has since employed himself in farming during the summer, and is at present occupied in the long winter evenings with a voluminous work to be entitled *Presbyterologia Holensis*, containing a complete biographical account of all the clergy who have lived within the diocese of Holum, from the Reformation down to the present day. He immediately led me into the hall of the *ci-devant* episcopal residence, and told me this should be my lodging during my stay at *Holum*.

After conversing some time on the object of my journey, and the great things which had been achieved at Holum in the publication of the Icelandic Bible, I went with Mr. Jonson to see the church. It has been an elegant structure, and is still, beyond comparison, the best church in Iceland. With the exception of a small part of the roof, one of the windows, and the sacristy

at the end, it is still entire, and wears scarcely any marks of decay. It is built of red sandstone, which abounds in a mountain called *Holarbyrde*, at no great distance up the valley. The roof is of wood. On each side are seven windows, besides two for the admission of light into the portico at the west end, in which the bells are hung. The principal thing in the inside deserving of notice is the altar-piece, which contains an excellent representation of the crucifixion cut in wood, and finely gilt. There is also a large silver chalice on the altar; which, together with the altar-piece, was presented by the Pope to Jon Ögmundson, the first bishop of Holum. The wall on both sides of the altar is adorned with portraits of several of the Holum bishops. Next to the altar, on each side, is one of the worthy Gudbrand Thorlakson, taken at two different periods of his life. He lies interred directly before the altar, beneath a large marble stone, on which is the following brief but emphatic epitaph :

EXPECTO RESURRECTIONEM CARNIS

ET VITAM ETERNAM.

GUDBRANDUS THORLACIUS IESU CHRISTI PECCATOR.

ANNO CHRISTI, 1627,

20 JULII.

I stood here sometime in silent meditation, revolving in my mind the laborious and indefati-

gable zeal of this excellent prelate, in preparing the Holy Scriptures for his countrymen. How he would have hailed my arrival at this place had he been in the land of the living! With what joy he would have listened to the news of the present circulation of the Bible! And how readily he would have assisted in the distribution of the present edition! But he now rests from his labours, and his works do follow him. His exertions to advance scriptural knowledge, and thereby to promote the glory of God, and the welfare of his brethren, did not die with him. They continue to operate at this day, and shall till time be no more. The following just eulogium of his character, is inserted in the annals of his country: "The venerable and most learned bishop, Gudbrand Thorlakson, was one of the most distinguished and useful men ever Iceland produced. He was most active in the propagation of the word of God, by means of those books and pamphlets, which, for many years, he not only translated and printed, but also bound and prepared at Holum, and which have obtained a wide circulation throughout the island. Nor shall his memory cease while Iceland continues to be peopled, and the vernacular language to be spoken by her inhabitants." \*

Several other epitaphs presented themselves before the altar, but few of them were legible,

\* Annalar Biörns a Skardsa, Tom. II. p. 140. Hrappey, 1775, 4to.

owing to the dust which has accumulated around the letters. On the outside of the railing which encloses the altar, is a bench on each side of the church : That on the right was occupied by the Bishop, and the male part of his family, and that on the left by the females. Behind these are benches the whole way back to the door, all of wood, and well finished. Above the door of the railing there is another wooden table, containing a carved representation of different parts of the gospel history ; and on the right hand side from the altar, a wooden crucifix is suspended to the wall, which is at least ten feet in length, and wears a most disgusting appearance. Such images are seldom to be met with in Iceland ; whereas, they are exhibited in almost every country church in Sweden and Denmark. Near to this crucifix is a baptismal font of exquisite workmanship. It consists of a large hard stone which, with amazing pains, has been rounded, hollowed out and polished, and is adorned with a variety of figures and several texts of scripture. It bears the date of 1671.

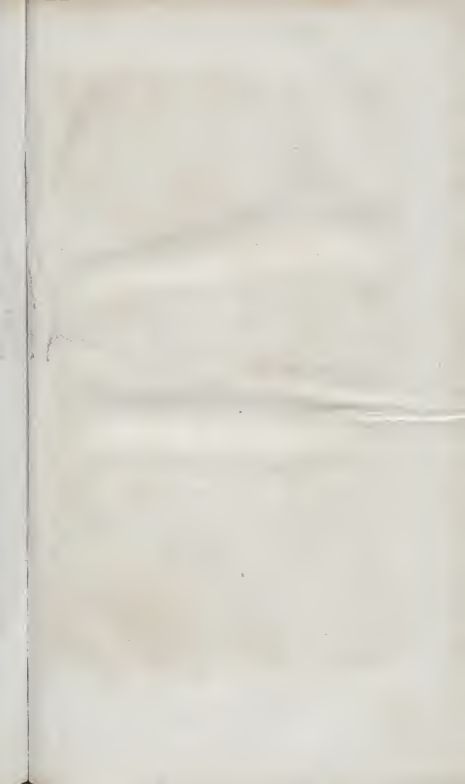
On coming out of the church, I desired Mr. Jonson to shew me where the printing-office stood, at which Gudbrand printed the first edition of the Icelandic Bible. Folding his hands together, and alluding to the removal of the school and episcopal see, " Alas !" said he, " we have also been deprived of our press, and the office has been converted into a stable !" Both of us lamented that the testaments of pious

men should suffer from sacrilegious hands, and their property be applied in a manner different from that which they have unequivocally specified with their dying breath. Gudbrand erected the printing-press at much expense, and spared no trouble in rendering it complete, many of the utensils being of his own invention and workmanship; and, in his last will, bequeathed it to the bishopric as a perpetual property, for the purpose of securing the constant supply of fresh editions of the Scriptures, and other useful books. It was however removed to Skalholt, in 1685, but restored to Holum again in the year 1704, where it remained till 1799, when it was removed to *Leirárgördum*, and placed under the direction of the Icelandic Literary Society.

*Holum* was first erected into an episcopal see in the year 1106, and continued in possession of its dignity and importance for nearly seven centuries, till, by an order of government, the two bishoprics were combined in 1797, and the seat of ecclesiastical jurisdiction was fixed in *Reykjavik*, where the Bishop of Iceland now resides. This arrangement, as well as that in virtue of which the schools were united, has given universal dissatisfaction. In the northern and eastern districts in particular, it is attended with great inconvenience to the clergy, who are now obliged to repair all the way to *Reykjavik* on church business; where, in the course of a few weeks, they spend more of their scanty allowance than would have served them a whole year in the north.

The want of the school is severely felt. While the two schools were separate, say the common people, they were of some value ; but now, that they have been united, they are good for nothing. Nor are their complaints without ground ; for *Holum* used to educate as many, if not more scholars, than the whole establishment at *Besastad* does at present ; and the trouble and expense at which the parents were in sending their children to the former place, were nothing compared to what it now costs them to send them to the south. Yet they would willingly submit to this inconvenience if the establishment were sufficiently large to receive all who wish to avail themselves of its advantages. In vindication of the Danish government be it said, that these innovations did not originate in any arbitrary measure on their part, but in the schemes and representations of certain native Icelanders, who endeavoured to make it appear that the change would be attended with the most beneficial effects to the island.

In consequence of these changes, the once respectable and far-famed *Holum* now begins to wear the appearance of a deserted village. The valley, which was intersected by upwards of fifty tracks worn by the horses that were brought thither on business, again resumes its original rusticity ; and the place which used to be the resort of multitudes, is now visited by, perhaps, a single stranger in the course of the summer. It consists, at present, of the church ; the house







VIEW OF HOLIUM.

formerly occupied by the bishop, which is built of wood, and is the only house of two stories that I have seen in Iceland ;\* the farm houses belonging to Mr. Jonson ; a small building occupied by the relict of the late Bishop, behind which is the stable, where the printing-press formerly stood ; and a little to the east of this is the school-house, now inhabited by two peasants. To the north of the church there is a long hollow tract, marking the direction of a subterraneous passage, which the turbulent Jon Areson, the last Catholic Bishop, had caused to be dug from the church, back to the mountains ; that, when surprised at the altar by his enemies, he might, unknown to them, make a safe retreat, and collect his forces from the neighbouring valleys. On the opposite side of the church, the foundations of a house are still visible, in which an English lady is said to have dwelt, whom one of the Bishops had brought over in order to teach his daughters embroidery and other fine work. I could not learn her name ; but the ruins are known by the name of “ the English lady’s house.”

Holum is most beautifully situated at the termination of a high mountain called *Holarbyrde*, on each side of which a rich valley runs down into *Hialtadalr*, which extends in a northerly di-

\* Of the former episcopal residence which stood on the same spot, and was built by Bishop Gudbrand in the year 1576, I only saw two large beams, which look fresher than I would have supposed, from their age.

rection, till it reaches *Holum*, when it winds round to the west, and gradually opens into the *Skagafjord*, into which its river is discharged, at the distance of about fifteen miles below this place. The mountains on every hand are of an amazing height, and that of *Tindastol*, which is famous for its rich minerals, forms a grand boundary to the prospect on the west. A little to the south of *Holum* lies a cottage, called *Hof*, the first place in the valley that was inhabited. I was shewn a large stone, which was used as an altar, in the times of heathenism at this place, the name of which indicates its having been a place of sacrifice.

Though no less than three editions of the Icelandic Bible were printed in this valley, scarcely a copy is now to be found among its inhabitants. They were overjoyed to hear that provision had been made for supplying their wants; and the individuals who received copies from me expressed their gratitude in the most lively manner. By my visit to *Holum* I obtained a manuscript of considerable importance; a translation of the Prophets, and the two books of the Maccabees, in Icelandic, by Gisle Jonson, Bishop of *Skalholt*. This MS. was written at *Skalholt* in the years 1574 and 75, and is the more valuable, as *Gudbrand* is supposed to have made use of it when translating the Bible; and its existence is spoken of only by way of conjecture, both by Bishop *Harboe*, in his brief account of

the Icelandic Bible,\* and Bishop Jonson in the ecclesiastical history. †. I also obtained a MS. translation of the Apocryphal books of the New Testament, and the third and fourth books of Ezra.

By the whole of Mr. Jonson's family I was treated with the utmost kindness and attention. On my arrival I was served with coffee, and towards evening Mrs. Jonson provided an excellent dish of boiled rice and milk, which was followed by smoked mutton boiled and hashed, and served up in a large pewter plate, out of which we ate in common with our forks. Our only beverage was milk and rich cream. The ordinary diet of the Icelanders is extremely simple. In the morning they breakfast on *skyr*, a dish of coagulated milk, resembling our curds in Scotland, only it is sour; to which they use plenty of sweet milk or cream, and sometimes give it a peculiar flavour by mixing with it blue and juniper berry juice. Their dinner consists of dried fish and butter; the latter of which is generally sour, it being a common practice to allow it to acquire a strong degree of rancidity, after which it will keep for almost any length of time. For supper they have either *skyr*, a little bread and cheese, or porridge made of the Icelandic moss. To a foreigner this is not only the most healthy, but the most palatable of all the articles of Icelandic diet. On particular occa-

\* Dänlsche Bibliothek, viii. Stück. † Tom. iii. 376.

sions, such as Sundays, and other holidays, they eat boiled mutton, rye-porridge, and milk. At Christmas, the first day of summer, and harvest-home, extra feasts are given to the servants, consisting of fresh mutton, milk-porridge, and bread—an article which this class of the inhabitants seldom taste throughout the year. Their common beverage is *blanda*, a kind of whey mixed with water; the whey itself, which they call *syra*; and milk, which they generally drink warm.

When the hour of rest approached, I was conducted by my kind host and hostess into a back apartment, where was an ancient but excellent bed, on which, I had every reason to conclude, more than one of the Holum Bishops had reposed. A ceremony now took place, which exhibits, in the strongest light, the hospitality and innocent simplicity of the Icelandic character. Having wished me a good night's rest, they retired, and left their eldest daughter to assist me in pulling off my pantaloons and stockings, a piece of kindness, however, which I would a thousand times rather have dispensed with, as it was so repugnant to those feelings of delicacy to which I had been accustomed. In vain I remonstrated against it as unnecessary. The young woman maintained it was the custom of the country, and their duty to help the weary traveller. When I had got into bed, she brought a long board, which she placed before

me to prevent my falling out ; and, depositing a bason of new milk on a table close to my head, bade me good night, and retired. Such I afterwards found to be universally the custom in Icelandic houses. Where there are no daughters in the family, the service is performed by the landlady herself, who considers it a great honour to have it in her power to shew this attention to a stranger.

It is also worthy of notice, that the task of loosing the sandals of the men devolves on the female servants ; a custom which elucidates the declaration of John the Baptist : “ There cometh one mightier than I after me, *the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose,*” Mark i. 7.

On the 11th I would have left *Holum* early in the morning, but it blew a violent storm, accompanied with rain, not only on the mountains, but also in the valley below. As it began to clear up towards noon, though the wind still continued, I ordered my servant to get the horses ready, much against the will of my kind host and hostess, who strongly represented to me the danger of crossing the *Yökul* in such weather, and told me of numbers who had been carried away by the wind, and dashed to pieces in some of the adjoining chasms ; but, as I had no time to lose, and the storm began to subside, I succeeded in tearing myself away about two o'clock, and was accompanied by Mr. Jonsen to the farther end of the valley. On our way we

visited the hot springs of *Reykialaug*, which are situated on the west side of the river by which the valley is divided, at the distance of six miles from *Holum*. They are three in number, but of small note, not being kept clean, and are but seldom used for bathing by the family in the neighbourhood. No incrustations are observable about them, nor have they any uncommon taste. The temperature of the largest was 114°, of a smaller 104°, and of the smallest 124°.

Having reached my servant and the horses, Mr. Jonson parted from me, after having obtained a promise that, if possible, I would pay him a visit next year, when I had finished my tour round the west country. The ascent of the mountain-pass, called in Icelandic *Kampr*, I found very difficult, on account of its steepness. I was obliged to dismount, and drive my horse on before me, which seemed no less spent than myself before reaching the summit. About six in the evening we gained the top of the snow, when we began to descend on the other side; but the declivity of the *Yökul* was so steep, and the snow so much softened by the rain, that my horse could not keep his feet under me, nor could I possibly walk myself, so that taking him at the length of the bridle, and dragging him a little on, we both slid down, without halting, to the distance of fifty yards, when we came again to stones and clay. Having taken this position, I enjoyed the sight of my man and the baggage horses sliding towards me in the same manner,

though at times their descent looked rather serious, from the greater velocity with which the heavier horses were borne down upon those that went before. I now took care to avoid the place which had given us so much trouble the preceding morning; and stretching further to the right than the way the guide had taken us, we reached the *Hörgá* by a much easier and safer route. Crossing this river, which was considerably swelled by the rain, we proceeded on to *Flaugasæl*, where we arrived just as it began to get dark, completely drenched by the rain, which had again come on as we descended from the mountains.

On the 12th I struck my tent about ten o'clock, and traced my steps back to *Mirká*, where the worthy pastor was waiting my arrival, together with his son, who had come from a cottage in the neighbourhood, in order to purchase a copy of the Bible. On opening one of my boxes, I was surrounded by an interesting group, each of whom got copies to look at, and made such simple, but pious and apposite remarks, as both astonished and affected me. One young peasant remarked, that I was going round the world like the Apostles, carrying the Gospel to every creature; a truth which I never felt with such force as on this occasion. When engaged in preaching, I fancied my employment, in many respects, resembled that of the Apostles; but they taught an infallible doctrine, whereas I was liable to err. Now, however, the case was dif-



ferent. I came, not with the words of man, but with the pure, unadulterated oracles of divine truth, so that I could apply to my mission what our Saviour declared to the inspired teachers of the Gospel: "Verily, verily, I say unto you: he that receiveth whomsoever I send, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me."\* A fresh instance of the general intelligence of the Icelanders occurred on this occasion. A servant girl of about sixteen, happening to take up a map of the island which I had dropped, quite astonished me, by pointing to the different places with all the readiness of a professed geographer. Finding that she was very desirous of having a New Testament, I made her a present of one, which she instantly kissed, and seemed quite transported with the gift.

I was here under the necessity of leaving one of my horses, which had got lame in one of his feet, to the care of the clergyman; and, borrowing a horse from him to *Akur-eyri*, I sent my servant on to that place with the baggage, while I proceeded round by the Abbey. As I passed down the valley, the people left their hay-making, and came running to the road in order to see me, and have some conversation about the Scriptures; when they wished a thousand blessings might descend on me, and the good Christians who had sent me to Iceland. Some of them

\* John xiii. 20.

were very particular in their inquiries about the reasons that induced us to do so much good to Iceland, while others satisfied themselves with respect to the size of the present edition, and the source from which it had been derived. Calling, by the way, at *Audabrecka*, I spent about an hour with Sira Jon, and then went on, accompanied by him to the Conferenceraad's, where I met with the same cordial reception as before, and was pressed to stay; but the advanced state of the season imperiously called for my making the best of my way to the east: so that after partaking of some refreshment, and receiving a number of letters of recommendation to the eastern quarter of the island, together with a travelling directory, which the Conferenceraad had the kindness to make out for me, I took leave, and was conducted by *one of his sons till within a little way of the factory*, at which I arrived about half past ten o'clock.

## CHAP. IV.

*Journey to Vopnafjord—Public worship and catechising at Háls—Icelandic Dress—Pauperage—Piety—Skialfandaflot—Læva—Salmon River—Husavik—Hot Springs of Reykiahverf—Greniadarstad—Lava, near Myvatn—Traces of Volcanic Eruptions in the Bible—Eruptions of Leirhnukr and Krabla—Church of Reykiahlid—Myvatn—Sulphur Mountain—Hot Springs—Ascent of Krabla—Boiling pool in the Crater—Obsidian Mountain—Desert—Dangerous River—Grimstad—Rural Happiness—Computation of Time—Desert—Hof in Vopnafjord.*

HAVING digested a plan with the Secretary, relative to the circulation of the Scriptures in this part of the island, and furnished myself with two fresh horses, I took my departure from *Akur-eyri* in the afternoon of the 13th of August. Of the kindness shewn me at that place by Captain von Scheel and Mr. Hemmert, as also by Mr. Gudman, the supercargo of a brig lying in the roads, I shall ever retain a grateful remembrance. To Captain von Scheel in particular, I am under the deepest obligations for the

very distinguished attention and accommodation which I experienced during the time we were together.

A little above the factory, I crossed the river of *Eyaford*, which, before falling into the bay, divides into a number of streams, and forms several beautiful islands ; whence the bay is called *Eyaford*, or Island-bay. During my stay in the neighbourhood, I had often surveyed the opposite mountain, called *Vadla-heidé*, by which the districts of *Vadlé* and *Thingey* are divided from each other, and anticipated the extensive prospect I should have on gaining its summit ; but the atmosphere was foggy, and I had scarcely got half way up the ascent, when I found myself completely enveloped in mist. Happening, however, to look behind me, I was much interested by a bird's-eye view, which I obtained through a picturesque hole in the mist, and which, though small, displayed several windings of the river, and a church or two, with a number of cottages that crowded into the scene. Having descended about two miles on the other side of the mountain, the mist began to dissipate, and disclosed the beautiful valley of *Fnios-ká*, which lay directly before me. The mountains on both sides of this valley differ from those to the west, by their being free from crags, and almost entirely covered with grass. About a hundred years ago, the valley exhibited one of the finest forests in Iceland, but now there is not a single tree to be seen—such has been the ha-

vock made by the inclemency of the seasons, and the improvident conduct of the inhabitants. The remains of this forest are still visible on the east side of the river, which divides the valley, in the numerous stumps of birch trees which present themselves, some of which exceed two feet in diameter.

Proceeding a little up the east side of the valley, I arrived at *Háls*, where there is a good church, and an excellent glebe. Immediately on approaching it, I easily perceived that the clergyman must be in good circumstances, from the verdure and extent of the *tún*,\* and the number of cows, sheep, and goats, that were grazing around. Though nearly dark, Sira Sigurdr, the clergyman, had not yet left the meadow where he was assisting his people at the hay; but, on being informed of my arrival, he made the best of his way home, and received me at a little dis-

\* The *tún* signifies the ground immediately connected with the farm-houses in Iceland, which, as it is the only part that receives any manure, is always conspicuously distinguished from the rest of the ground by its superior verdure. The term had formerly the same signification with the English *town*, hence *Eskilstuna*, *Sigtuna*, &c. in Sweden; but it is now exclusively used in the above sense. It has the same meaning in the Anglo-Saxon translation of *αγοα*, Luke xiv. 18. *Íc bohte anne tun*, where Ulphilas has *land bauhta*. Vul. "villam emi." In the poetic Edda, we read that the Einheriar daily contend in "Othins tunom," for which the prosaic Edda has "i gardinn," in the court or open space before the houses. Compare *Vafthrud*, ver. xli. with the xxxv. *Dæmi* sage.

tance from the house, in the kindest and most affectionate manner. Before reaching the door, we were met by his wife, who ran, asking, "Where is my guest?" and gave me a hearty welcome. I had scarcely entered the parlour, when I was served with excellent coffee; and, as there was plenty of room in the house, I was desired not to pitch my tent, but to accept of such accommodation as they could afford. Having read the letter which I delivered to him from the Bishop, to whom he is related, Sira Sigurdr told me, he did not doubt but that his parishes, which are three in number, would take a considerable quantity of Bibles and New Testaments. A few copies of the edition of the New Testament, published in 1807, had been sent him for distribution; but they only went a little way, and tended rather to make the wants of the people more visible than afford them any adequate supply. He assured me they would buy copies with the utmost cheerfulness.

The next day, being the Lord's day, I was happy to find it was his turn to conduct divine worship at this place. There is only one service in the Icelandic churches, which seldom begins in any part of the island before noon, and in some places, not before two o'clock. The reason of the hour being so late is, that the Icelanders have their sheep to collect and milk, the horses on which they are to ride, to seek and drive home, and themselves to dress; which circumstances, taken in connexion with the length of

the way many of them have to come, renders it impossible for them to meet sooner.

A little before church time, the mistress of the house and her two daughters made their appearance, richly dressed in the complete Icelandic costume, and had it been another day, I should certainly have spent some time in examining the various articles of which it was made up; but the nature of the exercises we were called to engage in, demanded the utter exclusion from the mind of all such trivial subjects, and reminded us of the necessity of another kind of clothing—"the robes of righteousness, and garments of salvation."\*

\* Though I do not recollect seeing a richer Icelandic dress than that of the clergyman's wife at *Hials*, yet, as I had afterwards frequent opportunities of observing the costume of the Icelandic females in general, I shall here present the reader with a description of it.—Next to the body they wear a *Skirta*, or shift, which is generally made of single wadmel, and is fastened round the neck by means of a silver or brass button. Besides two or three blue petticoats of the same material, to which they give the name of *fat*; they have in front a *svinta* or apron of blue cloth, bordered with black velvet, and hung above with an ornament of silver or gilt brass. The bodice or waist-piece, (*upphlutur*) consists of red or black wadmel, on the back of which, are three stripes of velvet, covering the seams, and in front are two broad borders of the same stuff, elegantly ornamented with five or six silver clasps, by which it is fastened, and a profusion of lace embroidery. Exactly beneath the bodice, the petticoats are fastened by means of a velvet girdle, (*lindi*) which is studded with ornaments of polished stones, plate, &c. Round the neck is worn a thick ruff of black velvet (*struttur*), about two inches in breadth, and nicely embroidered

Though the morning was rainy, the church was well filled. Having gone through the altar-service, the clergyman went to the door, and

with silver. The (*treya*) or jacket, is made to fit close to the body, and consists of black wadmel; the sleeves also sit tight, and are ornamented at the wrists with *Erma-knappar*, or buttons silver-gilt, and sometimes exhibiting the initials of the husband and wife. Over all goes the *Hempa*, or cloak of black cloth, the borders of which are lined with velvet of the same colour, and tied in front by means of clasps. The stockings (*Sockar*) are of dark blue, or red worsted, and the shoes of the Icelanders are made of seal or sheep skins, by cutting a square piece the length of the foot, and sewing up an indentation made at each end, so as to make them fit close. Excepting the pointed toe, they exactly assume the form of the foot, and are kept on by two leathern thongs, one of which binds from side to side across the instep, and the other, which is fixed at the heel, is brought round the ankle, and tied once or twice about the leg.

Such of the Icelandic females as are in better circumstances, suspend elegant silver chains from the neck, with large medals of the same metal, on which are different figures and inscriptions of a religious nature.

The most curious and fantastic part of the female costume is the head-dress. It consists of a *faldur* or turban made of white lincn, and stiffened with an immense number of pins. It is generally between fifteen and twenty inches in height, roundish where it leaves the head, but instantly assuming a flattish shape, and after rising to the height of about twelve inches by a curve backwards, it again bends forward, and terminates in a square form, not less than six inches in breadth. It is fastened to the head by means of a black, or dark coloured silk handkerchief, which is wound round it several times, and, falling close behind the ears, completely hides the hair. The bridal-dress is still richer, especially the *faldur*, which is then elegantly adorned with a fillet embroidered with gold lace.

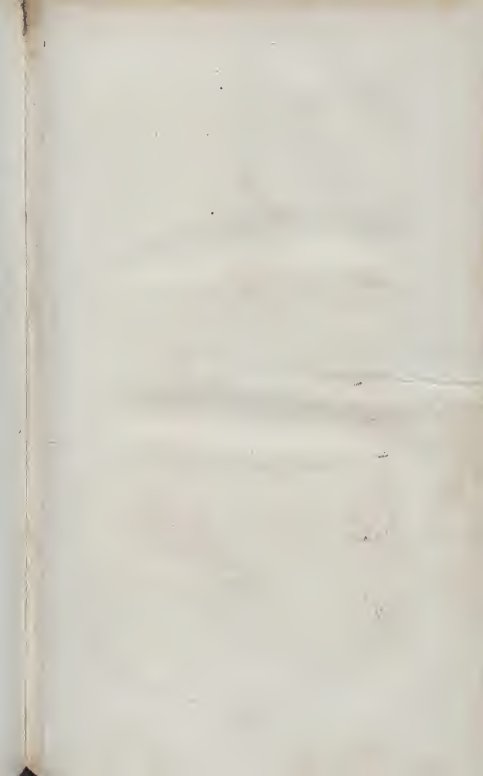


taking a female by the hand, who had stood without all the while, he led her forward to her seat, and gave her a very appropriate address relative to her obligations arising from the experience of the Divine goodness in child-birth, and the importance of attending to the education of the two young immortals who had been committed to her care. He then prayed for her, pronounced

Their common working dresses in summer, consists of nothing more than the shift and petticoats of white wadmel, with a blue cap, the top of which hangs down at one side of the head, and terminates in a red or green tassel like a hussar's foraging-cap. This, with blue petticoats, and a blue jacket, forms the home dress of the richest female on the island.

The costume of the men is more simple, and greatly resembles that of the peasants in Norway, and different parts of the interior of Sweden. They have shirts of wadmel, and blue waistcoats, jackets and trowsers of the same kind of cloth, only double wrought; the borders of which are edged with a small red stripe, not even excepting the neck. They also wear caps like the women, when at home, but have broad-brimmed hats for putting on when they go abroad; on which occasions they also wear a large cloak, or *Hempa*, as a defence against the rain or cold.

The civil officers dress according to the Danish fashion, and the priests are clothed with black garments cut in the same manner. Sometimes they wear boots, but generally they have black worsted stockings and pantaloons, which are rather awkwardly contrasted by the white sandals, and the still whiter thongs by which they are tied round the ankle. Their church robes differ in nothing but their coarseness, from those worn by the clergy in Denmark, if we except the large white ruff, instead of which, the Icelandic clergy wear bands. The Bishop, however, assumes the ruff at ordinations, or on other solemn occasions.





*Engraved by W & D Lewis Edin'*

ICELANDIC FEMALE IN HER BRIDAL DRESS.





*Engraved by W. & P. Leese 2167*

ICELANDIC DRESSES.

the blessing, and concluded by giving her the Apostolic salutation. His sermon was founded on Psalm ciii. 10, 11. which he illustrated from the history of the Israelites, as referred to in the gospel for the day. Both in his sermon and prayer, he took particular notice of the mercy and loving kindness of God in sending them a more abundant supply of the Holy Scriptures. When the ordinary service was over, he went into the middle of the church, and collecting the young people of both sexes around him, he catechised them, for about half an hour, from the subject of his sermon. This he did, with the view of gratifying a wish I had expressed the preceding evening, of being present at an Icelandic catechising. The exercise proved interesting in the highest degree. Though wholly unapprized of his intention, the youth replied to the questions he put to them, in the readiest and most apposite manner, and discovered an acquaintance with the cardinal points of revealed religion, which I have seldom seen equalled by those whose spiritual advantages are vastly superior. This exercise, equally instructive to the young and the aged, is but seldom attended to, during the summer months, but in winter it forms a conspicuous and important part of public duty.

Before dismissing the congregation, he gave them intimation of the new supply of Bibles, and desired such as wished to have copies to give him their names; and we had scarcely got into

the house, when it was crowded with people; who, supposing the number of copies might prove insufficient, pushed forward with uncommon eagerness, each calling out, "Put me down for a Bible—me, for a Bible, and a New Testament—me, for *three* New Testaments," &c. While looking at the copy I had given to Sira Sigurdr, as a specimen, some of them seemed rather concerned about the smallness of the volume, (this being the first octavo edition of the Icelandic Bible); but on being told by their pastor that it contained all the *canonical* books of Scripture, they were satisfied, and expressed the peculiar pleasure they felt in the idea that it would now be in their power to furnish their children with this infallible directory.

Inquiring into the circumstances of a poor-looking old man, whom I saw employed in the most menial services, I found he was, what is called in Icelandic, a *Nidursetningr*, i. e. a poor person, who lives on the parish, has no fixed dwelling place, but is supported, by turns, among the inhabitants. As there are no alms-houses for the reception of the poor in Iceland, every farmer is obliged to maintain such as are sent him by the Hreppstiori, to whom the care of the poor is committed, and in case of refusal, is subjected to a very heavy penalty. To prevent the parishes from being over-burdened, the greatest care is taken that none be allowed to settle in any other than that in which he was born, except he can give security, that neither he, nor

any of his family, shall ever be burdensome to the public. When any family happens to be so reduced, that it can no longer maintain itself, it is separated, and the members placed out in different households ; and, if the husband, or wife, belong to a different part of the island, he is passed on to his native parish, perhaps never more to behold the wife of his youth. On such occasions, a scene presents itself the most affecting that can possibly be conceived. Though there may not be a single morsel in the house, with which to satisfy the craving appetite of four or five young starvelings, and though they are themselves emaciated with hunger, still they cleave to one another, and vow that famine, and even death itself, would be more supportable than a separation.

Monday the 15th, about ten o'clock in the forenoon, I left *Háls*, accompanied by the clergyman, his son, and one of his servants. Immediately on setting out, we all took off our hats for about the space of five minutes, and implored the Divine mercy and protection. This laudable and impressive custom, is universally practised in such parts of Iceland as remain uncontaminated by the example of those foreigners who "live without God in the world." Before crossing, and after having crossed a river, the genuine Icelander also moves his hat in token of the sense he entertains of his dependence on the Supreme Being ; and the fishermen, when they put to sea, after they have rowed the boat into quiet



water, at a short distance from the shore, take off their hats, and send up a prayer, which they call *Varasaungr*, committing themselves to the protection of God, and soliciting his blessing on their labour. The road lay direct east, through a wide and fertile dale called *Liosavats-skard*, near the east end of which, lies the beautiful and extensive *Liosavatn*,

“ a spotless mirror, smooth and clear,”

the margin of which exhibits in various places a bed of ancient lava, whose blackness is rendered still darker by the crystalline appearance of the water. This lake, which furnishes in great abundance the species of trout called *Forelles*, is in many parts of unfathomable depth, and has been supposed to have an immediate communication with the sea, on account of the alleged ebb and flow of the water; but this circumstance is disproved by Mr. Mohr,\* who spent two days here, and though he fixed several poles within the water-mark, could not perceive the least variation. Sira Sigurdr and his son having conducted me to the lake, were prevailed on to return, while the servant, a well-dressed, intelligent young man, undertook to see me safely across the *Skialfandafljot*.

Skirting the northern margin of the lake, we turned the south-east corner of a long hilly tract,

\* Forsög til en Isländsk Naturhistorie, &c. p. 375, Kiöbenhavn, 1786, 8vo.

called the *Kinn*, and after crossing a broad mo-rass, by means of a road of turf resembling an earthen wall, we proceeded along the west side of an ordinary mountain, which was clothed with dwarf willows and blue-berry bushes. The berries were quite in season, and afforded a most delicious refreshment. The way-marks, called in Icelandic, *Vardar*, consisting of heaps of stones raised in a pyramidal form, were in excellent order, and at a short distance from each other, which, being an accommodation of no small importance to the traveller, brought to my mind Jeremiah xxxi. 21. "Set thee up way-marks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the high way, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities."

On turning round the north end of the mountain, my attention was arrested by a noble cataract at some distance, called *Goda-foss*. The whiteness of the vast body of water, which was poured from a considerable height, and the cloud of vapour arising from the spray, were beautifully contrasted with the blackness of the lava on both sides. *Skialfandaflíot* is one of the largest rivers in the north of Iceland. It is supposed to take its rise in the *Klofa Yökul*, not far from the opposite side of the island, and derives its name from the rapid and undulating motion with which the waters hurry forward to the ocean. They are of a light bluish colour, like that of milk strongly diluted with water, which must be

owing to the numerous accessions of clear streams that it receives after leaving the Yökul.

On crossing this river, which we accomplished on horseback, with great ease, notwithstanding its extreme breadth, the guide returned, and my servant and I pursued our course for some time along the eastern bank, having a low mountain on the right, through the barren soil of which some specimens of trap-rock, and submarine lava presented themselves, till we were interrupted by a tract of ordinary lava, consisting of broken crusts of enormous magnitude, and containing profound gloomy chasms, which it required the utmost stretch of our ingenuity, combined with the instinctive skill of our steeds, to avoid. The rugged and forbidding aspect of the lava, was, in some measure, enlivened by the verdure of a number of birches that reared their heads through the cracks and rents on both sides of the path. In the course of an hour we gained the termination of the mountain, and entered *Adaldal*, an extensive valley, in which are a number of red conical hills, with craters nearly half filled with slag, and a torrent of lava which has issued from some volcano in the vicinity of *Myvatn*, and continued its course along the *Salmon River* (*Laxâ*) which runs down the east side of the valley, till it has fallen in with the *Skialfanda* bay; when, turning round to the left, it has poured its fiery current along the east side of the *Skialfandaftiot*, and formed the tract just described. What excited peculiar interest, was

part of a *bæ*, or farm, which the lava has attacked in its progress, when it has burnt and carried along with it one half of the house, and left the other half in such a ruinous state, that were it not for the regularity of the stones which mark the site of the walls, it could no longer be traced. The soil which, in the course of time, has collected on the lava, yields excellent pasture, and we passed through the midst of a numerous flock of sheep, the property of the Syselmand, whose house is most grotesquely situated a little way up the valley, and on whom I would have called, had I not been informed of his absence from home.

About six o'clock we arrived at the western bank of the *Laxá*, which pursues its meandering course round the small capricious promontories raised by the lava, now moving heavily along, and now rushing down a gentle declivity with accelerated speed. Now and then a solitary salmon leaped above the surface of the water, and I was struck on finding a variety of small rills flowing from the river into the domed cavities of the lava, whither the fish retreat, which accounts for their being caught at times in holes in the middle of the valley. This river is celebrated for the quantity and richness of its salmon; but it has entirely disappointed the hopes of the proprietors this summer, and scarcely a single salmon has been caught. Following the windings of the river for about an hour, we came opposite to the ferry-house called *Nupum*; and

after hallooming for some time, a woman and a little girl came to ferry us over. Looking at the boat, I observed to my servant that we must have mistaken the place; and, on being told that it was the proper ferry, and that it was the ferry-boat which was rowing towards us: "Well," said I, "but I certainly will not venture my riding-horse in that vehicle." "Nor need you," was his reply; "the horses are to *swim* across, and the boat is only for ourselves and the baggage." The answer was satisfactory; but my curiosity was now excited by a mode of passage which I had never before witnessed. Having unloaded the horses, we drove them into the stream. They were almost instantly beyond their depth, and after a good deal of exertion and snorting, they reached in safety the opposite bank, and, giving themselves a shake or two, they set off for the house, being enticed by the verdure of the *tún*. It was my intention to have proceeded further, but reflecting on the time it would take to get the baggage on the horses again, I resolved to stay all night at *Nupum*, and pitched my tent close to the ferry, on the eastern bank of the river. The evening was serene. The sun, who was yet considerably above the opposite mountain of *Kaldakinn*, reflected his beams on the river, and illuminated my tent. Joy and content filled my heart, and I praised God for the mercies of the day,

The following morning the fog was so close, that I could only see a few yards around me. Leaving a Bible with the proprietor of the ferry, I rode on across a barren desert tract, to a farm called *Lazmyrè*, from which, in order to shorten the way for the baggage horses, I caused my servant to proceed with them in an easterly direction, while, accompanied by the Hreppstiori, who "was to me instead of eyes," I pursued the path to *Husavik*, where I arrived about eleven o'clock, and was kindly received by Mr. Baagoe, factor for the house of Mr. Wolff in Copenhagen. This gentleman, together with his lady, did their utmost to serve me, and were by no means satisfied with my having resolved to make my stay with them so short. Nor could I indeed have spent a day or two in a more agreeable family; but, having learned that several boxes of Bibles, which I expected to have found at this port, had, by mistake, been forwarded to another quarter of the island, it did not require much time to mature a plan for the circulation of the copies to be sent the following year, and it was of importance for me to advance on my journey, while the weather and roads continued favourable. Mr. Baagoe is a native of Denmark, but has spent many years in Iceland; and is an ornament to his country, not only by the good example which he sets the Icelanders in horticultural labours, but, what is of infinitely greater moment, by his strict attention to the duties and interests of religion. He is the only

Dane on the island that I have heard of who practises family worship.

While dinner was preparing, I was conducted by Mr. B. into his garden, which I found well laid out, and in excellent order. Besides potatoes, cabbages, and greens, which grew in great abundance, it contained pretty large beds of parsnips, turnips, carrots, beans, pease, parsley, sallad, and onions. I certainly did not expect to meet with so many different vegetables in such perfection near the north-east corner of Iceland, but this instance shews how much the ungenial influence of climate may be subdued by the energy of persevering and indefatigable industry. To this nursery the peasants, from a considerable distance, flock for seeds, and, in the hands of its benevolent proprietor, it is rendered a source of relief to the poor in the vicinity.

*Husavik*, which is famous for its being the place where Gardar, the second adventurer to Iceland, fixed his habitation, and spent the winter of 864,\* is situated at the termination of an inlet on the east side of the *Skjaldfandafjord*, and consists of several stately wooden houses, a sulphur manufactory, and a number of cottages belonging to the workmen. Lying at the height of more than an hundred feet above the level of the sea, the different articles of commerce are removed to and from the boats by means of a crane, which is fixed on the brow of a perpendi-

\* Landnámabók, p. i. cap. 1.

cular precipice close to the store-houses. The harbour is reckoned one of the most dangerous on the island, on account of the rocks in the entrance, and its exposure to north and north-west winds, by which enormous masses of Greenland ice are driven into it. To secure a vessel here, no less than four strong cables are requisite, and each of these is borne up by fourteen or sixteen large casks, to prevent its coming in contact with the rocks. The atmosphere being foggy, I was denied a sight of the coast, which I was told is very bold and craggy; but what I saw of the neighbourhood, was sufficient to convince me that it now wears a very different appearance from what it did in the time of Gardar, there not being a single vestige of wood of any kind. \*

A little to the east of the factory, at the sea-side, lies a low mountain called *Hallbiarna-stadarkamb*, which is remarkable for the quantity of petrified and crystallized marine productions that are found in it. The mountain itself consists of clay and sand, and is, for the most part, covered with grass. The shells are mostly of the *Venus Islandica*, but are much smaller than any now found on the shores in the vicinity. Some of them are filled with the same kind of clay with that of the hill; others contain calcareous spar, the crystals of which differ as to shape and colour, some of them being white, some brown, and some of a reddish colour; the most

\* "Var thá skógr midlom fialls oc fiöro." Landnámabók.



of them are six-sided, but some, besides the six larger, have twelve smaller sides, and others are cubic. They are found at different heights in the hill, but the uppermost are in the greatest perfection. \*

Besides salted mutton, wool, &c. *Husavik* has, till very lately, exported annually a large quantity of refined sulphur; a mineral which has been produced in abundance by the mines around *Myvatn*, but is now more scanty, owing to their having been overwrought, through the injudicious conduct of the peasants, by whom the sulphur is dug up and carried on horseback to the factory. With a view to the mines recovering the effects of this exhaustion, the most of the beds are at present suffered to enjoy a period of rest. They lie at various distances from *Husavik*: those of *Thestareykia* are about twelve miles distant; *Hlidar-námar*, or the mines of *Reykiahlid*, upwards of twenty miles; and *Fremri-námar*, which are the most extensive on the island, but can be turned to little advantage, owing to their being situate so far in the interior, at least thirty-six miles distant from the port.

From orders sent to Iceland in the thirteenth century, relating to the management of sulphur, it appears that it has long existed in abundance on the island. Subsequent to the year 1561,

\* Olafsen's and Povelsen's Reise, p. 665. Mohr ut sup. p. 346.

repeated privileges have been granted to enterprising individuals, to encourage its refinement and exportation, both from this port, and the sulphur mines of *Krisuvik* in the south. These latter mines continued to be wrought till the year 1764, but have since been entirely abandoned, though there still exists a sufficient quantity in that quarter, to excite and reward mercantile speculation. Those of *Husavik*, on the other hand, have been more constantly wrought, and in former times have produced a clear profit of from ten to eighteen thousand rix-dollars. During the last forty years, about 220 *cwts.* of refined sulphur have, at an average, been annually exported from this harbour. \*

After dinner, I went up to the house of the rector, which, with the church, lies a little to the east of the factory, and delivered a letter I had to him from the bishop. He is a good-looking young man of about thirty-three, and may be classed among the more learned of his order in Iceland. He entered at once into the Bible Society plan; assured me that his parishioners were in the greatest want of the sacred volume, and, with joy, accepted my proposal relative to his taking an active part in the distribution of the copies to be sent to this place. Having drunk coffee with him, he insisted on accompanying me to *Reykiahverf*, whither my servant had pro-

\* Hist. Eccles. Island. Tom. II. p. 15. Island i det attende Aarhundrede, p. 28.

ceeded with the horses ; and, after drinking chocolate at Mr Baagoe's, I again set off from *Húsavík*, in company with the clergyman and Hreppstíori.

When we had gained the heights to the south, I happened to look back on the factory, and was surprised on observing the Danish flag displayed from the house and the vessel lying in the roads—a piece of politeness which I had not in the least anticipated, and to which I could not in any degree conceive myself to be entitled. While it furnished me, however, with an additional proof of the kind disposition of Mr Baagoe, it, at the same time, reminded me of my friends in Denmark, and called forth secret aspirations in behalf of the Bible cause in that kingdom. Retracing the way I had come in the morning for some miles, we then struck off to the left ; and, after crossing a tract of superior verdure, covered with fleecy flocks, we arrived about seven in the evening at a farm called *Reykium*, where I found my tent pitched close to the house. As it was my intention to be off early next morning, we went, after a short respite, to survey the boiling fountains in the neighbourhood ; but, as it began to pour a torrent of rain, we could only just glance at them, and returned immediately to the tent.

It continued to rain the whole night, and most of the following day, so that I was under the necessity of waiting for a change of weather. The day was spent in making up my journal, except

at two lucid intervals, when, escaping from my confinement, and attended by my servant, and the peasant from the farm, I went to examine the springs; and though their magnificence would bear no comparison with that of the Geysers, I certainly found them extremely interesting, and entitled to the second rank in the history of these remarkable phenomena. They do not lie in *Reykiadal*, as might be supposed from the name given them by Olafsen and Povelsen, \* but at the distance of nearly three miles to the east of *Reykiadal*, in a low marshy territory called *Reykiahverf*, close to the base of *Reykiafell*, a low sloping mountain, which, as far as I could perceive for the mist, appeared to be clothed with a coarse kind of grass.

The more remarkable fountains are three in number, and lie nearly in a direct line from north to south. Their names are: *Nordurhver*; † *Oxa-hver*; and *Sydster-hver*. The first, or northermost spring, is by far the largest, the pipe of which opens into a perfectly circular bason, little inferior to that of the Great Geysir, measuring thirty-four feet and an half in diameter from north to south, and thirty-three from east to west. The pipe itself, which is about ten feet in diameter, is of no great depth, and very irregular, presenting, a few feet below the orifice

\* Reise, p. 640.

† *Hver* properly signifies a large kettle, and is the general name in Icelandic for boiling springs or fountains.

on the east side, the most beautiful shining incrustations, exactly resembling those of the cavity which forms the remains of the Old Strochr, but still more difficult of access, owing to the breadth of the bason. The sides of the mount exhibit a number of siliceous depositions, but of so extremely delicate a texture, that it was in vain to think of removing any of them in a perfect state. This fountain only jets on the approach of tempestuous weather, and its jets are said to be then both lofty and frequent. During my stay, the water, which was at the boiling point, kept simmering and emitting a large column of steam, for about the space of four minutes, when, a few gentle concussions ensuing, a violent ebullition took place, and the water was raised in the middle of the bason, to the height of a foot above the brim, which it immediately overflowed. In less than half a minute, the ebullition began to subside, and the contents of the bason were almost instantly diminished to the same quantity that it displayed while in a more quiet state.

On the south side of the same general mount, and only eight feet distant from the grand bason, is another irregular pipe or opening, which may be called the satellite of this fountain, and at first view appears to be connected with it; but a more narrow inspection of its operations shews, that it proceeds from a separate and independent source. Instead of being quiescent and turbulent by turns, it boils incessantly to a most furi-

ous degree, now at the brim and now about a foot below it, and splashes the water some feet around. On measuring its depth, which I could only effect by suspending the line over the middle of a long pole held across it by the men who were with me, I was surprised to find that the ebullitions abated somewhat of their fury, and when I attempted to draw up the line again, after I found it had reached the bottom, it was only by using the utmost exertion that I could effect it—so strongly was the stone which I had fixed to the end of the line attracted by a power communicating with the bottom of the pipe. The power of attraction was greatest while the stone was at rest, and diminished in proportion to its elevation, till it was raised about three feet, when it seemed to have got without the reach of its influence. The depth of the pipe was between fourteen and fifteen feet.

The middle, or *Oxa-hver*, the most celebrated of these springs, is situated about an hundred and fifty yards in a south-west direction from the former. According to a traditionary account, still current in the vicinity, it derives its name from the circumstance of an ox having fallen into one of the neighbouring apertures, and after a short interval, he was found thrown up by this; but the thing appears too incredible to admit of the smallest degree of belief: yet, as the most fabulous relations are generally founded on some real occurrence, it is by no

means improbable that an ox may have fallen into this identical fountain, and been ejected again by the following eruption. The pipe of the *Oxahver* is eight feet at its greatest diameter, and is surrounded by a strongly incrustated brim, almost close to the orifice. It would appear from the earlier published accounts, that it has originally been much wider, and has had a pretty considerable bason; but owing to some deterioration in the mechanism, and the rapid accumulation of its depositions, the mound has made considerable incroachments on the shaft, especially around the mouth. Its shape is oblong, and at the depth of seven or eight feet it appears to diverge towards the west, and becomes quite irregular. The propulsions of the water, which take place every five or six minutes, observe the following order: Immediately after an eruption, it continues to boil quietly about three feet below the orifice, for the space of a minute and an half, after which its ebullitions commence and increase, and the water ascends for about two minutes more, when a denser body of steam makes its escape, and the water, reaching the mouth of the aperture, begins to boil more furiously, and overflows the greater part of the mound. In the course of the following minute, a rumbling noise is heard below, immediately after which the water explodes, and the jets, which are all nearly of the same height, continue to be ejected, with a roaring noise, to

the height of between fifteen and twenty feet, for the space of a minute, when the water instantly sinks into the pipe, and resumes its original station. The operations of this spring, during the whole of their progress, are conducted with the utmost regularity, and do not seem to vary half a minute in any of their stages. During the eruption, immensely large rolling volumes of steam, burst from the mouth of the pipe, and render the scene more superbly grand and noble.

The incrustations, formed by the depositions of this fountain, are peculiarly beautiful. The greater part of the mound seems covered with small thin pieces of wood, some of them nearly half a foot in length, which lie in almost every possible direction. On breaking them, the most delicate white fibres appear within a light brown rind. The cavities, formed by the junction of the pieces, are generally filled with a fine efflorescence, resembling that of the incrustations at *Laugarvalla*, and various other curious petrifications.

The *Sydstr*, or most southerly spring, lies two hundred yards to the south of *Oxa-hver*, in a direct line with *Nordur-hver*, and is much smaller than either of them. It consists of three apertures, one of which is always perfectly quiet, though at the boiling point, and is that used for the bending of hoops; the other two, situate at the distance of fifteen feet from one another, regularly alternate, which circumstance compensates for their diminutive size, and renders them



scarcely less interesting than the *Oxa-lver*. The largest can only be measured to the depth of five feet, is about half as much in diameter, and jets for about two minutes to the height of six feet, when all remains quiet nearly five minutes; after which the smaller one throws up three curious oblique jets, through three holes in the thin crust with which the pipe is arched. Having acted its part, the water instantly subsides, and in the course of two or three minutes the larger one again commences. This was the only instance of alternation I observed about these springs; though I have since found that Horobow remarked a regular rotation in all the three. I am sorry I did not then know of the circumstance, alleged by the same author\*, otherwise I might have made the experiment, viz. that when the water of the largest is put into a bottle, it continues to jet twice or thrice with the fountain; and, if the bottle be corked immediately, it bursts in pieces, on the commencement of the following eruption of the spring!!!

A little to the west of the principal fountains, are three inferior *lvers*, one of which is on the brink, and the other two are in the middle of the streamlet which divides the valley. The first consists of water, mixed with red clay, which boils violently, and splashes the mud around the sides of the pit. One of the others, in which, owing to the quantity of cold water conveyed in-

\* Natural History of Iceland, p. 22.

to it by the rivulet, the thermometer did not rise above 182°, is remarkable for the loud reports, and the concussions of the ground, which precede each violent ebullition. When these have ceased, a strong agitation of the water commences, which lasts about three minutes; and, after intermitting double that space, the reports begin as before. The grass on the banks of the rivulet possesses a very superior verdure, to the distance of nearly a mile below the springs, and the forelles, which frequent the water at this height, are uncommonly fat and delicious. The rivulet is called *Helgán*, or the Sacred River, and may have been the scene of superstitious ablutions, previous to the introduction of Christianity. It is still used for bathing by the neighbouring peasants. In the immediate vicinity of the springs is a great quantity of red bolus, which is used for painting houses, and other purposes; and below the bolus is a bed of lava, through the cracks and rents of which the water is conveyed to the springs.

Early on the morning of the 18th, I set off accompanied by the peasant from *Reykium*, and proceeded in a south-westerly direction to *Greniadarstad*, the abode of Dean Scheving, to whom I had a letter of introduction. On descending into the valley, I fell in with a very rugged tract of ancient lava, which has most probably issued from some of the mountains near the mines of *Thestareykia*. It is bounded on the west by the *Laxá*, which I forded opposite to *Greniadarstad*;

the water being shallow, owing to the extreme breadth of the river, which, at this place, is not less than three hundred yards. The Dean is an aged man, has the superintendence of eighteen parishes, and performs the duties of the ministerial office in the parish where he resides. According to the accounts he gave me, the oracles of God are extremely scarce in this part of the island, and he did not suppose there were more than two Bibles in the whole of his parish. After drinking coffee, and having obtained a promise, that an inquiry should, without delay, be instituted, with the view of ascertaining the actual wants of the people with respect to the Scriptures, I prosecuted my journey towards *Reykiahlid*, the next station on the route to the east country. Crossing a swamp, that stretches towards the right into a valley called *Theianda-dal*, or the Valley of Silence, which the peasant informed me, had formerly been inhabited, but had been depopulated by the plague, I came to the entrance of *Laxárdal*, which is not more than a hundred and fifty yards across, and the bed of the river is rendered still more narrow by the lava which has here been stopped in its course, and thrown up in every possible form. From the brink of the precipice on the west side, which may be about ninety feet of perpendicular height, you look down upon a number of roaring cataracts, formed by enormous masses of rock that have been dislodged from the side of the mountain, and presenting a most sublime and majestic scene.

On the opposite side of the river rises a towering mountain, the face of which exhibits stately columns of rock. The *Laxárdal* opens to the right, completely filled with lava, amongst which the *Laxá* pursues its irregular course; and on the left, you have an extensive prospect of *Reykiadal*, filled with low conical hills, whose gloom gives a fine effect to the clouds of mist ascending from the waterfalls at your feet. I now descended into the valley, and proceeded about two miles over a broken and extremely uneven tract of lava on the right side of the river, when I again forded it; and, after passing numerous craters and cascades, together with some beautiful islands, on which were people making hay, I climbed up a winding and steep ascent, which conducted me into a desert, called *Myvats-sandar*, consisting entirely of sand, pumice, and other volcanic substances. For upwards of four hours there was not the smallest sign of vegetation to relieve the eye, nor could I meet with a single drop of water to quench my thirst.

Having gained the extremity of the sand, I encountered a prodigious stream of lava, which, having insinuated itself into the vallies that open into the plain where it has collected, I had to cross several times before I reached the limit of the day's journey. Of all the lavas I had yet seen, this appeared the freshest and most interesting. It is black as jet; the blisters and cracks are of an immense size; and most of the chasms are completely glazed, and present the most beau-

tiful and grotesque stalactitic appearances. In some places it is spread out in large round cakes, the surface of which is covered with round diminutive elevations, resembling the coils in a roll of tobacco. Where the fiery stream has met with some interruption, and got time to cool, a crust has been formed, which, on a fresh vent having been opened below for the egress of the lava, has broken, and, intermingling with the more liquid masses, has been heaved and tossed about in every direction, and now exhibits the wildest and most fantastic figures, which the imagination may easily convert into various objects of nature and art.

This molten stream\* is one of those which issued from *Leirhnukr* and *Krabla*, two famous

\* Few perhaps, would suppose, that any traces of lava are to be found in the Bible; yet, among the numerous interesting phenomena of nature described in the more ancient documents of that invaluable book, we not only meet with this substance, but, if I mistake not, volcanic mountains, and hot springs, such as exist in great abundance in Iceland. The prophet Nahum declares, in his sublime description of the majesty of God, that "the mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is *burned* at his presence:—his fury is poured out *like fire*, and the rocks are thrown down by him." Chap. i. 5, 6. And Jeremiah evidently takes his image from a volcano, when he saith, "Behold I am against thee, O *destroying mountain*, saith the Lord, which *destroyest* all the earth, and I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and will make thee a *burnt mountain*. And they shall not take of thee a stone for a corner, nor a stone for foundations, but thou shalt be *desolate* for ever, saith the Lord. Chap. li. 25, 26. The passage which contains the most unequivocal

volcanic mountains in the vicinity, between the years 1724 and 1730, and inundated almost the whole of the plain along the northern and eastern shores of the lake *Myvatn*. A little to the

reference to an eruption of lava is that, in which Eliphaz insidiously reminds Job of the catastrophe which unexpectedly seized the abandoned inhabitants of the cities of the plain :

“ Hast thou observed the ancient tract,  
That was trodden by wicked mortals ?  
Who were arrested of a sudden,  
Whose foundation is a *molten flood*.  
Who said to God : Depart from us.  
What can Shaddai do to us ?”  
“ Though he had filled their houses with wealth.  
(Far from me be the counsel of the wicked !)  
The righteous beheld and rejoiced,  
The innocent laughed them to scorn ;  
Surely their substance was carried away,  
And their riches devoured by fire.”

Chap. xxii. 15—20.

It is, indeed, commonly believed, that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was effected by a shower of fire and brimstone miraculously produced in the regions of the air, and Gen. xix. 24. has been adduced in support of the opinion. But the words : “ The Lord rained brimstone and fire from the Lord, out of heaven,” are susceptible of a very different interpretation. It is well known, that, in Scripture, every operation of nature is directly ascribed to God. All her diversified instruments are his servants, and what is performed by them is said to be done by himself.

“ The winds are his messengers ;  
His servants, flames of fire.”

Earthquakes, storms, inundations, drought, famine, pestilence, and war, are uniformly represented as coming from the ruler of the universe. When, therefore, the combustible matter in

left, you descry it descending down the front of an adjoining mountain apparently not more than forty yards in breadth ; but, on reaching the low ground, it spreads at once on both sides, encircles

question is declared to proceed from Jehovah, we are, in like manner, to understand the historian as referring the awful catastrophe immediately to God as the avenger of iniquity ; though, in bringing it about, he might, as in other instances, have availed himself of natural causes. From the geologic notices contained in the Bible, relative to the neighbourhood of the devoted cities, it would appear, that it abounded with inflammable substances, and, as will presently be shewn, was most probably at some earlier period subjected to volcanic revolutions. Nothing farther, then, was necessary, than to set on fire the bitumen, sulphur, &c. that was in the bowels of the earth, which, ravaging with violent fury, an earthquake ensued, and vent being given to the subterraneous elements, a torrent of melted matter was poured forth, that, descending into the plain, carried destruction to its inhabitants, cities, villages, fields, and whatever came in its way. The quantities of sulphur, pumice, and ashes, poured by the volcano to an immense height in the air, and falling from that elevation, might, with strict propriety, be said to have been "rained from heaven." In allusion to this catastrophe, God is said to rain on the wicked, hot ashes, fire, and brimstone, Psalm xi. 6. Mr. Holm, in his account of the eruption of the Skaptà volcano, says : "The whole atmosphere was filled with sand, dust, and brimstone, so thick as to occasion a continual darkness. The pumice which fell on the villages, being red hot, did considerable damage. Along with the pumice stones, there fell a great quantity of a dirty substance like pitch, rolled up sometimes in the form of small balls, and sometimes like rings or garlands. The falling of these hot substances was attended with great mischief, as they totally destroyed all manner of vegetation that they came near."

That, besides the fiery sulphureous shower described by Moses, an inundation of lava overtook those cities, is stated

the intervening hillocks, winds its way round every small projection of the mountains, and stretches forward to the very margin of the lake. According to the accounts given by those who

in the most express terms, in the passage quoted from *Job*. Their inhabitants were *arrested* by its torrents. It surrounded their habitations, and cut off all way of escape, *carried before it* their substance, *devoured* their riches with its raging flames, and so completely laid waste the spot where they dwelt, that nothing now remained but a *stream of melted matter*. The same fact is obviously implied in the description of the circumstances connected with Lot's escape. Why was he prohibited from lingering in any part of the low land, if not because he would there be exposed to the lava? And what reason can be assigned for his obtaining leave to stop in Zoar; but its lying at some distance from the spot where the lava began to act, as likewise on an elevation whence he could survey the approaching ruin, and retire before the stream reached that place? We accordingly find, that however keen he was on staying there at first, he quitted it before night, for a still more elevated and safer retreat. "And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, for he feared to dwell in Zoar," verse 30. How natural is the incrustation of his wife on the same hypothesis. Remaining in a lower part of the valley, and looking with a wishful eye towards Sodom, she was surrounded, ere she was aware, by the lava, which, rising and swelling, at length reached her, and incrustated her where she stood; so that being, as it were, embalmed by the salso-bituminous mass, she became a conspicuous beacon and admonitory example to future generations. The power of this asphaltic substance in preserving from corruption, is evident, from its being employed by the Egyptians for embalming their mummies. *Diod. Sic. Bib. Hist. lib. xix. c. 109*. She is said to have been converted into a pillar of *salt*, on account of the quantity of that substance which appeared in the crust, and its abundance in those regions is notorious, both from sacred and profane



witnessed the eruption, the stone-flood, (Steiná) as they very emphatically called it, ran slowly along, carrying every thing before it, and burning with a blue flame, like that which proceeds

history: so much so, that the lake which now fills the caverns made by the earthquake, has, among other names, that of the "Salt Sea."

In confirmation of the conflagration of the ground about Sodom and Gomorrah, may be alleged, Deut. xxix. 22. "All the land *burning* with brimstone and salt; *like the overthrow* of Sodom and Gomorrah," &c. Nor was the fire thus kindled extinguished for ages, but continued to send forth flames, smoke, bitumen, &c. Strabo, lib. xvi. Philo de vita Moses, lib. ii. Joseph. de Bello Jud. lib. iv. c. 8.

Previous to this terrible revolution, the valley abounded with bitumen-pits, Genesis, xiv. 10. out of which great quantities of that substance were dug, being applied, by the ancients, in the construction of edifices, Genesis xi. 3. floating vessels, &c. Exodus, i. 14. From which circumstance we should naturally have concluded, that it would have obtained the name of the valley of Hêmar (from חמר hâmar, to *disturb*, *make turbulent*, expressive of the appearance of the bitumen in its active state,) or the Asphaltic Valley, just as the lake came to receive the appellation of λιμνη Ασφαλιτιδος; the names of places being most commonly taken from some remarkable object in the vicinity. In Iceland, for instance, we meet with "The Lava Valley;" "The Valley of Smoke," &c. Now, what could possibly be more remarkable than the bitumen, except some volcanic craters, or hot fountains, resembling those in Iceland, by which water, bitumen, sulphur, &c. were continually ejected? On the supposition, that volcanoes, or boiling pools, did exist in the neighbourhood of the valley, a more appropriate name could not have been found, within the whole compass of the Hebrew language, than the valley of Siddim or Sheddin, the name actually given to it in the xivth of Genesis. Not only the root, but every one of its derivatives is expressive

from sulphur, yet but partially visible, owing to the dense smoke in which it was every where enveloped. During the night the whole region appeared to be one blaze; the atmosphere itself

of something or other, remarkable in the phenomena of volcanoes. Thus שׁוּ, signifies to *shatter, destroy, lay waste*, and שׁוּר, the reduplicate verb, to *break in pieces, destroy utterly*; שׁוּ and שׁוּר, *destruction, devastation*, all of which are the well-known effects of volcanic eruptions; שׁוּר, *lime*, which is obtained by the *destruction of stones by fire*; שׁוּר, to which verb the word in question seems to stand more nearly related, signifies to *gush, pour forth*, the most prominent feature of volcanoes, which pour out their melted contents, together with sand, pumice, &c. on the surrounding country. From the same root the divine name *Shaddai* (שׁוּדַי) is derived, a name peculiarly in use among the postdeluvian patriarchs, and which appears to have arisen from the *pouring out* of the flood on the old world, and of fire and brimstone on the cities of the plain. Every circumstance therefore considered, the appellation signifies, “The valley of the pourers forth;” or, taking in both senses, “The pourers forth of destruction.” Let any one read the history of a volcanic eruption, and then say whether these be not the ideas most forcibly impressed upon his mind.

But I have said that the word may designate hot springs, or fountains, as well as volcanoes. It is, in fact, the same in signification with the Icelandic *Geysers*, “The gushers, pourers forth;” and it is certainly a most striking coincidence, that a little to the north-west of Krabla, there is a valley called *Geysadal*, in other words, “The valley of Siddim!” Among the sports which Solomon caused to be made,\* were שׁוּרֵי שׁוּרֵי, not musical instruments, as in our common version, but a multiplicity and variety of *jetting fountains*, such as are still common in royal gardens, the most brilliant of which, however, are mere straw-pipes, compared to the natural fountains in

\* Eccl. ii. 8.

seemed to be on fire, and was filled with large balls of fire: flashes of lightning darted along the horizon, and announced to the inhabitants of distant districts the terrific scenes exhibited in this quar-

Iceland. How the Chaldee paraphrast came to render the words *warm baths*, an interpretation that wonderfully tallies with my hypothesis, I cannot determine, except he had פוּרְוּם and פֶּשֶׁר in his eye, which are merely the same words under a different form, and are rendered "*Springs*" by our translators, in Deut. iv. 49. "*Springs of Pisgah*," and Josh. x. 40. xii. 8. "*the Springs*," "*Country of the Springs*." In the other passages where the springs of Pisgah are mentioned, they have given them by a proper name, "*Ashdoh-Pisgah*." The singular occurs only in Num. xxi. 15. and is rendered "*stream*," but the "*spring of the streams*" makes better sense. Now, all these springs lay on the east and north-east margin of the Asphaltic lake, near the *hot springs* of Callirhoë (τοις κατα Καλλιρροην θερμοις,) to which Herod went for his recovery, Joseph. Antiq. Jud. lib. xvii. cap. vi. 5. and were most probably of the same quality.\*

Supposing some such phenomena, for it is now impossible to determine which, to have given rise to the name of the valley, it will be no difficult matter to explain what were the idolatrous objects of worship, called פֶּשֶׁר *Shéddim*, which caught the attention of the Israelites on coming into those parts, and to which they offered their children in sacrifice, Deut. xxxii. 17; and Psalm cvi. 37. They were either some ancient volcanoes, or the effects of such, visible in the ejaculations of hot-water, or bitumen, from large boiling caldrons, which excited the fears and terrors of those who lived in the neighbourhood, and at last became an important branch of Canaanitish idolatry. To appease these offended deities, the terrified votaries

\* Many suppose the פֶּשֶׁר *Yémim*, which Anah found in the wilderness, were warm baths, an interpretation derived by St. Jerome from the Punic. See Gen. xxxvi. 24.

ter. Having overflowed the greater part of the low lands, the lava was at length poured into the lake, which it filled to a considerable distance, forming numerous little islands, and destroying

sacrificed the offspring of their own bodies, thereby hoping to live secure in future from such dreadful havoc and devastation, as they had seen hurled from the mountains, in the vicinity of Sodom. It was universally the custom among the northern nations, when they had unfruitful seasons, to sacrifice some person of consequence, in order to procure a good year: their kings themselves were frequently the victims on these occasions. A similar practice is still common in Mexico. Now, if such was the case, merely on a common failure of the seasons, how much more natural was it, when that failure was effected by a volcano? Within the whole range of the visible creation, there is undoubtedly nothing more terrible in its appearance, and more dreadful in its effects, than a volcanic eruption,—nothing more calculated to inspire the mind with sentiments of horrific awe, or excite the ignorant to perform acts of superstitious worship and adoration. Witness the effect produced on the inhabitants of Naples, during an eruption of Vesuvius. The head of St. Januarius is carried in procession by the Cardinal Archbishop, and placed directly in front of the mountain, amidst thousands of superstitious and trembling spectators. If such a custom has obtained among people called Christians, we may surely conclude, that ignorant idolatry, at a remote period of the world, would go still further, and worship the object of terror.

I shall conclude this long note with an extract from Mr. Hooker's Tour in Iceland:—"The Kamtchadales, as well as the Japanesc, have a dread of the hot-springs in their country, arising from a similar supposition, that they are the abode of demons. Thus, speaking of the boiling fountains of Opalski, or Osernoi, situated nearly mid-way between the Lopatka and Bolshoiretsk, Martin Sauer observes, that the Kamtchadales suppose them to be the habitations of some demon, and make

the fish with which it was stocked. Those who inhabited the plain, being apprised of the approaching disaster, by the rumbling and cracking noise from the mountain, removed the most valuable of their effects to situations where they were secure from danger ; so that little damage was done except the destruction of three farms, with the most of the pasture grounds belonging to them. \*

On my arrival at *Reykiahlid*, one of the farm-houses overrun by the fiery stream, but which was afterwards rebuilt nearly on the same spot, my attention was instantly directed to the church, which, in almost a miraculous manner, escaped the general conflagration. Reaching the north-west corner of the low earthen wall by which the church-yard is enclosed, the lava has been arrested in its progress within about two feet of the wall, where, as if inspired with reverence for the consecrated ground, it has divided into two streams, and, pursuing its course till it advanced about twenty yards, when the streams have again united, and left the church completely unhurt in the midst of the surrounding flames. Some parts of the stream, close to the

a trifling offering to appease his wrath ; without which, they say, he sends very dangerous storms." See the *Account of an Expedition to the Northern Parts of Russia*, by COMMODORE BILLINGS, p. 303.

\* Olafsen's and Povelsen's *Reise*, p. 729. Horrebow's *Natural History of Iceland*, p. 10. For a sublime poetical description of such a scene, see the *Iliad*, Book xxi. line 342.

wall, are more than double the height of the church. Who knows but the effectual fervent prayer of some pious individual, or some designs of mercy, may have been the cause fixed in the eternal purpose of Jehovah for the preservation of this edifice ?

From this place a prospect presents itself, which, perhaps, of all the views in the world, bears the most striking resemblance to that in the vicinity of the *Dead Sea*. \* The *Myvatn*, or Gnat Lake, so called, from its being frequented by immense swarms of that troublesome in-

\* Strabo, in his *Geograph. Lib. xvi.* speaking of the *Dead Sea*, says, "It is full of asphaltus, which, at irregular periods, boils up out of the deep, like the ebullitions of hot water, and, assuming a curvated appearance, looks like little hills, emitting a quantity of hot embers, from which an illusive vapour proceeds," &c.—"For there is also a fountain of fire in the middle, producing abundance of bitumen, the irregularity of whose ejections is to be ascribed to the motion of fire, which, like many other substances, observes an order invisible to us. That there exists fire in this region, is evinced by many other signs; by the rugged calcined rocks around *Moa-sada*, hollow caverns in many places, slags, pitch distilling from the rocks, and hot rivers, the unpleasant smell of which is perceptible at a distance."—In like manner *Philo de vita Moses*, lib. ii. :—"The memory of that inexpressible disaster (the fall of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*) is still shewn in *Syria*: ruins, ashes, brimstone, smoke, and thin flames, still breaking forth, intermingled as it were with fire." The barrenness of the surrounding soil became proverbial; and, according to the unanimous testimony of oriental travellers, it wears, to this day, the most sterile and melancholy appearance. See *Newberry*, *Cartwright*, and especially *Mariti*, *Arvicux*, and *Volney*.

sect, lies directly before you ; and the whole of the intervening tract, which may be about a mile in breadth, is one vast field of black, rugged, and cavernous lava, now projecting a considerable way into the lake, and now giving place to the water : thus forming innumerable creeks and promontories along the greater part of the northern margin. To the north-west rise a number of barren hills that open into the sandy deserts ; leaving which, the eye wanders over an extensive tract of moor, intersected, at different distances, by red conical mountains ; till, reaching the south side of the lake, it falls in with several huge dark mountains, of various singular forms, that are again relieved in the east by the *Námar*, or sulphur mountains, from the decomposition going forward in which, a vast profusion of smoke is constantly ascending to a great height in the atmosphere. The most profound and death-like silence pervades the whole of this desolated region. The dismal gloom reflected by the darkness of the opposite mountains on the lake is greatly augmented by the small black islands of lava with which it is studded ; and the pillars of vapour proceeding in different places from the surface of the water, though affording a slight contrast, only tend to finish the melancholy scene, by leading the mind to the destructive element, still raging at no great depth in the earth, which has been the tremendous cause of the surrounding wildness and ruin. The lake, which is reckoned to be

about forty miles in circumference, has been so filled up with the torrents of lava which have been emptied into it, that, at its extreme depth, it does not exceed four fathoms and an half, and, in most places, is only between two and three fathoms deep. In the lava with which the bottom is covered, are numerous rents and cavities; and, what is remarkable, there are hot fountains in the middle of the lake, boiling to such a degree, that the steam rising from them is seen at a considerable distance. The immediate vicinity of these fountains proves an excellent nursery for the *fórelles*, which are found here in great abundance, and much fatter than common. The islands, which have been formed by the heavings and explosion of the sub-aquatic lava, are upwards of thirty in number. Some of them yield a little hay and pasture; and most of them abound in angelica, a plant of which the natives are very fond, and which they collect for winter provision. It has a pleasant taste when fresh, but is said to be still better after it has been kept some time.

As the atmosphere was temperate, I luckily escaped being attacked by the gnats, but observed thousands of them in the window at *Reykiahlid*. They are greyish in colour, have long shining wings, and are much larger than any I had seen before. Not only the peasants, who are continually pestered by them in warm weather, but travellers, who merely pass the lake, declare them to be insupportable. Their bite is ex-



tremely painful ; and it is impossible, even after using every means of defence, to keep them from penetrating to the skin. The poor horses, especially black ones, are most tormented by them ; and instances have been known, of those belonging to travellers having suffered to such a degree, that, in order to obtain relief, they have rushed with fury into the lake and perished.\*

Having pitched my tent close to the margin of the lava, I retired to read a little; but had not proceeded far in that exercise, when my servant announced the arrival of a large travelling cavalcade from the east country ; which, on coming out, I found belonged to Kammer-assessor Thorlacius, who had been several years Sysselman of *South Mulè* district, but had lately received the Sysselmanship of *Arness* district, and was now removing his family to the south. It is impossible for a foreigner, who has never been in Iceland, to form any idea of the trouble and danger connected with such a removal. The conveyance of the more important parts of household furniture is entirely out of the question : for they cannot be got overland, and there are no coasting vessels ; and it is with the utmost difficulty that the most portable articles can be removed. The fording of the rivers, the climbing of the mountains, the scrambling over the

\* Mohr's Naturhistorie, p. 100,

lava, the passage of the morasses, bad weather, and numberless other circumstances, present very serious inconveniences even to the most robust and accustomed traveller, and might be deemed absolutely insurmountable barriers in the way of females and young children; yet Mrs. Thorlacius, with her three children, had undertaken a journey of not less than five hundred British miles, and seemed to support it with a courage that quite astonished me. They had each a horse, except the youngest, a girl of about two years, who rode before an assistant. This poor little infant, had the misfortune to be dropped the same morning by her keeper, but did not appear to have received any material injury, only she complained of a pain in her stomach; till, arriving at this place, and being undressed, it was found that the dear babe had broken her thigh-bone. The anguish and perplexity of the parents on this discovery may be easily conceived. At a strange place, with more than the half of their journey before them, and at least sixty miles distant from any surgical aid, their case was truly pitiable. We endeavoured, as well as we could, to set the bone, and bound some pieces of tough sheep-skin parallel with it, to prevent its sliding, all which the child bore with uncommon patience; and, getting it rebound the following morning, they proceeded to *Akur-eyri*, whence they intended sending for proper assistance.

I had become acquainted with Mr. Thorlacius in Copenhagen, and knew he would enter cordially into the Bible cause; and I received, on this occasion, the strongest assurances of his assistance and support.

At the distance of twenty-five miles east from *Reykiahlid*, is the large *Yökul* river, which, taking its rise in the northern regions of the *Klofa* *Yökul*, and being augmented by an immense number of tributary streams, pours a vast body of water into the *Axarfjord*, a bay on the northern coast, about thirty miles distant from *Husavik*. It frequently overflows its banks, and has repeatedly done great damage to the houses and grounds in the neighbourhood of the sea. As this is the nearest farm on the west side of the river, it is necessary to make an agreement with the peasant for a man and horse to conduct you to the ferry, and row you over, for which he charges three rix-dollars, or about five-and-sixpence Sterling. Not being accustomed to such heavy charges in Iceland, I considered it rather exorbitant, but found ultimately no reason to complain, having got sufficient service for the money.

The morning of the 19th being clear and serene, I resolved to proceed into the desert; and, sending my servant on before me with the baggage, I got the guide to strike off a little to the right, in order to conduct me through the mines. Encountering a cavernous tract of ancient and recent lavas, intermixed and tossed about in the

wildest manner, my curiosity was excited by a singular looking hill, about half a mile before me, from the top and sides of which a considerable quantity of smoke was making its escape, and which wore every appearance of a volcano in miniature. On coming up to it, I found it to consist of lava and volcanic sand. In the middle was a circular crater, of about twenty feet in diameter; which, being open on the south side, I entered, and surveyed various rents in the scorified wall, which emitted so much heat and smoke, that I could scarcely approach within a yard of them. The bottom was filled with sand and rough slags, and the whole bore the most evident marks of its having been a furnace in which the fire has raged, and from which it has played on the surrounding regions. From this place I rode, in a north-east direction, encompassed on every hand by smoking rents and chasms in the lava, till I came to the *Vapour-bath*, a low rude building of lava, raised over an excavation, in which is a crevice that sends forth a current of steam, and heats the place to such a degree, that, on closing the door, a person is instantly thrown into the strongest perspiration. Close to the crevice, Fahrenheit's thermometer rose, in the course of two minutes, to the 144th degree. The bath is frequented by people from a distance, and is celebrated for its efficacy in curing various diseases. It is, however, very inconvenient to bathe here, owing to the quantity of small sooty volcanic sand, which is not only

thrown around the bath, but has even penetrated into the inside, through the pieces of lava of which it is constructed.

The sulphurous exhalations now becoming so strong, and the deceitfulness of the surface so great, we were obliged to alight from our horses, and lead them over such parts of the soil as appeared most indurated, though, after we had used every precaution in selecting the road, it frequently happened that one of the horses' feet broke through the crust, and left a hole, which continued to send forth smoke in great abundance, so that every moment we were in danger of sinking into

“ ——— a fiery deluge, fed  
With ever-burning sulphur unconsumed !”

On either side lay vast beds of sulphur, covered with a thin crust, containing innumerable small holes, through which the vapour was making its escape. In many parts the crust, which presented the most beautiful aluminous efflorescence, was not more than half an inch in thickness ; and, on its being removed, a thick bed of pure sulphur appeared, through which the steam issued with a hissing noise. The sublimation of the sulphur is produced by the constant ascension of this vapour ; and it is found to possess greater and less degrees of purity, in proportion as the soil is more or less porous. In general, however, these mines are vastly supe-

rior to any other in Iceland, owing to the intense degree of subterraneous heat, and the very loose and porous nature of the earth at this place.

The sulphur mountain rises to a considerable height from the east side of the hollow in which these mines are situate. It does not exceed a mile in breadth, but is more than five miles in length, stretching from the east end of the lake in a northerly direction, between the volcanoes *Krabla* and *Leirhnukr*, where it joins the ridge by which these two mountains are connected. The surface is very uneven, consisting of immense banks of red bolus and sulphur, the crust of which is variegated with random mixtures of yellow, light blue, and white colours; and, in some places, a soft sand-stone makes its appearance through the predominant mould. I could also observe holes, out of which the sulphur has been dug by the peasants, and which seemed to have been made with much prodigality: a consequence that must ever attend its being dug without any regular plan, by persons who do not possess skill sufficient to qualify them for the work. Instead of the mines being wrought under the inspection of an individual appointed for the purpose, the mode of collecting the sulphur is left entirely to the discretion of the peasants; who, in the earlier part of the summer, collect such quantities of it as will afford them a barter against the articles of foreign produce, which they may need for the winter.

Ascending by the sides of the banks, the bolus of which was very soft, and often took the horses more than mid-leg deep, we succeeded in gaining a narrow pass in the mountain, which opened into a vast level country, but terminated all at once in so abrupt and precipitous a descent, as to excite a momentary trepidation and awe. Yet I had scarcely recovered from my consternation, when a more terrific scene opened on my view. Almost directly below the brink on which I stood, at the depth of more than six hundred feet, lay a row of large caldrons of boiling mud, twelve in number, which were in full and constant action; roaring, splashing, and sending forth immense columns of dense vapour, that, rising and spreading in the atmosphere, in a great measure intercepted the rays of the sun, who stood high above the horizon in the same direction. The boldest strokes of poetic fiction would be utterly inadequate to a literal description of the awful realities of this place; nor can any ideas, formed by the strongest human imagination, reach half the grandeur, or the terrors, of the prospect. I stood for about a quarter of an hour, as if I had been petrified, with my eyes intensely fixed on the dreadful operations that were going on in the abyss below me, when, turning to the left, I had a full view of the tremendous *Krabla*, the *Obsidian Mountain*, and two or three other volcanic mountains, whose names I could not learn with any certainty.

Leading our horses down the side of the mountain, in a ziz-zag direction, we advanced towards the *hverar* ; but, as the steeds grew rather restive, and the soil began to lose its firmness, we left them behind us, and proceeded, with wary step, amongst numerous burning quagmires, till we came close to the springs. Excepting two, which lie at the distance of twenty yards from the rest, they are all crowded together into one vast chasm of the lava. Some of them remain stationary within the crevice, but roar terribly, and emit much steam ; others boil violently, and splash their black muddy contents round the orifice of the pit ; while two or three jet, at intervals, to the height of four or five feet. The most remarkable, however, is that at the northern extremity of the chasm. Its smallest diameter, down at the surface of the puddle, may be about fourteen feet, but it opens gradually to the edge, where the chasm is at least twenty feet across. The water, which was quite turbid and black, was comparatively quiet about two minutes, when it broke forth in a most furious manner, jetting to the height of between ten and fifteen feet, and splashing between the jets, in oblique directions, on every side, which rendered it dangerous to stand near the margin. What increased the danger, was the softness of the soil, which appeared to fill other chasms close to the great one, so that, on making a sudden leap, to escape being scalded, a person can hardly avoid plunging into semi-liquid beds



of hot clay and sulphur, an alternative still more shocking. The jetting is accompanied with a harsh roar, and the escape of a vast quantity of vapour, strongly impregnated with sulphur. It lasts four minutes, after which the liquid again subsides to its former state. The two apertures, that lay at a short distance from the rest, were filled with thick mud, which moved so sluggishly that it could scarcely be said to boil, but, as the surface was considerable, it puffed no small quantity of steam in a very amusing manner. To a considerable distance around these springs, and a long way up the mountain, the soil is extremely soft, and so hot that you cannot hold your hand more than three inches below the surface; corresponding in every respect to that described by Milton:

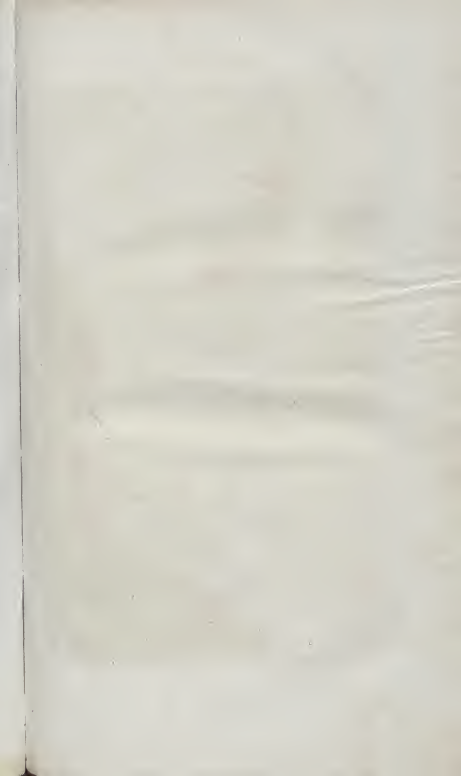
“ —— till on dry land  
 He lights, if it were land that ever burn'd  
 With solid, as the lake with liquid fire :  
 And such appear'd in hue, as when the force  
 Of subterranean wind transports a hill  
 Torn from Pelorus, or the shatter'd side  
 Of thund'ring Etna, whose combustible  
 And fuel'd entrails thence conceiving fire,  
 Sublim'd with mineral fury, aid the winds,  
 And leave a singed bottom all involv'd  
 With stench and smoke : such resting found the sole  
 Of unblest'd feet !” ——

Having again reached our horses, we were on the eve of setting off for the road, when, hap- pening to turn towards *Krabla*, I descried a vast

volume of smoke, rising at first perpendicularly, with amazing velocity, from a break, about two-thirds up the south-west side of the mountain; but, after gaining a considerable elevation, it struck off, in a beautiful horizontal line, towards the north-west; and as its regular intermission indicated that it proceeded from a boiling volcano, and I had yet the greatest part of the day before me, I resolved to ascend the mountain, and survey another of these terrible, but interesting scenes. It was with difficulty, however, that I could prevail on my guide to accompany me. The region, he said, was wholly unexplored; and hidden pools of boiling clay were scattered so thick around the foot of the mountain, as to render it inaccessible: but, on offering to make him a trifling present, his fears began to leave him, and he at length engaged to conduct me as far as we could proceed with safety.

The path we pursued, lay along the eastern margin of a stream of lava, which appears to be of the same age with that at *Reykiahlid*, only it is, for the most part, covered with white pumice and volcanic sand. The side of a low mountain to the right, which we skirted for some time, was partially overgrown with grass, and, now and then, a few willows reared their dwarfy tops above the ridges of the lava. Passing a desolate farm, and keeping at a distance from the sulphur banks, which appeared in the face of a contiguous mountain, we succeeded in reaching the base of *Krabla*, without meeting with any

of the pools so much dreaded by my guide ; but here an obstacle presented itself, scarcely less formidable. Along the foot of the mountain ran a small rivulet, by which the ground had been hollowed out to a great depth ; and, as there was nothing on either side but loose clay, it was some time before we could find a place, sufficiently indurated, to afford a solid footing for our horses. What increased the difficulty was, that the opposite bank, which is formed by the base of the mountain, was so high and steep, that, at almost every step, the surface gave way, and we slid down again into the stream. After several reiterated attempts, we at length gained the summit of the bank, and proceeded upwards, but found the ascent very laborious and toilsome ; the side of the mountain consisting of pumice, sand, and soft earth, and, for the most part, steep and slippery. Walking and riding by turns, in a curvilinear direction, we left several divisions behind us : and, from the apparent nearness of the smoke, and the loudness of the roaring which attended it, both being perceptible at intervals, we flattered ourselves with the hope that the *hver* lay behind the height immediately above us ; but on reaching it, we found still another eminence to climb ; till having been tantalized in this manner for near an hour, and almost completely out of breath, we ultimately came within sight of the object of attraction. As such, I certainly viewed it at a distance, when nothing was visible but the body of va-



HEATING POOL IN THE CENTER OF KRAKELA.



pour ; but the moment my eye took in the whole of the scene, I became conscious of sensations the most repulsive and abhorrent. At the bottom of a deep gulley, lay a circular pool of black liquid matter, at least three hundred feet in circumference, from the middle of which a vast column of the same black liquid was erupted, with a loud thundering noise ; but, being enveloped in smoke, till within about three feet of the surface of the pool, I could not form any idea of the height to which it rose.

From every circumstance connected with the vast hollow in which this pool is situated, I could not but regard it as the remains of the crater ; which, after having vomited immense quantities of volcanic matter, has loosened the adjacent parts of the mountain, to such a degree, that they have fallen in, and left nothing but the boiling caldron to mark its site, and perpetuate, in faint adumbrations, the awful terrors of the scene. The surface of the pool may be about seven hundred feet below what appeared to be the highest peak of *Krabla*, and about two hundred feet below the opposite height on which I stood.

Having continued some minutes to disgorge its muddy contents, the violent fury of the spring evidently began to abate ; and, as the ground along the west side of the hollow, seemed sufficiently solid, I got the guide to accompany me to the immediate precincts of the pool. On the northern margin rose a bank, consisting of red

bolus and sulphur, from which, as the wind blew from the same quarter, we had a fine view of the whole. Nearly about the centre of the pool, is the aperture, whence the vast body of water, sulphur, and bluish black bolus is thrown up; and which is equal, in diameter, to the column of water ejected by the *Great Geyser* at its strongest eruptions. The height of the jets varied greatly; rising, on the first propulsions of the liquid, to about twelve feet, and continuing to ascend, as it were, by leaps, till they gained the highest point of elevation, which was upwards of thirty feet, when they again abated much more rapidly than they rose; and, after the spouting had ceased, the situation of the aperture was rendered visible only by a gentle ebullition, which distinguished it from the general surface of the pool. During my stay, which was upwards of an hour, the eruptions took place every five minutes, and lasted about two minutes and a half. I was always apprized of the approach of an eruption by a small jetter that broke forth from the same pool, a little to the east of the great one, and was evidently connected with it, as there was a continual bubbling in a direct line between them. None of its jets exceeded twelve feet, and generally they were about five. Another bubbling channel ran a little way to the north-west of the principal opening, but did not terminate in a jetter like the former. While the eruption continued, a number of fine silver waves were thrown round to the sides of the

pool, which was lined with a dark blue bolus, left there on the subsidence of the waves. At the foot of the bank on which we stood, were numerous small holes, whence a quantity of steam was unremittingly making its escape with a loud hissing noise; and on the west side of the pool was a gentle declivity, where the water ran out, and was conveyed, through a long winding gulley, to the foot of the mountain. The soil around the margin was so extremely soft, that it was not without imminent danger I endeavoured to thrust my thermometer into the liquid, in order to ascertain the degree of its heat; an attempt which proved fruitless, as the glass got obscured by the sulphureous exhalations.

The above is an outline of the situation and general appearance of this wonderful pool, but its horrors are absolutely indescribable. To be conceived, they must be seen; and, for my part, I am convinced, that the awful impression they left upon my mind, no length of time will ever be able to erase. The effect was indeed somewhat diminished by the scenes which the earlier part of the morning had presented to my view, and, by comparing this phenomenon with others of the same class, it sensibly lost by the association; whereas, had it been a single and detached object, to which I had never before witnessed any thing similar, it must necessarily have been productive of a higher degree of astonishment. Surely, were it possible for those thoughtless and insensible beings, whose minds



seem impervious to every finer feeling, to be suddenly transported to this burning region, and placed within view of the tremendous operations of the vomiting pool, the sight could not but arouse them from their lethargic stupor, and, by superinducing habits of serious reflection, might be attended with the happiest consequences, both to themselves, and all within the sphere of their influence. \*

On again reaching the elevation where we had left our horses, I stopped a few minutes to survey the surrounding scenery. It was with

\* Olafsen and Povelsen, describing two pools on the south-east side of *Krabla*, say, that "they are called *Vüle*, a contraction of *Helvüle*, which signifies "hell;" and the name is most probably a remnant of "ancient superstition."—"We only reached one of the apertures, which we could discover at a distance, from the dense black smoke arising from it. In appearance, it resembles an exceedingly large kettle. The rim was about five fathoms high above the water, which is bluish, and thick as porridge, and the fine clay, which is thrown up on the banks by the steam, is sour. It is only at certain intervals, when the smoke is carried away by the wind, that a person can look down into the pit. The whole region completely answers to the well-known *Solfatara* in Italy, of which the inhabitants entertain the same unlovely idea the people here have had, that it is either purgatory or hell. The heathens gave the appellation of *Ollam Vulcani* to the boiling lake at the same place," Pp. 726, 727. That my guide was not altogether free from such apprehensions was evident; for, while the thundering operations of the pool were going on, his attitude, and the contortions of his features, were scarcely less terrific than the pool itself. I was the more struck at this, as he seemed to regard the scenes we had witnessed in the morning with perfect indifference.

regret that I did not gain the summit of the mountain, which was not more than five hundred feet above me, but my time imperiously forbade any longer delay. The view from this place was very commanding, but desolate and dreary in the extreme. What was visible of *Krabla*, appeared covered with the same clay, pumice, and sand, as that on which I stood; only diversified by beds of yellow sulphur, and a few strangely mis-shapen rocks, which now and then broke through the surface. On the left rose the *Obsidian* mountain, consisting of a high narrow ridge, that runs from north to south. This was relieved by a low flat circular mountain, over which I could descry part of the vast inhospitable desert stretching into the interior, till terminated by the huge volcano called *Herdubreid*, and the *Odáda Hraun*, which is reported to be one of the most extensive and forbidding tracts of melted rock that is to be met with in Iceland. To the west of this wilderness lay a number of low mountains, where the *Fremrinámar* are situated. Directly in front was the valley filled with lava above described; near the farther end of which the large columns of smoke, ascending from the sulphur springs, had a fine effect. Beyond this rose the mountains to the south of *Myvatn*, called *Sellingafjall*, *Bláfjall*, and *Burfell*. To the west were *Reykiahlíðarfjall*, and *Geysadalsfjall*; between which and *Krabla* lay the dangerous volcano of *Leirhnúkr*. It appeared considerably below me, at the distance

of a mile. The crater was surrounded by a vast tract of black lava, which is said to be inaccessible, owing to the softness of the ground; and the side of the mountain that lay nearest to me was covered with beds of bolus and sulphur.

Quitting this scene, and bending our course round the precipitous brow of a hill, on the south side of *Krabla*, which was so deeply indented by the mountain torrent, and afforded so insecure a footing, that it was with great difficulty we turned it, we came, in the course of an hour, to *Hrafninnufjall*, or the *Obsidian mountain*, so called from its abounding in obsidian or the Icelandic agate.\* On the west side of this mountain is a large hollow or plain, in which are a number of knolls, for the most part pointed at the summit, that consist entirely of this beautiful mineral. From the undulations apparent in the space between these eminences, I concluded that it has been overrun by a stream of obsidian, and that the knolls have been heaved up in a manner analogous to that in which those of common lavas are formed. My attention was first attracted by a vein that appeared at some distance up the mountain, but on reaching it I was disappointed to find, that it was very coarse in the grain, not differing much from ordinary lava, only it was unvesicular. Returning by another path, amidst in-

\* This stone, which is found in Peru and Quito, the Spaniards also call *Piedra de Galinazzo*, or "Raven Stone," which is the signification of the Icelandic *Hrafninna*.

numerable small fragments of lava, obsidian, and five-sided basalts, I ascended one of the knolls, which, being broken on one of the sides, exhibited the most perfectly black obsidian. With the utmost ease I separated pieces from the rock much larger than I could possibly move. Having picked out such specimens as were most conveniently carried, and just glanced at the large shining beds near the top of the mountain, I again mounted my horse, and made the best of my way to a pass at the northern extremity, through which I hoped to extricate myself from these dismal volcanic regions. Just before coming to the pass, we rode close by a large pool of light blue water, where, it would appear, from the depositions round the margin, a boiling spring has played in former times; and, directly in front, appeared a long rugged ridge of black stratified rocks, running along the north-east side of *Krabla*, which I take to be the aqueigneous volcano described by Olafsen and Povelsen, as the oldest of all the mountains in the vicinity of *Myvatn*. \*

The descent from the pass was extremely declivitous, and could only be accomplished by leading the horses in a zig-zag direction. Having reached the foot of the mountain, we hastened to quench our thirst at a black stream, which we saw a little way before us, and which proved exceedingly refreshing, both to ourselves and the

\* *Reise igiennem Island*. p. 727.

horses: neither of us having tasted a drop since early in the morning. All around the tract we explored, the water is of a light blue colour, and so strongly impregnated with sulphur that it cannot be drunk. We now rode across a number of stony fields, and in the course of an hour arrived at the road, which led us in the next hour to a vast plain, overrun with lava at some remote period, and exhibiting, in many places, immense yawning caverns; in others, a surface of many hundred feet square, as level as pavement. This tract was relieved by one consisting of cinders and ashes, which have proceeded from a volcano a little to the right hand of the road. This volcano is of no great height, stands insulated, is circular, and hollow within, having a lateral opening towards the east; and, from its resemblance to an old fortification, and its having been used for driving horses into, in order to catch them, it has obtained the name of *Hrossa-borg*. In this situation, to whatever side the traveller turns, nothing presents itself to his view but

“ A dreary plain, forlorn and wild,  
The seat of desolation.”

The past part of the day had been spent in gratifying a curiosity of exploring some of the more awful scenes of nature: the remaining part was to witness a complication of anxieties and adverse occurrences. On his arrival at the *Yökul River*, my servant had unloaded the horses, and

suffered them to go loose among a number of sand hills, overgrown with wild corn ; but, as they had no appetite, hungry as they were, for so coarse a vegetable, and there being no grass in the vicinity, they had quitted the bank of the river, and were in full march for *Reykiahlid*, where they had fed the preceding night. We happily met them before they had got farther than a mile, and, driving them back to the ferry, we found the baggage, but there was no appearance of the servant. He had taken a circuitous route in search of the horses, and might have gone far enough, if the lad had not rode back into the desert and found him. During their absence I took care of the horses, and cast many a wishful look towards the opposite bank of the river, in some measure intimidated by the breadth and impetuosity of the stream that was flowing between, and fully assenting to what I had heard reported, that it was the largest and most dangerous of all the rivers in the north of Iceland. On their return we re-loaded the horses, and with some difficulty forded about one-third of the river ; when, reaching a low sand-bank, my servant and I unloaded the horses again, while the lad, wading the fording-place, went to bring round the boat, which, being filled with baggage, the servant entered, in order to receive the horses on their swimming across. It was no agreeable sight to behold the lad fighting against a current of eight miles an

hour ; to which, however, he was ultimately obliged to give way, and only barely gained the opposite shore considerably below where I stood. After resting a little he returned with the boat, and assisted me in driving the horses into the stream ; and all promised well till they got a little past the middle, when a strong turn of the current drove them round, swept them away past the north end of the sand-bank, and, carrying them back towards the side they had left, they made for it, and, ascending the bank, set off again at full speed into the desert. Fortunately the horse belonging to the guide was fastened to a stone, so that he could not accompany the rest ; and, re-fording the western branch of the river, the lad set out in quest of the horses, while I remained beside the boat and the rest of my baggage. As he was not like to make his appearance after some time had elapsed, I began to feel somewhat uneasy. On the opposite side was my servant, who could render me no manner of assistance, nor could he even hear me, owing to the breadth and roaring of the intervening stream. I was myself placed on a small bank, the highest part of which was not more than a foot above the surface of the water : it began to get dark ; the rain poured down in torrents, and the river was on the increase, from the quantity which had fallen in the course of the day. It is true, I had the small cockle-shell of a boat beside me ; but to think of managing it

against so impetuous a current, was altogether out of the question. Apprehensive, therefore, of danger, and conceiving that the lad might not be able to get the horses back alone, I at last resolved to wade over to his assistance. I chose, as nearly as I could, the place we had forded, which, owing to a gentle declivity, was more shallow than any other; but had nearly paid dear for my temerity, as the water stood almost to my middle, and twice or thrice I felt myself borne a little down, and must inevitably have been carried away, had not the stones at the bottom held my feet, while I inclined with all my strength against the current, till, after a few violent efforts, I succeeded, by the kind providence of God, in reaching the dry land.

Having returned thanks to my Almighty Deliverer, for this fresh instance of his mercy, and emptied my boots of the water that had got into them, I bent my course into the desert; and, after walking about a mile, to my no small joy, met the lad with the horses. We now made again for the sand-bank, and driving them into the river, somewhat higher up, they at length gained the opposite bank, near the place where my servant was waiting; and, while the lad plied at the oar, I had the disagreeable task assigned me of holding the reins of one of the horses, while swimming, which we could not venture with the rest; and which threatened, at times, to overturn the boat with his head. In a minute or two, we were far below the sand-bank;



and, had it not been for my confidence in Divine protection, I must have viewed myself as swept along to a watery grave ; but, “ he that had delivered, did again deliver,” and brought me in safety to the wished-for bank.

It had now become so dark, that we could scarcely see to re-load the horses ; and yet we had six miles of a desert country to explore alone, the guide from *Reykiallid* quitting us at this place. At first we could discover the track from the greater darkness of the sand, but we had not advanced two miles ere it became wholly invisible ; and, after alighting from our horses, and feeling in vain with our hands, we were obliged to commit ourselves to God, and the instinct of one of our horses, as his instrument during the remainder of the way. I had often heard of surprising feats being accomplished by the Icelandic horses ; yet they had more the appearance of the tales of other years than that of sober facts. In my present circumstances, an opportunity presented itself of bringing them to the test of experience. Suffering the steeds to go loose, and placing the oldest first, we were conducted, without a single accident, over heights and hollows, till, all at once, we were stopped in our progress by a steep elevation, the nature of which, with all our groping, we could not possibly ascertain. At last, after crossing and re-crossing it several times, my servant explained the mystery, by exclaiming, “ Ho ! here is a

window !” \* so that, after having rode four miles across an unknown desert, in a night of extreme darkness, we had the great satisfaction to find we had arrived at *Grimstad*, the appointed limit of our journey for that day.

As it was past twelve o'clock, the family were sunk in the most profound sleep ; yet, on being called up, they arose with the greatest alacrity ; and I had scarcely got time to hang up a lamp they had the kindness to lend me, when the landlady and one of her daughters made their appearance in the tent, with a large bason of hot milk, bidding me repeatedly welcome, and tenderly sympathizing with me in my perplexities and troubles. With heartfelt gratitude I prostrated myself before the God of my life ; praised him for the numberless mercies of the day ; and, commending myself, during the remainder of my journey, to his blessing, I laid myself down to rest, in a happier state of mind than I recollected having done for years.

My tent and baggage having been completely soaked with the rain, and the horses tired with the fatigues of the preceding evening, I resolved

\* On relating this anecdote to one of the most respectable public officers in *Reykjavik*, he informed me that, one dark night he was in like manner puzzled by a height that fell in his way ; but applying the whip to his horse, he obliged him to mount it, and did not discover his situation till one of the fore-feet of the animal sunk into a hole, which, on stepping off, he found to be the chimney of a house !

to spend the following day at this place. On the clearing away of the mist, an extensive view of the surrounding country presented itself; but, with the exception of some small huts and grasslands belonging to the farm, the eye wandered in vain in search of houses, or the least appearance of vegetation. The whole formed one vast desert, the gloomy uniformity of which was barely relieved by some snow and ice mountains, and a number of fantastically shaped volcanoes, that crowded into the scene, in almost every direction. Of these, the most remarkable was *Herdubreid*, or the Broad-Shouldered Volcano, so called from the shape of the crater, which is distinctly visible from this place. This mountain forms the meridian day-mark of the *Grimstad* family. Few of the Icelanders being in possession of watches, the only sun-dial they make use of is the natural horizon, which they divide into eight equal points, called day-marks (*dagsmark*), availing themselves of certain peaks or projections of the mountains; or, in the absence of these, they erect pyramids of stones on the corresponding heights. Most of these kinds of pyramids have originally been raised by the first settlers from Norway, and have been held in repair from generation to generation; which circumstance will account for the difference of time between the Icelandic computation, and that in common use with us. Their divisions are as follows:



Designed by August 1868

Designed by August 1868

HERDUBREID AS SEEN FROM MÖDRUDAL.



1. <i>Midnatti</i> , i. e. -	Midnight, - -	about 11 o'clock, P. M.
2. <i>Otta</i> , - -	Morning Vigil, -	— 2 — A. M.
3. <i>Midur-morgun</i> , -	Mid-morning,	} — 5 — —
or	or	
<i>Hirðis-rismál</i> , -	Shepherd's rising hour,	
4. <i>Dagnál</i> , -	Day, - - -	— 8 — —
5. <i>Hádeggi</i> , -	High-day, or Noon,	— 11 — —
6. <i>Non</i> , - -	Nona, - - -	— 2 — P. M.
7. <i>Midur-aptan</i> , -	Mid-evening, -	— 5 — —
8. <i>Nattmál</i> , -	Night, - - -	— 8 — —

In the vicinity of the factories, the marks approximate more to our hours, the natives finding it convenient to accommodate themselves, in this respect, to the usage of foreigners. In the names they give to the days of the week, the Icelanders pretty much resemble the Society of Friends; only they do not make use of the numerals throughout. With us, they call the first day of the week *Sunnudagr*, Sunday; and the second *Má-nadagr*, Monday; but Tuesday they express by *Þriðjudagr*, the third day; Wednesday is *Midvikudagr*, the same as the German *Mittwoche*, mid-week-day; Thursday is called *Fimmtudagr*, the fifth day; Friday, *Föstudagr*, the fast-day; and Saturday, *Laugardagr*, the bathing-day, it being universally the custom of the Scandinavians to frequent the bath on that day.—But to return to *Grimstad*.

The family, fifteen in number, were all busy at hay-making, close to my tent. The farm is held by a widow, who is assisted in the management of it by the brother of the departed, an aged man of about seventy. She has three sons, and seven daughters, all in the bloom and sprightliness of youth. Some were employed in tedding; others

were removing the cocks already dry, and carrying them to the stack ; while two lads were preparing sods for a defence against the rigour of winter.

“ Even stooping age is here ; and infant hands  
Trail the long rake, or, with the fragrant load  
O'ercharged, amid the kind oppression roll.”

I could not help admiring the cheerfulness and content which shone in every countenance ; and I was more than ever convinced of the truth, that happiness is confined to no station, and that the fewer our real wants are, the greater is our enjoyment of life, undisturbed by the long train of cares and anxieties which harass and perplex the votaries of artificial luxury. Uncontaminated by intercourse with polished life, the inhabitants of this obscure farm preserve all the original simplicity of natural habits ; and, ignorant of the cunning and deceit, the perfidy and intrigue, which too often pervade more populous societies, they are unsuspecting, liberal, and kind, in the highest degree. They live at the distance of thirty miles from any neighbouring habitation ; so that they are strangers to the petty feuds and quarrels of vicinage ; and, mustering so strong a force at home, they stand in no need of foreign assistance. Their principal earthly care is the safety and provision of their flocks and herds, on which both their clothing and food depends, as well as the barter of the summer market. To no situation, therefore, could the

sage advice of Solomon more aptly apply: "Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well [to thy herds; for riches are not forever, nor doth the crown endure to every generation. The hay appeareth, and the tender grass sheweth itself, and the herbs of the mountains are gathered. The lambs are for thy clothing, and the goats are the price of thy field. And thou shalt have goats milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and for the maintenance of thy maidens." Proverbs xxvii. 23—27. Their distance from any place of worship is so great, that they can only attend twice in the year, in order to receive the sacrament; and even then they do not repair to the parish church, but to a *Bœnahus*, or house of prayer, situated at a considerable distance in the desert, where two other solitary families meet with the clergyman, for the above-mentioned purpose. They, nevertheless, discover a superior degree of religious information, which is to be ascribed to their being in possession of a copy of the Scriptures, and a number of other good books, which they read every Sabbath in summer, and during a considerable portion of the long evenings in winter.

In the course of my evening walk I fell in with the crowded pen, in which were two girls, employed in milking the sheep. Observing that they were upwards of fifty in number, and that such as had been milked, were soon lost among those that were un milked, I asked how it was possible for them to distinguish the sheep with



so much ease? "O," said they, "we know them all by name;" a reply which at once brought to my recollection, and illustrated that endearing part of the character of the Lord Jesus, "that Great Shepherd of the sheep;"—"and he calleth his own sheep by name." John x. 3.

Leaving *Grimstad* about ten o'clock in the forenoon of the 21st, we soon lost sight of vegetation, and again encountered a desert of stones and sand. In many places there was not the faintest impression of a track. The rocks and stones, which exhibited numerous proofs of their having been exposed to the action, both of fire and water, lay thrown about in the strangest confusion, and the whole scene re-echoed to Isaiah, xxxiv. 11.; "And he shall stretch out upon it the line of confusion, and the stones of emptiness;"\* or Job xxx. 3. "a wilderness desolate and waste."† I compared my situation to that of David, while in the wilderness of Judah. Like him, I was, both in a temporal and spiritual point of view, "in a dry and thirsty land, in which there was no water;" and, though

\* To the mere English reader, the beauty and force of this admirable passage are entirely lost. In the Hebrew there is an evident allusion to Genesis i. 2. where, in the first stage of its creation, this globe is said to have been *tohu va-bohu*, "confusion and emptiness." Therefore, to stretch out upon any place the measuring-line of *tohu*, and the plumbets of *bohu*, was to reduce it to a state of emptiness and confusion, similar to that of the original chaotic mass.

† Heb. *shoah umshoah* שואה ומשאה.

I read and meditated on the Scriptures, alternately, still my heart accorded with his, in longing to enjoy renewed manifestations of the Divine power and glory in the sanctuary.

The day being hot, we were parched with thirst; but it was not till we had been repeatedly deceived by the appearance of vallies and brooks, that, about five o'clock in the afternoon, we came to a small river, where, as there was a little vegetation on its eastern bank, we stopped about half an hour to refresh the horses. Resuming our course, we came, in a short time, to a precipitous descent, which extricated us from the wildness of bleak and desolate mountains, and introduced us into a level country, where there was a good deal of coarse grass, and being studded, in various places, with sheep, it presented a very agreeable relief to the eye. In the course of two hours more, we reached a mountain, which seemed to have been terribly revolutionized by water, the most enormous masses of compact stone being scattered all round its base. Skirting the east side of this mountain, and descending into a fertile valley, we arrived at a farm called *Haukstad*, where I pitched my tent; it being impossible to reach *Hof* in *Vopnafjord*, the place of my destination, that evening.

A little to the east of *Grimstad* is the division between the *Nordlendinga-fiordungr*, and *Austfirðinga-fiordungr*, or the northern and eastern quarters of the island. Here also *Mulè* Syssel begins, which was formerly divided into three

parts, the north, middle, and south divisions, each of which had its own Sysselmand; but the inequality of the division was attended with several inconveniences; and, in the year 1779, the Syssel was divided into two equal parts, and placed under the direction of two Sysselmenn, who divide the labour of collecting the taxes imposed on the whole Syssel. \*

Next morning I proceeded in a south-easterly direction; and, crossing the east end of the mountain opposite to *Haukstad*, I descended into *Hofsádal*, across a number of dangerous bogs, having a stupendous precipice of columnar rocks on my right, till I reached the river, whose northern bank I skirted for some time; and, about one o'clock, arrived at *Hof*, the residence of the very Reverend A. Thorsteinson, Dean of North *Mulè* Syssel. It is situated on an elevation, and commands a noble and extensive prospect. To the right, a long valley stretches into the interior, where it is bounded by very high mountains, covered with snow. In front, are the lofty mountains of *Smörvatn* and *Krossavik*; and to the left is the bay of *Vopnafjord*, on the north side of which lies the trading station of the same name. *Hof* is famous for its having been the seat of a heathen temple, whence the name is still retained; and the door of the church, which is certainly very old, is reported, by a tradition that may be traced upwards of four hundred

\* Olavii Oeconomisk Reise, p. 429.

years back, to be the identical door of the temple. Though the dwelling-house, bears no proportion, at present, to that erected at this place by Broddi Thorisson, at an early period of Icelandic history; \* it is more capacious than any Icelandic house I have seen; and the room into which I was shewn on my arrival, is equal to any in the best mercantile houses. The Dean is a tall, well-looking man of about forty, easy and polite in his manners, and possesses a degree of intelligence and piety greatly superior to any I had yet met with on the island. Having read the letters of introduction which I delivered to him, he expressed, in the liveliest terms, the interest he felt in the circulation of the Sacred Oracles; his joy at the provision that had been made for Iceland; and his gratitude to God, whose kind providence had paved the way for the bestowment of this blessing upon her. Several years ago he had received, for distribution, two hundred copies of the New Testament, published in 1807, but they only went a little way in supplying the want; and he verily believed, that, in the course of a few months, he could dispose of as many thousand copies in his Deanery. The desire of reading the Scriptures, he was happy to say, was universal; but

\* Hann var thá hálfthritugr födmum, oc threttan álna breidr, oc threttan álna hár. "It was then twenty-five fathoms in length, thirteen ells in breadth, and thirteen in height." Landnamabok, p. 385.

hitherto, the means of gratifying it, were very circumscribed, owing to the scarcity of Bibles in this quarter of the island. The parish of Hof contains upwards of four hundred souls; yet there is only one parishioner, upwards of eight years of age, that cannot read, and this individual is prevented by a natural infirmity.

The longer I was in company with the Dean, and the wider scope we gave to the conversation, the more did we coalesce; and, like the disciples of old, "our hearts burned within us," while we talked of the wisdom and goodness displayed in the plan of the divine government; the love of the Son of God, in voluntarily becoming our substitute; the claims he has on our love and obedience in consequence of that substitution; the excellence of his Gospel, and the pleasing prospects of the extension of his moral dominion; which are at present opened to the view of the church. Prevented, by his situation, from obtaining any information, relative to the state of religion in other parts of the world, the accounts I had it in my power to communicate, were as "cold waters to a thirsty soul." The establishment of Bible Societies, in particular, he could not but regard with a kind of reverence, mingled with the most joyful admiration. In the course of the evening, we fixed the mode of supply for the northern division of *Mulè* Syssel; the Dean, engaging to institute an immediate inquiry, relative to the number of the poor, whose circumstances required that copies be given

them gratis; as also, how many wish to purchase copies, either of the Bible, or New Testament; and, on completing the investigation, to write to Copenhagen, by one of the autumn ships, for the quantity needed within his charge. His lady also, together with her sister, the widow of the Sysselmand, who died lately in *Leith*, discovered superior intellectual attainments, and read with avidity the Danish account of the operations of the Bible Society, which I had given to the Dean.

Having made every necessary arrangement at this place, there was no occasion for my proceeding on to the factory of *Vopnafjord*. Its situation, being central, renders it very convenient for the inhabitants of the northern part of the Syssel; yet the harbour is greatly inferior to some others, at no great distance, on the coast. The mountains behind *Vopnafjord*, are very high; and one of them, in particular, is remarkable for its exhibition of *surturbrand*, in combination with basaltine pillars.

## CHAP. V.

*Journey through Mulè Sysseis—Icelandic Psalm-book—Bridge and Basket—Punishment for neglect of Education—Eskifjord—Holmar—Bewildered on Stapsheidè—Mountains of Breiddal—Visit Eydal—Berufjord—Factory of Diupavog—Circulating Libraries—Rich Minerals—Hammarfjord—Starmyra—Lonsheidi—Stafafell—Yökulsá i Lon.*

ON the 23d of August, about noon, I bade adieu to the kind and interesting family at Hof, and set off on the road to *Eskifjord*, accompanied by the Dean, who conducted me across the *Hofsá* and *Sunnudalsá*, two considerable rivers, which are, for the most part, supplied from the snow-mountains, and join a little below this place. Having skirted the south bank of the *Sunnudalsá* for some time, and passed a magnificent cataract, the path turned off to the left, and, leading us across a soft swampy tract, brought us to a very steep and winding ascent, on the east side of the *Fossá*, or Cataract River. We were here obliged to dismount, and lead our horses up the

mountain. As we ascended, I was every moment charmed with the finest cascades, down which a great quantity of water was poured, with resistless fury; and, what tended to heighten their grandeur, was the immense depth at which they lay; the pools by which the most of them were received being upwards of a hundred feet below the brink of the gully along which we passed. In many places the road approached so close to the margin, that there was great danger of the horses missing a foot, and sliding into the abyss.

In the course of two hours we gained the summit of the ascent, and entered on a long dreary mountain-tract, called *Smörvatsheidè*, which presented nothing worthy of notice, except, now and then, a collection of water, and large masses of snow, and a stream of lava, which, lying so high, and being surrounded by so many irregular hills, must have issued from some volcano in the immediate vicinity of the *heidè*. As the mist was pretty close, and it rained heavily, the ride proved very uncomfortable. About seven o'clock, we reached the south end of the *heidè*, from which we had to descend along the side of a precipice, still more steep than that at the north end; and, on reaching the foot, we soon found ourselves surrounded by bogs, which stretched a considerable way south. Continuing still to descend through alternate tracts of stones and morass, we arrived, a little before twilight, at a rich farm, called *Fossvöllum*, or the Cataract Plains, from the noble cataract close behind the



houses. Independent of the contrast formed by the dreariness of the *heidè*, the landscape, at this place, presented one of the most beautiful rural scenes I had met with on my journey. The troubled waters, dashing over a precipice of rugged rocks, both sides of which are lined with verdant meads; the gentle elevations which encircle the plains; the stately appearance of the farm; the extent and verdure of the *tún*, and the number of sheep, cows, and horses, that were feeding in every direction, produced altogether an effect the most lively and pleasing. I pitched my tent at the margin of the river, about half a stone-cast from the cataract, and was soon lulled asleep by the sounds of the struggling stream.

It being late ere the mowers quitted the scythe, I did not see the proprietor (Rusticus Biörnson,) till early the following morning, when he paid me a visit in my tent, and told me he was quite angry with me for not having slept in the house. He possesses a copy of Gudbrand's Bible, together with two copies of the New Testament, published 1807; yet he gave me a commission for a Bible and four New Testaments, which he intended giving as presents to some poor people in his service. Of the new Psalm-book he complained sadly, but the principal argument he used against it was, that "he was an old man, and was fond of old things." For upwards of two hundred years, the only Psalm-book used in the Icelandic church was that known by the name of *Grallarann*, which first appeared in 4to, in the

year 1594, and which, besides a number of antiquated and vulgar expressions, contained passages that were unintelligibly mystical, and others, containing sentiments which must necessarily have offended the ears of such as were accustomed to reflection, and the habitual study of the Scriptures. With a view to the removal of this evil, orders were given, in the year 1784, to the two Bishops, to prepare a better collection; and, about ten years afterwards, on the institution of the Royal Icelandic Society for the advancement of knowledge in the country, the completion of the work was committed to that Society under the direction of the learned Bishop of *Skalholt*. This prelate not only desired such as had attained to some degree of celebrity for poetical talent, but also all who felt so disposed, to send to the Society such psalms, either originals or translations, as they might deem worthy of insertion; and after the Bishop's death, the revision and selection of the psalms came into the hands of Bishop Vidalin, and Chief Justice Stephensen, and a new Psalm-book was published at *Leirárgördum*, 1801, and introduced into the church service, agreeably to an order of the Danish Chancery. On its first appearance, it met with considerable opposition, not only from the peasants, but also from several of the clergy; and there are many parishes in which it has not been received to this day. \*

\* See preface, and Chief Justice Stephensen's "Iceland in the eighteenth century," p. 253.

Indeed, when it is considered, that in modernising the old psalms, they have not merely been purged from obsolete and offensive words, but that the passages celebrating the divinity of the Son of God; the value and all-sufficiency of his atonement; the influences of the Holy Spirit, &c. have either been omitted, or altered so as to give a very cold and partial view of these doctrines, it cannot be matter of surprise with those, who adhere to "the faith once delivered to the saints," to find, that such of the Icelanders as are in the habit of bringing all things in religion to the test of Scripture, prefer the old psalm-book, with all its faults, to one in a high degree favourable to the tenets of Socinianism. An instance is mentioned by Mr. Hooker \*, but I believe it is a solitary one, of *Pope's Universal Prayer* being introduced into the psalmody of an Icelandic church; from which he argues the liberality of sentiment entertained by the party concerned in its introduction. It must be allowed, the combination of "*Jehovah, Jupiter, and Drottinn,*" in an act of professedly Christian worship, was liberality with a witness! Its counterpart is only to be found in the annals of atheism, during the awful period of the Revolution at Paris; and gives us occasion to repeat the apostolic inquiry: "What concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" 2 Corinth. vi. 15, 16.

\* Journal of a Tour in Iceland, vol. I. p. 279.

Having crossed the bogs and a low hill to the south of *Fossvöllum*, I came, in a short time, to *Yökulsá-á-Brú*; another of those mighty rivers which this island pours into the ocean. When the reader is informed, that previous to its reaching this place, it receives an accession of no less than thirty-eight rivers and streamlets, he will be able to form some idea of its size and strength. It is here confined between two perpendicular precipices of solid rock, measuring fifty-two feet across, and sixty-eight from the brink of the rocks to the bottom. The depth of the water is various, depending on the rains, and the melting of the snow; and sometimes its banks are entirely overflowed, as in 1625, when the water rose forty feet above them. At the time I passed, there appeared to be about thirty feet to the surface of the water. Over this channel, a slender wooden bridge is thrown, about five feet in breadth, with ledges, consisting of a few poles which are raised from the beams on either side, and bound together at five different places above, which gives them the appearance of as many doors. Alighting from my horse, I went to the bridge, and, after having looked for a minute or two into the profound chasm, through which the light brown torrent rolled and boiled with the most tremendous fury, I took hold of the ledges, and shook the bridge with the utmost ease. Indeed, its instability is such, that I have no manner of doubt, but a person of powerful muscle could shake the whole structure to pieces in less than a quarter

of an hour. I now walked over, not without impressions of terror, and returning, led my horse over the tottering frame; when my servant and one of the peasant's sons, carried over the baggage, and then led the horses one by one, till all was safe on the opposite side.

Some miles farther up, there is another mode of crossing this river, called by the natives *at fára á Kláfa*, but it is still more terrific. Two rope are suspended from the edge of the precipice on either side, on which a basket or wooden box is hung, sufficiently large to contain a man and an ordinary horse-burthen. Into this box the traveller must descend, and pull himself, by means of a rope, over the yawning abyss; while, owing to the looseness of the main ropes, the box sinks with rapidity till it reaches the middle, and threatens by the sudden stop it there makes, to dislodge its contents into the flood. The principal danger, however, attends the passage of the horses. They are driven into the river a little higher up; and, if they do not swim to a certain point formed by a projection of the rock, they are precipitated over a dreadful cataract, and seen no more. If measures be not soon taken to repair the bridge, which is beginning to rot at the south end, the *Kláfa*, dangerous as it is, will be the only means of conveyance over the Yökul river.

We had not got many yards from the bridge, when one of the baggage-horses had nearly disappeared in a dangerous bog; and, after a few vain

struggles to extricate himself, he began quite coolly to eat the grass within his reach. Having pulled him out, we proceeded over a long marshy tract called *Brúarheidè*, which terminates to the left in the parish of *Tunga*, and is diversified by several lakes, where a considerable number of swans are caught, while they are casting their feathers. About five in the afternoon, we arrived at the northern margin of the *Lagarfliot*, which was covered with fragments of zeolites, crystals, and other minerals; the water itself was white, and, being little short of a mile in breadth, had more the appearance of a lake than a river. Skirting the *Fliot*, till we came to a farm called *Aas*, we were ferried across, the horses being held from the stern of the boat; and, after proceeding about six miles up the south side, we came to *Finnstad*, where I pitched my tent for the night.

The whole of the tract on both sides of the *Lagarfliot* is closely inhabited, and is considered to be one of the best districts in Iceland. It goes by the general name of the *Herred*, and contains ten parishes. The pasturage is uncommonly rich, the meadows extensive, the mountains abound in *Fiallagrös*, or lichen *Islandicus*, which the inhabitants collect during the summer, and lay up in store for winter-provision; and the numerous forests of birch that grow here, yield them many conveniencies, of which other districts are entirely destitute. Add to which, the fine fishery on the *Lagarfliot*, as well as the

ease with which they can row out to the salt-water fishery, and it will appear, that the praises which have been lavished upon it, have not been altogether without foundation. At the upper end of the *Fliot*, in the tract called *Fliotsdal*, lies *Skrida Priory*, which was founded by Bishop Stephen, about the beginning of the sixteenth century.

The 25th, being rainy, I was confined the most of the day to my tent. At first I indulged the hope of being able to turn my detention to some advantage, by mixing with the family, and obtaining a closer view of the native manners and customs; but, to my no small disappointment, I soon found, that the character they exhibited was in perfect contrast with any I had hitherto observed in Iceland, and that if I were to form a judgment of its inhabitants in general, from the specimen I now had before me, the sentence I should pronounce upon them would not be more unfavourable than unjust. Sloth, swearing, and slander, appeared to be their predominant habits. Happening to mention these circumstances afterwards to a person who knew the family, he sincerely regretted that I should have fallen into such bad hands; confirmed me in the opinion I had formed of them; and communicated the following additional information. About four months ago their conduct had become so intolerable, that it was found necessary to summon them before the Sysselman's court; when, on investigation, it appeared that the

wickedness of the children had not only prompted them to compose what the Icelanders call *Nidingavisar*, or infamous satirical songs, on the priest, and almost every person in the parish, but had assisted others in the composition of similar songs on their own parents. They were sentenced to be beaten with rods at home by the constable of the parish, and to stand public penance in the church, as a warning to the congregation. Nor were the parents allowed to pass with impunity. The bad conduct of the children was in a great measure to be ascribed to a neglected education, and the influence of evil example on their part; they were accordingly sentenced to pay a fine of sixty-eight rix-dollars, of which forty-eight was to go to the poor, and the remainder to defray the costs of the suit.

This day I experienced an inconvenience which I never felt before in my life—the total exhaustion of my stock of bread; and though I had some other articles of provision with me, I was keenly sensible of the privation.

The morning of the 26th being clear and serene, I struck my tent at an early hour, and proceeded on the road to *Eskifjord*. On the right the *Lagarfliot* stretched into the interior, lined on both sides with beautiful woods; on the left rose four very high mountains, the relative situation of which seemed to form a perfect square, while the prospect was bounded in the distance by *Sniáfjall*, a conic-shaped snow-moun-



tain, and ancient volcano of immense size, whose glittering coat was finely contrasted by the blackness of the inferior hills. As the path appeared to be well-beaten, I left my servant to come with the baggage at his leisure, and made the best of my way alone. I had not got far, however, when I was met by a peasant; who, perceiving I was a stranger, detained me with a great number of curious questions, which forcibly brought to my mind our Lord's injunction, "Salute no man by the way," Luke x. 4. Passing through a forest of birch trees, some of which might be about twenty feet high, I plunged into a deep valley, where I found the heat of the sun very oppressive; till, turning into another valley to the left, I proceeded up the sunless and snow-clad side of a high beetling mountain, and fully appreciated the worth of "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land," Isaiah xxxii. 2. The name of this tract is *Eskifjords-heidè*; a mountain-road of considerable difficulty, owing to the bogs and deeply indented gulleys which alternately throw themselves in the way of the traveller; add to which, the very steep and stony ascent from the valley below. Just before you gain the summit of the pass, which is very narrow, you would suppose that a descent of a similar nature awaited you on the other side; whereas you are introduced, all at once, into a vast amphitheatre, several miles in circumference, the floor of which consists of immense fragments of broken rock, and streams of very

ancient lava, which appear to have run through it in several directions. The continuation of the mountains round both sides of this amphitheatre is august and noble ; but, what particularly attracts your attention, is the uncommon structure of the mountains to the right. Rising into pyramids, their sides discover numerous strata piled one above another ; while four large excavations, forming perfect semicircles, run a considerable way into the body of the ridge, resembling, to compare great things with small, the niches left for images in the walls of ancient buildings. To the left lay a great quantity of snow, sheltered on the north and east, and completely exposed to the sun.

While scrambling among the stones my horse fell under me, and threw me forward into a very dangerous situation, had he risen immediately ; but the sagacious animal did not make the least motion till he found I had extricated myself from the stirrups, when he arose with the utmost composure, as if nothing had happened. Considering the rugged aspect of the place, I was struck with the narrow escape I had made, and felt an additional call for the exercise of the most lively gratitude to that gracious Being, by whose protecting care I rose from such a fall uninjured. Under this impression I was inspired with fresh courage, and a more determined resolution to meet without dismay the still greater dangers which I knew were yet before me.

After a very rough ride, of nearly two hours, I arrived at the south-east side of the amphitheatre, when the *Reydar* and *Eski Fiords* opened on my view, bounded on either side by exceedingly high mountains. The prospect, though confined in point of breadth, was very magnificent. On the north side of the *Eskifiord* I could descry the factory of the same name, together with a vessel that lay in the bay; yet, being nearly 2000 feet below me, they had a very diminutive appearance. The situation of the factory is very romantic. A long range of high mountains, which takes its rise on the *Heidè*, runs close behind the houses; and, being broken in several places, numerous cascades are poured over the precipices, and present a very fine spectacle. The pride of *Eskifiord*, however, is the prodigious mountain called *Holmasfall*, which, though on the opposite side of the bay, appears almost directly over head:

“ Irregularly huge, august, and high,  
 Mass piled on mass, and rock on ponderous rock,  
 In Alpine majesty;—its lofty brows  
 Sometimes dark frowning, and anon serene,  
 Wrapt now in clouds invisible, and now  
 Glowing with golden sun-shine.”

I was here kindly received by the Sysselmand, Mr. Vidalin, who is brother to the Bishop, and has perhaps travelled more than any other Icelander of modern times, having made several

voyages to the East Indies and other distant parts. He not only surrendered to me his room and bed, but pressed me to mention any thing I wanted, as all he had was at my service. On entering his room, I was happy to recognise a large quantity of Bibles and New Testaments which I had sent to this place. These he had unpacked, and arranged in the best order, but had not ventured to dispose of any till my arrival. I soon explained my plan to him; and I had the pleasure, before leaving the place, to witness the commencement of their distribution. The people had no sooner heard of their arrival, than they manifested, as in other places, the utmost desire of obtaining copies.

There were formerly three mercantile houses at this place, but at present there are only two, belonging to Messrs. Isfiord and Wolff of Copenhagen, whose factors, as well as Captain Ipsen, the master of the vessel lying in the bay, shewed me every possible attention.

On the 27th I made a short excursion down the north side of the bay, for the purpose of examining some of the "miny caverns," with which this part of Iceland abounds; when I had an opportunity of collecting some fine mineralogical specimens, and contemplating the infinite wisdom of God in the beauty displayed in the exquisite groups of crystals which presented themselves to the view in every direction. The shores were strewed with valuable chalcedonies, and fragments of white marble; and at one

place, not far from the factory, I observed a vein of a black semilucid substance, which had much the appearance of coal. Narrow ridges of horizontal trap also protuberate in various places.

The following morning I set off for *Holmar* church, accompanied by the Sysselmand and one of the factors. Having turned the bay, we proceeded up the east side of *Holmafjall*, which we passed a little below the huge beds of columnar rock that form its base, and then descended to *Holmar*, where we arrived just as the service was going to commence. The subject of discourse was, "Christ's life on earth, a life of benevolence and usefulness." From the clergyman, Sira Guttorm Paulson, I met with the most cordial reception, and the rest of the day was spent in conversation about the interpretation of Scripture, the state of the Icelandic translations, and the wants of the people in a religious point of view. Sira G. has spent some time at the university of Copenhagen, and possesses a superior acquaintance with the Greek language. In him the Bible cause has a warm friend; and much may be expected from his active exertions in the sphere in which he is placed.

Owing to the interesting conversation and distinguished hospitality of Sira Guttorm, I found it impossible to leave *Holmar* before noon on the 29th. Indeed, it was with deep regret that I had it not in my power to spend longer time at the different places where I halted, but the advanced state of the season required the

utmost possible expedition. Having conducted me to the end of the *Reydar bay*, and given my servant proper directions respecting the road, Sira G. bade me an affectionate adieu, when I pursued my course towards the mountains. All along the east coast the mountains tower to a great height, and consist of numerous horizontal strata, which appear exactly facing each other, at such places as have been subject to disruptions, and evidently dip as they recede from the sea.

From the end of the valley we passed up the side of a winding gulley; and, in the course of two hours, came to a spot where there was a little vegetation; leaving which, we proceeded down a rapid descent, and, following the course of a torrent, which was precipitated over the rocks to our left, we entered *Skriddal*, an extensive valley, which runs in a north-westerly direction, and opens into the *Herred*. We now turned to the left, and after having, with much difficulty, reached the upper end of the valley, we came to a mountainous tract, called *Stapsheidé*, the ascent of which we found very laborious, as it lay up the front of a narrow protuberance in the mountain, and was so excessively steep that we were obliged to lead our horses; and even then we could only gain the summit by nearly a hundred turns and windings, and stopping several times for a respite both to ourselves and the horses.

The *heidé* itself consisted of alternate tracts of snow, stones, and bogs; and ere we could reach the further end, we were completely benighted, and exposed to great danger from the softness of the morass in which we got bewildered. Keeping as near as we could to the margin of a mountain-torrent on our right, we proceeded southwards, till a barrier was thrown in our way by a deep gulley, which came down from the mountains on the left, when, advancing to the point of the angle in which the two torrents met, we descended by a narrow and precipitous tract that led us into the river; but, after having, with great difficulty, crossed the water, we had the disappointment to find that the banks were so soft and steep that there was no possibility of climbing them. As my servant had rather a weak sight, I had to proceed down the deep channel in search of a place where we could extricate ourselves. Leading my horse, and wading the river repeatedly, every moment apprehensive of quicksands and cataracts, my only consolation arose from the Divine promise, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not. I will lead them in paths that they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight." Isaiah xlii. 16. At the distance of nearly a quarter of a mile, I got my horse upon the right bank; and returning up the river to my servant, assisted him with the baggage-horses,

which, after a great deal of trouble, we ultimately succeeded in drawing up out of the dark abyss. Though the tract felt rather marshy, yet, as there was grass for the horses, I determined to stop in it all night, a step I was the more induced to take, on account of the miry pits which we had reason to dread lay directly before us.

Having pitched my tent on the driest spot I could select, I sat down at the door, and spreading my frugal meal on my knees, while the servant brought me a draught of water from the stream, I began, with a whettened appetite, to partake of the bounty of Providence. A sense of divine preservation pervaded my mind; I reflected on my unworthiness of the least of God's mercies; the hair-breadth escapes I had experienced in my past life came under review; and, while I drew a parallel between myself, and thousands of my fellow-creatures, who would esteem themselves happy to be in my circumstances, I was conscious of the soothing emotions of peace and content. As I was musing on these things, a number of wild fantastic crags began to raise their pointed heads above the general gloom in which the waste was involved; and soon after, the moon appeared in the clouded east, and, shooting a few feeble rays across the intervening mountains, afforded me a partial view of the seat of silence and desolation in which my lot for the night was cast.



Next morning, about ten o'clock, I lifted my tent, and pursued my journey to *Eydal*. The way lay now on the right and now on the left side of the river; and, as I passed along, I was struck with the appearance of fine chalcedonies, that were almost as numerous as "the stones of the brooks," among which they were scattered. Proceeding into *Breiddal*, I could not but admire the antic and singularly diversified shapes of the mountains on both sides, which continued to vary as I changed my position; and sometimes resembled the gables of houses, sometimes churches, castles, &c. but the prevailing appearance was that of lofty turrets and spires. Those at some distance, to the south, which divided *Breiddal* from *Berufjord*, were peculiarly striking. One of them so exactly resembled Edinburgh Castle, as seen from the north, that I almost fancied I saw it in the panorama. The name of this strangely peaked mountain is *Smá-tindufjall*. Its appearance, from the south side of *Berufjord*, is nearly similar. A little to the left, the peaks of another mountain exhibited a striking likeness of St. Paul's.

At five in the afternoon, I arrived at *Eydal*, where Sira B. Eisleon, the Dean of South *Mulê* Syssel resides. He was not at home himself, but I was made welcome by his lady, and the sister of the Landfoged in *Reykiavik*, with whom I carried on a long conversation, chiefly relating to the external situation of the Icelanders, and the nature of true happiness. The determined

manner in which I spoke of the necessity of internal religion : a religion in which the heart is interested, and which consists in active love to God and man, soon convinced them that I was a friend to the doctrines of Scripture, and that I had not imbibed the principles of scepticism, which, they assured me, abounded in and about *Reykjavik*. The discourse then turned on the folly and the lamentable consequences of what is most improperly called free-thinking ; and it afforded me great pleasure, to find so much sound sense and intelligence among Icelandic females. The Dean came home in the evening ; and, after reading the letters I delivered him, he declared he was no less surprised than pleased, at the agreeable news I had brought him. He repeatedly assured me, that his Deanery was in the greatest want of the Scriptures ; and that the present supply could be viewed in no other light, than that of the manna which came down from Heaven. In his own parish are upwards of two hundred persons who can read ; yet he did not believe there were more than twelve families that possessed a Bible, and but few were in possession of the New Testament.

On the morning of the 31st, I pursued my course along the coast. Having crossed *Breid-dalsá*, the road ran along the bottom of the most threatening cliffs ; and being, in a great measure, defaced by the fragments which have been dislodged upon it, the horses had to proceed slowly, and with great caution. The striking

change of scenery I found very agreeable. I had now an unlimited view of the blue face of the ocean. Its billows were dashing with tumultuous rage against the rocks below me, while I had, on the right, a lofty wall of rugged and precipitous crags, the summits of which were partially involved in mist, and bectled over the road in a tremendous manner.

About the middle of this rocky tract, a grand four-sided pyramid rises to an amazing height above the neighbouring cliffs, and exposes fairly to view the numerous horizontal strata of which it is composed. Beyond this, the land between the cliffs and the sea continues to open; and jutting out towards the south, where it is known by the name of *Beruness*, it is occupied by several rich farms, the owners of which are enabled, by their situation, to add the riches of the sea to the produce of the earth. On my arrival at the northern shore of the *Beruford*, I hired a boat, to take me and the luggage across the bay, while my servant went round with the horses. By this means, I saved not less than fourteen miles travelling; and the expedient at the same time afforded my horses considerable relief. The width of the bay may here be about seven or eight miles.

At six o'clock in the evening, I landed at the factory of *Diupavog*, the most southerly harbour on the east coast. It consists only of one mercantile house, a *kram-bod*, or shop, and some warehouses; but they are all of a supe-

rior kind, both in point of size, and the taste with which they are erected. They are situated at the end of a narrow, but deep bay, which runs up from the *Berufjord*, and forms one of the safest harbours on the island. The trade, which is in the hands of Mr. Busch of Copenhagen, and is managed by his factor, Mr. Stephensen, is very considerable; the port being frequented, not only by those who inhabit *Mulê* Syssel, to the south of *Stapsheidé*, but also by the inhabitants of east *Skaftafell's* Syssel. For the same reason it possessed great local importance relative to the object of my mission; and I was happy to learn, that Mr. Stephensen's literary and patriotic habits, would naturally induce him to give the cause in which I was engaged his cordial approbation and strenuous support.

This gentleman, to my no small concern, happened to be absent; but Madame Stephensen, whose father is a Norwegian clergyman, received and treated me in the kindest and most hospitable manner. I had a large room assigned me for my lodging, in which I was surprised to find a pretty voluminous circulating library, which the zeal of the proprietor has prompted him to establish, for the accommodation of such as may wish to cultivate different branches of science. Similar establishments, in different parts of Iceland, would be attended with unspeakable advantages; only care ought to be taken to exclude all books that have the most distant tendency to encourage vice, or disseminate the prin-

ciples of irreligion, as they never fail to superinduce a train of vicious and immoral consequences. About the year 1790, a reading society was instituted in the south, by the Archdeacon Magnussen, which continued to flourish till the close of the century, when it almost expired, and has never since been revived. Another was established in 1792, in the north country, under the direction of the Amtmand. The books belonging to the *Reykjavik* Society, which was instituted by the Danish merchants, are also allowed to enjoy a period of rest; which, however, is the less to be regretted, as most of them are reported to be of a poisonous and demoralizing tendency.

The following day, after having written a letter to Mr. Stephensen, explanatory of the mode in which I wished the copies of the Scriptures that had arrived at this harbour to be disposed of, as my horses had not yet come round the bay, I made a short excursion along the southern shore of the *Berufjord*, accompanied by Jonathan, Mr. Stephensen's assistant, who is a native of the West Indies, and has spent several years at this place. At the distance of about three miles from the factory, we came to a long irregular range of cliffs, where "the shore, eat into caverns by the restless wave," exposed "the place of stones," and disclosed to the ravished eye some of the most unparalleled beauties of the mineral kingdom. In the hard rock were numerous and widely diversified crystallizations

of quartz ; but what particularly attracted my attention, was the zeolite, or star-stone, so called from the beautiful shining rays of crystal, which all diverge from a common centre, and terminate in a pyramidal form. It was imbedded in argillaceous earth, and on this account is easily dug out ; but was so exceedingly brittle of itself, that it could hardly bear the removal of the clay. Of this mineral I met with many beautiful varieties. Some of these stars contain four-sided rays, or bars, of crystal, nearly as fine as hairs, and not more than a quarter of an inch from the centre to the circumference : others consist of bars, near a quarter of an inch in thickness, and three or four inches in length ; while others are found in the shape of a goose's egg, but twice as large, which, on being broken, present a flat surface, consisting, at the one end, of a white, and white-bluish substance, resembling cornelian, and, at the other, of beautiful bars of white crystal, that lie close together, like pillars in a bed of basalt. These last are covered with a thin coat, of a light green colour, in which, in various places, small prominences appear, consisting of a greenish loose-grained substance. At the same place I found some small light stones, externally of the same colour, but, on being broken, they discovered a beautiful shining substance, which I take to be calcareous spar. Chalcedonies and red jasper also abound in the neighbourhood ; and, though most of the European cabinets have been stocked with specimens from this place, in the

selection of which the greatest waste has been made, it still contains inexhaustible treasures, and would richly repay the toils of the naturalist who spent a summer here in mineralogical researches.

As I surveyed this museum of natural curiosities, and reflected that little more than half a century has elapsed since the zeolite attracted the attention of naturalists, when they were sadly puzzled in endeavouring to account for its formation, I could not but adore Him whose all-skilful hand has given to the particles of matter the admirable order and regularity displayed in the composition of the minerals before me—whose workmanship infinitely transcends the proudest efforts of human genius, and baffles the most profound researches of inquisitive man.

At the distance of about six miles from the extremity of *Bulandsness*, which here juts out into the sea between *Berufjord* and *Hamarsfjord*, lie a number of islands, the largest of which is called *Papey*, and is supposed to derive its name from its having been inhabited by Christian fishermen from Ireland, or the western islands of Scotland, previous to the occupation of Iceland by the Norwegians. \* It was formerly famous for its eider-down, yielding nearly a thousand pounds weight annually; but the ducks are said to have been frightened away from this and the neighbouring islands by the firing of cannon from the

\* Landnámabok, p. 2.

English men-of-war, that lay here in order to protect the fishery.

The 2d of September, I left the factory of *Diupavog*, and, after passing a number of columnar rocks which line the base of the high mountain called *Bulands-tinde*, I proceeded along the precipitous sides of a number of high and steep mountains, that overhang the northern shore of *Hamarsfiord*. A little within the debris of red sand stone, which here appears conspicuously among the other component parts of the precipices, I came to a high mound of small stones and rubbish that has visibly been raised by the hand of man, and seems destined to mark to future generations the ultimate abode of some son of mortality. It being low water, I crossed the bay nearly three miles below its termination, in which direction, I could descry the summit of one of the east country' *Yökuls* beetling over the inhabited tracts at its base. The road now lay round the ness, which divides the bays of *Hamarsfiord* and *Alptafiord*, and consists, for the most part, of a ridge of immensely high mountains, whose sides present a striking horizontal stratification. The parish of Hof lies along the extremity of the last mentioned bay, and consists principally of two deep vallies, which are terminated by the *Yökul*, and have had their meadow grounds greatly damaged by inundations of the rivers. Passing into a stony tract called *Tunga*, which bears pretty evident marks of its having been subjected to the convulsive



effects of volcanic fury, I came, about eight in the evening, to a farm, the name of which is *Starmyra*, where I pitched my tent for the night. From this place, the coast runs a considerable way south, when, turning towards the west, it forms the *Auster Horn*, or East Foreland, which from its situation and prominent appearance, is well known to the mariners who navigate these seas. The church of *Thvottá* lies at no great distance, beyond which runs the river of the same name, in whose profluent stream Sidu-Hallr and his family were baptized by Thangbrandt, two years before the Christian religion was publicly received in Iceland.

From *Starmyra* I struck off towards the right, and, in the course of half an hour, entered *Lonsheide* a rugged and dreary region, which is chiefly remarkable for its being the boundary between *Mule* and *Skastafél* Syssels, its having always proved a barrier to the contagion of infectious diseases; and its being almost perpetually enveloped in mist. Having descended by the side of a deep gulley, I came to a river which I skirted for some time, till I found myself shut in between two steep precipices that were separated from each other by the gulley through which the river was poured over successive cataracts at my feet. At first sight, the pass appeared absolutely insuperable; but, following the track, I came to a place which I can only describe by comparing it to a huge staircase; a number of rough steps having been formed by clearing

away some of the stones, the ascent of which proved very fatiguing to the horses, as they had always to leap up from one standing-place to another, till they reached the summit. Though the ascent now got easier, it continued for a long time; and just as we gained the elevation of the *heide*, we were surprised by a tremendous chasm into which a large sheet of water is poured, so as to form a magnificent cascade, The fog being very dense, I could not see to a greater depth than ten or twelve yards, but I was told by the clergyman of the next parish, that the cascade is not less than seventy fathoms of perpendicular height.

The closeness of the mist, and the heavy rain that was blown, by a boisterous wind, directly in my face the whole time I was in the desert, rendered the ride very uncomfortable; yet comparing with the few hours of bad weather I had now to endure, the weeks of sunshine which I had enjoyed since setting out on my journey, I found that instead of repining, I had the greatest cause to be resigned and thankful. On descending into the lower regions, we got into a clearer atmosphere, and proceeded across a long plain of sand and small stones, which have been washed down from the neighbouring *Yökuls*. We had the sea on the left, and at a short distance, to the right, a range of large mountains, covered almost to the very base with mist. About four o'clock in the afternoon, we arrived at the parsonage of *Stafafell*, where I pitched my

tent, resolving to spend the Lord's day at that place. Its occupant, Sira Berg Magnussen, the Dean of East *Skaftafell* Syssel, was down at the sea on my arrival, but, having been sent for, he soon made his appearance, and I found in him one of the most animated and courteous Icelanders I had seen. He possesses no inconsiderable degree of intelligence; and speaks Danish with a facility that is rarely to be met with at a distance from the factories. He had been apprised of the new edition of the Scriptures, and waited with impatient anxiety for the arrival of copies in his district. In the parish of *Stafafell* are upwards of twenty families, yet there were only six Bibles among the whole; and Sira Berg himself had been endeavouring to procure a copy, for his own use, these *seventeen* years past; but had, at last, given up all hope of ever obtaining the treasure. His joy on receiving a copy from me was very great; and previous to my departure, he wrote a circular letter to his clergy, desiring them to institute an immediate inquiry into the wants of their respective parishes.

The whole of this tract is called the *Lon*, from the stillness of the water within the sand-reef, which girds the coast at some distance from the shore. *Stafafell* possesses a large and beautiful tûn, and is situated at the foot of a low circular mountain, which has formerly been covered with trees; and, from that circumstance, obtained the name of the *Staff*, or Tree Moun-

tain. On the west side of the parsonage is a low plain, nearly two miles in breadth, through which a formidable river, called *Yökulsá-i-Lon*, is poured from the *Lons-Yökul*, a large ice mountain in the vicinity. It frequently happens, in the spring, and late in the summer, that this river swells to such a degree, that the whole plain is inundated, and nothing appears between the mountains, on both sides, but one vast sheet of water. What renders it peculiarly dangerous to ford, is the frequency with which it changes its course, and the extreme softness of the bottom; owing to the immense quantities of clay and small stones which it brings along with it from the mountain. The worst, however, is, when vast floating fragments of ice are borne down by its fury. It then requires the greatest adroitness to steer the horse between them. Sometimes they are so numerous, and follow each other in such close succession, that the river cannot be forded at all on horseback; it being impossible to turn the horse, with the agility requisite, in order to elude them. The passenger is then obliged to wade, at the risk of his life. Sira Berg informed me, that being once called to visit a dying parishioner, he went over in this way, though, at times, the water took him up to the breast. He had provided himself with a long pole, in order to examine the ground at every step; while he had to look around him, with the utmost alertness, lest fresh masses of ice should overtake him, bear him down before

them, and, forcing him upon other pieces, cut him asunder.

The Lord's day being rainy, and the river having swoln considerably, there was no public service; as most of the people belonging to the parish of *Stafafell* live on the opposite side of the river, or at a considerable distance from the church. I spent most of the day in my tent, and while I read and meditated on select portions of the Bible, the hours passed rapidly and delightfully away.

## CHAP. VI.

*Yokulsá-i-Lon — West Foreland — Magnificent Prospect — Beautiful Basaltic Pillars — Ice Mountains of Myrar and Heinaberg — Basalts — Fellshverfi — Description of Breidamark Yökul, or Moving Ice-Field — Hypothesis respecting its formation, and change of position — Dangerous Yökul River — Örafsa Yökul and Volcano — Volcanic Eruption of 1727 described — Skaftafell — Topographical View — Moving Ice Mountain of Skeiderá — Passage of the Skeiderá — Promontory of Lomagnupr — Fliotshverfi.*

As the rain continued unabatingly till about ten o'clock in the forenoon of the 5th, the *Yökulsá* had increased to such a degree, that Sira Berg did not think it advisable for me to attempt fording it. In the afternoon, however, as we apprehended more rain the following night, and the water had somewhat subsided, I struck my tent, and proceeded on my journey, accompanied by two men from the parsonage, who undertook to conduct me across. As I approached the river, it wore a very formidable appearance, covering almost the whole of the plain between *Stafafell*

and the mountains in the vicinity of *Vestr-Horn*. Not being fordable at the usual place, we had to enter it higher up, where the branches were about thirty in number, some of which took our horses near the middle, and two of them were upwards of a hundred yards in breadth. The *Laxá*, which we had also to ford a little above its confluence with the *Yökulsá*, was still deeper ; but we passed it without much difficulty, its water being clear, whereas that of the *Yökulsá* is white and muddy.

Having reached the base of the mountains, which are covered with debris more than half way up, I skirted it some time, till, crossing the valley, which leads up to a mountain-pass called *Almannaskard*, I came to *Fjördr*, a farm close behind *Vestr Horn*, where I had my tent pitched at a short distance from the house. The *Horn*, or *West Foreland*, consists of three mountains ; the lowest and most easterly of which, appears to have been split into three parts, and presents a very singular appearance, the divisions being all pointed at the summit, and the two on the sides inclining towards the higher one which stands between them.

Early on the morning of the 6th I proceeded up *Almannaskard*, on reaching the extremity of which, a prospect burst upon my view, the most novel, magnificent, and unbounded that I ever beheld. At my feet lay a stupendous precipice, whose base is washed by the sea, and which is certainly not less than nine hundred feet of near-

ly perpendicular height. The ocean, bounded only by the distant horizon, expanded towards the left. The *Hornaflíot* appeared on the right; the eastern margin of which is beautifully ornamented with the farms constituting the parish of *Biarnaness*; beyond which, as far as the eye could sweep, nothing was seen but one vast chain of Yökuls, or ice mountains, stretching back into the deserts in the interior, and terminating towards the west in the majestic *Öræfa-Yökul*, the highest mountain on the island. The sparkling rays of the meridian sun, reflected from the marble snow with which the upper regions of the Yökuls are covered, the vivid green crust which forms their base, and the blue waves of the ocean, had a most exhilarating effect; and the whole of the scenery was calculated to produce in the mind the noblest and most sublime emotions. How vast and glorious are the works of God! How they reflect the splendour, majesty, and unlimited perfection of their Maker! But if such be the grandeur and beauty of creation; if the eye be dazzled with its lustre, and the most capacious mind be unable to grasp its immensity; how infinitely more excellent and glorious must *He* be, to whose all-creative word they owe their existence; who dwells in light inaccessible; and before whom “the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance!”

Having stopped some time in order to contemplate the sublimity of this spectacle, I ap-



proached the east side of the pass, and proceeded down a very precipitous descent, the bottom of which I reached with extreme difficulty, as every step I took set the fragments of the rock in motion, and it required the utmost agility to avoid being rolled along with them into the hollow. The traveller is also here exposed to immense disruptions from the face of a rugged mountain, which overhangs the descent at the height of at least eleven hundred feet. Several of these had fallen apparently only a few days before I passed, and, not having been cleared away from the road, considerably impeded my progress. The mountains in this quarter wear a whitish appearance, and consist for the most part of thin slate stone, and a porous kind of basalt, the beds of which are distinguishable, in various places, by the regularity of their perpendicular columns. As the *Hornafliot*, a Yökul river nearly two miles in breadth, appeared to be much swelled by the late rains, I rode up to a rich farm called *Arnaness*, the proprietor of which is an intelligent and judicious man, in order to request his guidance, when I met with a friendly reception, and, ere leaving the place, I was obliged to *borda*, i. e. dine with him, which I did on a most delicious dish of salmon-trout that had just been taken in the river. Being unfordable at the usual place, the farmer sent his son about four miles farther up with me to his brother, who is Hrepstiori, from whom I got a man to conduct me across. Proceeding within a little of the

*Höfsfell* and *Svinafell Yökuls*, and fording the rivers which they pour forth previous to their junction in the *Fliot*, I got over with the utmost ease.

From the west side of the water, to a farm named *Raudaberg*, where I pitched my tent, a distance of about three miles, the road lay through immense masses of variously situated columnar rocks, some of which appeared to have been thrown down from the adjoining mountains, and others were standing in their original beds. At one place especially, I almost fancied myself amid the ruins of some of the noblest structures of ancient Grecian architecture. The pillars were piled one above another with the most perfect exactness, and arranged so as to form an entire semicircle. They stand quite perpendicular; some of the divisions may be about four feet in length, but in general they appeared to be from two to three feet. The most of them were six-sided; a considerable number had five, and some seven sides. Finding that such fragments as had been thrown down were mostly all concave at the one end, and convex at the other, I was anxious to ascertain their original position, and climbed up amongst the broken pillars, when I discovered that they were all concave at the upper end; and the excavation appeared to be more or less hollowed according to the convexity of the lower end of the joint that had stood upon it.

As I stood and admired the regularity and perfection of this natural colonnade, and the exactness with which the angles of the pillars were formed, my servant alighted from his horse, and, coming up to me, declared that the place was visibly the work of art, but that it was too stupendous to be the effect of human art. Such vast natural structures the natives call *Tröllahlad*, or "Giant's Wall;" the cavities found in ranges of smaller basalt are termed *Dvergakamrar*, or "Chambers of the Dwarfs;" and when they would describe any workmanship as particularly artificial, they give it the name of *Dvergasmidi*: all which proves, that, like the unenlightened of other countries, they have been accustomed to view such uncommon appearances as the production of certain intelligences superior to man. What cause have we to bless God for the light of science! While it annihilates the imaginary beings of superstitious invention, introduces us into the more secret recesses of the great cabinet of nature, and presents us with ever fresh discoveries of the wisdom, the power, and the greatness of her divine Creator. "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches. The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein," Psalm civ. 24. cxi. 2.

On approaching the farm, I found it surrounded by a natural fortification of basaltine pillars, which I had to skirt for some time, till

reaching a lower part of the circular range, which serves for a gate, I ultimately succeeded in gaining admittance. The people shewed a kind and obliging disposition, and seemed wonderfully pleased with a copy of the New Testament which I gave them, there not being any in the vicinity.

As the weather continued fine the following day, I advanced as far as *Reinavellir*, which lies at the eastern termination of *Breidamark-Yökul*, and about thirty-six miles from my former station. The first part of the road lay across alternate tracts of bogs and sand, at the distance of a quarter of a mile from the margin of the *Myrar* and *Heinaberg Yökuls*, which are only branches of the immense *Klofa Yökul*, a central chain of snow and ice mountains in the interior, connecting the numerous *Yökuls* that project towards the eastern coast of Iceland, and occupying a space of not less than three thousand square miles. In regard to form, they are considerably high and narrow behind where they leave the main mass, but run forward, sloping and spreading as they advance, till they reach the plain, which they line to the distance of ten or twelve miles, presenting a margin of from twenty to fifty feet high. Their curvated appearance, and their inclination round the barren peaks which they embosom, suggest the idea of a vast fluid body having moved forward into the plain, and congealed in the attitude they now present. In the upper regions, they

appear to consist of the purest virgin snow; about the middle, they become blackish, owing, I suppose, to the admixture of sand and dust from the adjacent mountains; and a considerable way around the edge they assume a beautiful green tint, which, reflecting the beams of the sun, produces the most brilliant effect.

Besides several inferior streams, these Yökuls pour into the ocean three large rivers called *Holmsá*, *Heinabergs-vötn* and *Kolgrimará*, none of which, however, we found any great difficulty in passing except the first, which we had to attempt at different places ere we could get over. It is pretty deep, and is so completely filled with quicksands, that the horses run the risk of sinking at almost every step, while the rapidity of the current greatly increases the danger. The *Heinaberg* discharges much more water, but, being more spread, it is not so deep, and runs through a more consolidated soil. The whole of this plain has formerly been well inhabited, but has been so dreadfully inundated by floods from the Yökuls, that the only farm now remaining is that of *Heinaberg*, which, at some distance, you would suppose actually situated in the midst of the ice.

Turning the end of a strangely rugged mountain, called *Hreggs-gerdismula*, and consisting, for the most part, of tuffa, in which were numerous holes of an immense size, presenting the atmosphere above; a most beautiful group of small basaltic pillars caught my eye, at the

height of about seven hundred feet, in the face of an adjoining mountain. They had the appearance of so many bars of iron, bundled together at the top, but bulging out about the middle, from which, to the foot, they assumed a perfectly perpendicular position. The fragments that were scattered along the base of the mountain, were mostly all heptagonal. Beyond this, I obtained, at times, a distant view of the Yökul, till, passing several mountains diversified in shape, but all horizontally stratified, the vallies between which are tolerably well inhabited, I arrived at the plain before *Kálfafell*, when I was surprised by the prospect of a magnificent glacier, called *Kálfafells-Yökul*, which all at once falls with a rapid descent into the valley, and appears almost completely green. It would hardly be supposed that any vegetation could thrive in the vicinity of a spot, where, to use the words of the poet, "*stat glacies iners menses per omnes*;" yet the sides of the valley, close to the ice, seem uncommonly fertile, and yield pasture to a more numerous herd of cattle than I had seen any where in Iceland.

I now entered the wide plain into which the valley opens, and which has been totally inundated at some former period by the Yökul, and came, in the course of an hour and a half, to *Breidibólstadarfiall*, a tremendously beetling mountain, from whose sides immense fragments of rock have been dislodged on the road; turning which, I entered a beautiful tract, called

*Fellshverfi*, that lies between a lofty range of mountains receding from that just mentioned, and the *Breidamark Yökul*; and opening towards the sea, which may here be about three miles from the inner end of the valley. A little to the west of *Reinavellir*, stands an insulated mountain, called *Fell*, which is remarkable, on account of its being split completely to its base, at a short distance from its termination. Close to the foot of the disjointed cliff lies a farm of the same name, inhabited by a rich peasant, whose numerous family people the neighbouring cottages. Considering the number of earthquakes to which the island is subject, their situation does not, by any means, appear enviable; and, according to an ancient prophecy, the projecting rock is destined one day to crush the inhabitants to atoms; yet the present occupants seem to live in the utmost security, unintimidated by the impending precipice, which affords them an excellent shelter from the northern storms.

The 8th of September I shall ever recollect with feelings of the deepest interest, and the most lively gratitude to God for his merciful preservation. Having prevailed on the peasant of *Reinavellir* to conduct me over the *Yökulsá á Breidamerkur-sand*, a river which I had been taught, by Captain Scheel, to regard as the most formidable and dangerous of all the rivers in Iceland, I proceeded towards the sand, which I gained, after fording a pretty broad river, called

the *Vedurá*. Its banks are lined with pieces of turf, and large fragments of trees, which it carries down from the interior of the Yökul.

The position and origin of this Yökul are quite peculiar. It is not so much a mountain, as an immense field of ice, about twenty miles in length, fifteen in breadth, and rising, at its greatest elevation, to the height of about four hundred feet above the level of the sand. The whole of the space it occupies has originally been a beautiful and fertile plain, which continued to be inhabited for several centuries after the occupation of the island; but was desolated in the dire catastrophe that happened in the fourteenth century, when not fewer than *six* volcanoes were in action at the same time, and poured inconceivable destruction to the distance of near an hundred miles along the coast.\* While the snow-mountains, in the interior, have been discharging their waters through this level tract, vast masses of ice must have been carried down by the floods, some of which, being arrested in their progress, have settled on the plain, and obstructing the pieces which followed, they have gradually accumulated, till, at last, the fresh masses that were carried to either side by the current, have reached the adjacent mountains, and the water, not having any other passage, has forced its way through the chasms in the ice,

\* Olafsen og Povelsen's Reise, p. 787, and Mr. Paulson's MS. referred to p. 240.



and formed channels, which, with more or less variation, it may have filled to the present period.

This theory of the formation of the *Breidamark Yökul*, will, in my opinion, not only account for its singular situation, but also explain its progressive motion, and other remarkable phenomena connected with this species of ice-mountains. Of its progress towards the sea, I was furnished with the amplest proof on passing along the margin. About the distance of a quarter of a mile from the south-east corner of the Yökul, I was surprised to find it transversing the track made in the sand by those who had travelled this way the preceding year; and, before reaching the point, I again discovered a tract, which had been made only eight days previous to my arrival, lost and swallowed up in the ice. The same fact is confirmed by a comparison of the present length of the river, with what it was about fifty years ago. Olafsen and Povelsen, \* describing it as the shortest river in Iceland, state it to have been scarcely a Danish mile, or about five British miles, from its egress to its junction with the sea at the time they passed it; whereas it does not now appear to exceed a British mile in length. Now, going back to its foundation, we shall suppose the Yökul did not originally occupy more than a quarter of a mile in breadth; or that this was the extreme thick-

\* Reise, p. 785.

ness of the barrier, consisting of fragments of ice, by which the melted snow from the mountains was obstructed in its course. Deranging the original constitution of the masses of ice, the water must alternately have flowed, and been dammed up, now perforating into this cavern, and now into that, while, gaining fresh strength from the quantity accumulated behind, it has at last carried the greater part of the ice-wall before it to some distance, and again left it to settle, as soon as it got vent into the plain. The depositions of ice, &c. would soon fill up the space that had been left; and new obstacles being presented to the river by the falling in of the chasms and vaulted passages through which it flowed, successive revolutions of the same kind would ensue. The force of the water rushing into new caverns, the vent given to the imprisoned air, and the expansive power of the frost, accumulated in a degree proportioned to a body of such magnitude, must all have combined to elevate and convulse the Yökul; while the snow and ice it has been collecting for the space of four hundred years, will sufficiently account for its present size and form. What corroborates this hypothesis is the fact, that it is only in summer it advances, after a strong thaw on the snow-mountains; at which time, also, the river which it discharges, is poured forth, now at one place, and now at another. On such occasions, the natives say, *That er Hlaup i Anni*, "there is a run in the river;" and generally view it as un-

fordable, on account of the rapidity of the current, and the large masses of ice which it hurls from the bowels of the Yökul down to the sea. If this field of ice be not entirely carried away by some awful convulsion in the mountains behind it, the progress it is making will soon bring it to the sea; and, in the course of a few years, all communication between the southern and eastern districts by this route will be cut off.

In confirmation of the actual motion of this Yokul, it is with pleasure I lay before the reader the following interesting extracts from a Danish MS. in my possession, written by the learned surgeon Svend Paulson, and containing a physical, geographical, and historical description of the ice mountains in Iceland: "The Yökul river, which shall afterwards be described, divides *Breidamark Yökul* into two parts internally. The division to the west of the river is more sloping, and its margin is lower, thinner, and more irregular: it has also a number of rents, and much gravel lies on its surface. Both on the surface, and in front of the Yökul, a number of sand banks make their appearance. The eastern division, on the other hand, is quite compact, and free from fissures; its margin is steep, and rises to the height of from sixteen to twenty fathoms. It is free from gravel, only a quantity of sand has, from time to time, been drifted on its surface. There are no heights in front, and the colour of the ice is that of a light grey. From these circumstances it is evident,

that the western division has been, and still is, in greater motion than the eastern, though no remarkable retrogression has been observed similar to that of the *Skeidará Yökul*. Its motion consists in a constant but gentle progression." After endeavouring to account for the formation of the Yökul, Mr. Paulson adds, in a note, "Such were the appearances of this Yökul in the summer of 1793, when I travelled past it the first time; but the following summer it had entirely changed its position. The division on the east side of the river had, by that time, advanced at least 200 fathoms from the line described by its margin the preceding year. The margin, at that time smooth and solid, was now completely altered, exhibiting, in one direction, large fissures and pyramids; in another, it was wholly excavated, and consisted of immense masses of ice, that had been thrown down from the main body of the Yökul. In those places where the margin still remained smooth and unaltered, it was visibly much elevated, and bulged out in the middle, like an earthen wall that is at the point of bursting by water collected behind it. There was, besides, a constant rumbling heard from the interior of the Yökul; and small streamlets ran here and there out of the fissures, accompanied with a disagreeable mist, and a penetrating insupportable cold. The part of the Yökul that had slidden farthest forward was the most easterly, close to the river *Vedurá*, where it completely covered the heights mentioned § 25.;

but it now appeared to have commenced its retreat, a number of sand hills having become visible in front.

“ This progression of the Yökul took place all of a sudden, without any extraordinary discharge of water, about Whitsuntide, the above mentioned year ; and, while it continued, the neighbouring tracts were exposed to a continual mist, cold, and a small drizzling rain, which the inhabitants ascribed to the Yökul.”

All along the margin, and a considerable way back, were deep indentations, and, in some places, chasms of an immense size, that penetrated farther than the eye could reach, and in which I could hear the distant dashing of the water as it fell from the surface of the Yökul. The margin consisted, for the most part, of large flat pieces of ice lying in all directions : sometimes it was as perpendicular as a wall ; at others, the ice lay horizontally, forming vast crystal grottoes ; and, what particularly struck me, was a number of small cavities and cells, in such parts of the surface of the ice as were not exposed to the sun, which were filled with the most beautiful pyramidic crystals, from a quarter of an inch, to an inch and a half in diameter. In some places, the interior of the grottoes was completely studded with these crystal groups, sparkling with a dazzling lustre, and assuming various hues, according as they were more or less exposed to the light.

Towards the bottom of the slope, the ice has collected so much sand and clay, that it assumes a black and dark grey colour : higher up, where the heat of the sun has less influence, the winter snows remain undissolved, and give the Yökul a whiter appearance ; and, what is remarkable, at some distance from the margin, a vast number of round pillars, resembling sugar-loaves, only more pointed at the top, begin to rise above the surface, and extend back to the regions of snow. They are quite black in appearance, and may be from three to twenty feet in height. Where the Yökul has pushed forward in one direction and again receded, large heaps of clay, sand, and turf, are thrown up, so as to form a catenation of small hills round its base ; but where its progress is continuing, no such hills are seen ; only furrows are laid open in the sand, by the sharp projecting pieces of ice, and the sand is raised, precisely as the ground by a plough, to either side. In some places, I could plainly observe the motion of the sand ; but whether it arose from the actual progress of the Yökul, or merely from the dissolution of the ice, I shall not determine. Before getting within lee of the margin of the Yökul, I was keenly sensible of the extremes of heat and cold ; a sharp piercing wind blowing from the Yökul on the one side, while the scorching rays of the sun beat on the other. On reaching the ice, the cold entirely ceased, and I was thrown into a

violent perspiration, though sitting at ease on my horse.

About one o'clock, we arrived at the usual channel of the river, which lay at least ten feet below the general surface of the sand; and were surprised to find that, as far as we could see, there was not the least appearance of water. The guide was the more alarmed at this, as, how much soever the river had shifted its course each summer, it was always distinctly visible from this spot; and, only eight days before, when a Danish gentleman passed this way, it had flowed in the channel before us. Having descended into this channel, and proceeded to some distance, not without difficulty, owing to the numerous holes, filled with quicksand, that had been formed by the melting of the large masses of ice deposited there on the subsiding of the water, the guide averred, that the river had entirely disappeared; and, looking at me, told me, seriously, he believed I was endowed with a superior degree of good fortune to any other traveller that had ever passed this way. Urging him to proceed with me a little farther, till we should learn the certainty of the matter, we had not rode a quarter of a mile, ere we were convinced, by its tumultuous roar, and the height of its breakers, that the river not only existed, but was as impetuous and dangerous as ever. The nearer we approached it the more formidable it appeared; and I certainly would not have had the courage to attempt fording it, had

it not been for the confidence inspired by the following lines of the Hebrew bard :—

“ Jehovah ! the floods lift up,  
 “ The floods lift up their voice ;  
 “ The floods lift up their ways.

“ Than the voice of many waters,  
 “ Mightier than the breakers of the sea,  
 “ Mighty on high is Jehovah !” Psalm xciii. 3, 4.

Crossing several inferior branches, we gained a sand bank, past which the principal stream was rolled ; but the current was so impetuous, and the huge shoals of ice that were hurled along seemed so difficult to be avoided, that our guide deemed it more advisable to attempt the passage of the Yökul itself, directly above the egress of the river. Though rarely practicable by horses, it is seldom the Yökul may not be crossed on foot ; and it is only in this way that sheep can be conveyed to the opposite side. Leaving his horse, therefore, he climbed up among the cavities and walls of ice, in order to look for a passage ; but the fissures and chasms were so tremendous, that he was obliged to desist from the perilous attempt, lest, missing a foot, he should be

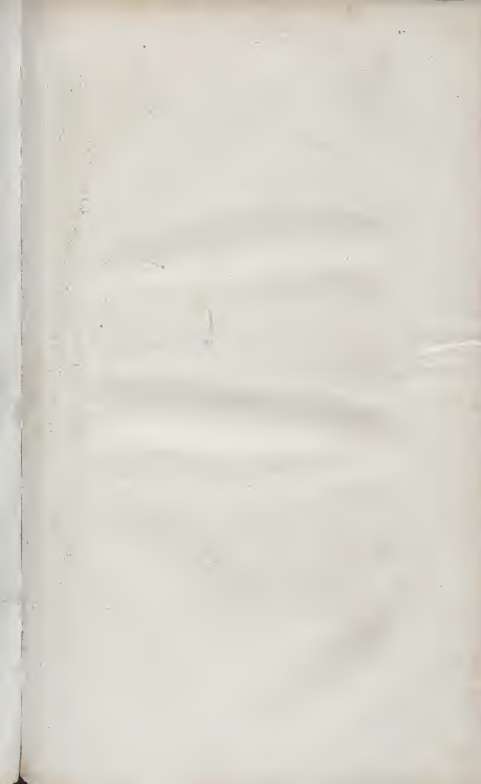
——“ Transfixed, numb'd in icy cells,  
 “ Or shrouded in unfathom'd folds of snow.”

The source of the river was only two stone-casts from us, whence the water boiled and raved to



a most furious degree, now rising and now subsiding, yet constantly carrying out with it immense fragments of ice, which it swept along to the sea.

On the return of our guide, we rode a little farther down, and as there was no other alternative, we entered the stream; the guide going first with his long pole, in order to probe the bottom, my servant and the baggage horses following after, while I myself brought up the rear. Having got so deep, that the water had no longer a free passage between our horses' legs, it rose like a wave against their sides, and the current being strong and rapid, threatened to sweep us all before it. As the guide's horse was not strong, he was very nearly borne down, the baggage-horses were also swung round, and my own, though possessing more strength than any of them, when he found the current getting too strong for him, threw himself against the stream side, and almost precipitated me into the flood. Owing to the suddenness with which he assumed this position, I was apprehensive that the stream had carried his feet out from below him; but I soon found it was a natural instinct in the animal, prompting him to recline with all his weight against the impetuosity of the water; and, balancing myself as well as I could, I sat in great suspense till he brought me to the opposite bank. Nor did our dangers terminate here. We had still several branches to ford, scarcely less furious than that we had crossed, and I had not



ÓRLEFA YÖKUL AS SEEN FROM THE BREIDAMARK RIVER



gained one of the banks two minutes, when a huge piece of ice, at least thirty feet square, was carried past me with resistless force. The foaming of the flood, the crashing of the stones hurled against one another at the bottom, and the masses of ice which, arrested in their course by some large stones, caused the water to dash over them with fury, produced altogether an effect on the mind never to be obliterated.

Having reached the opposite side of the river in safety, we all took off our hats, and returned thanks to the God of our lives for his kind care and protecting mercy, of which he had afforded us so signal an experience on this occasion. It now became a question what line of conduct the guide ought to adopt. He was so deeply impressed with a sense of the dangers he had just escaped, that he had scarcely the resolution to return; yet, reflecting that his absence would create great alarm in his wife and family, natural affection at length prevailed, and having obtained a promise that we would not set off till we saw him on the opposite bank, he again braved the fury of the flood; and after a number of narrow escapes, we could but just descry the appointed signal—so great was the distance between us.

From the egress of the river, *Breidamark Yökul* stretches in a north-west direction, till it is relieved by the *Öræfa Yökul*, the lower division of which is spread over the low mountains that line the coast, and is quite green, while the up-

per regions, consisting of the purest snow, tower to the height of 6240 feet in the horizon.\* Between the two Yökuls, a narrow black mountain rears its peaked summits, and though engulfed

\* As *Öræfa Yökul* is the highest mountain in Iceland, it is presumed the following description of its ascent from Mr. Paulson's MS. will not be uninteresting to the reader.

" We left *Qviskér*, (a small solitary farm at the eastern base of the mountain,) a quarter before six in the morning of the 11th of August, 1794, with a clear atmosphere and calm weather, after having furnished ourselves with a barometer, a thermometer, a small compass, a pointed hammer, a long pole, and a rope about ten fathoms in length. Our route lay up the precipitous mountains, which form the base of the Yökul, till we gained the ice at a quarter before nine o'clock, when we rested a few minutes on a small height, at the base of which we observed several specimens of the beautiful Alpine plant, *Ranunculus nivalis*, some of which had already withered. Such as had recently blossomed had snow-white petals, but those of longer standing were more or less red, resembling a saffron yellow. This plant is very rarely to be met with on the Southern Alps of Iceland. The barometer had now fallen from  $28^{\circ} 4\frac{1}{4}'$ , where it stood at *Qviskér*, to  $25^{\circ} 4\frac{1}{2}'$ , and the heat was  $8\frac{1}{2}'$  of Reaumur. The margin of the Yökul had evidently pushed forward against the height on which we stood, and raised a wall of small stones and sand nearly half up its side, but had again retreated to the distance of several fathoms.

" Having bound myself to my two companions by means of the rope, leaving a distance of two fathoms between each, that we might assist each other, in case any of us should happen to fall into a rent of the ice, we proceeded up the Yökul, but had scarcely advanced twenty paces when we heard a noise louder than thunder, running as it were longitudinally through the whole ice mountain from S. to N. accompanied with a perceptible concussion under our feet, which lasted for about a minute. My companions now wished to return, but though this

in eternal snows, its sides and gullies are clothed with verdure, and the neighbouring cottagers drive their sheep over the ice to feed there during the summer. In our progress across the sand

shock retarded our progress a few moments, a kind of natural impulse to visit these icy Alps prompted me to continue my ascent; and we afterwards found, that the report was occasioned by what is called *Yökla-brestr*, or *Yökul-burst*, the ice having disrupted and fallen in from either side of a gulley, about a mile (five English miles,) in length. We continued our route up the south-east side of the *Yökul* where it was least acclivitous, passing a number of black tuffa rocks, and crossing a multiplicity of fissures deeper than the eye could reach. Here, as is common at such elevations, the atmosphere got too thin to admit of our breathing with freedom. One of our party was so much affected, and felt such an inclination to sleep, that he remained behind us, and on lying down on the bare ice, immediately fell asleep; the other, naturally subject to a beating at the heart and melancholy, found himself more relieved and cheerful the higher we ascended, without being sensible of any particular fatigue from the tenuity of the air. We at length gained the south-east peak of the *Yökul* at a quarter before twelve o'clock, and found, that in conjunction with the three or four other peaks to the west and north, it describes the side of an immensely large crater of a circular form. These peaks on the summit of the *Yökul* are so precipitous, that the mass of ice has in different places disengaged itself and fallen down from them, leaving a number of black calcined rocks, the tops of which are covered with hats of frozen snow, and for the most part inaccessible, as a single false step would inevitably precipitate the traveller into the unfathomable chasms at their base. The barometer fell here to  $22^{\circ} 6''$ , or  $5^{\circ} 10\frac{1}{4}''$ , from what it was at *Qviskér*. The thermometer, at the same height with our eye from the surface of the *Yökul*, stood at  $11\frac{1}{4}^{\circ}$  of *Rcaumur*. The atmosphere was clear, and the wind blew keenly from the north. We could not discover any irregularity of the

we were met by several other considerable rivers, the principal of which are the *Breiddá*, the *Deildará*, and the *Hrutá*, but none of them occasioned us any difficulty; leaving which, we came to the south-east corner of the *Öræfa Yökul*, where we obtained the view of a magnificent glacier which has been precipitated from near the summit of that Yökul, and, on coming in contact with *Breidamark Yökul*, it appears to have impelled it forward to some distance.

We now entered a tract the most doleful and haggard that can possibly be conceived. It consists of the ruins of a range of mountains that had been convulsed to their very foundations in the year 1862, when the Yökul burst with a dreadful explosion, and completely devastated the coast in the vicinity. All around us lay immense masses of tuffa or hardened clay, filled with innumerable small black stones, which, up-

compass, and the whole of its variation was two points towards the west.

“The prospect was naturally enchanting. We had a view of all the Yökuls and mountains towards the north-east, between the spot on which we stood and *Hornaford*, and the situation of *Máfabygdir*, a little to the north-west of *Breidamark* mountain, from which two chains of sandy and stony mountains project towards the south-east, to the spot where the river breaks forth from the foundation of the Yökul. Towards the west, the *Eyafjalla* Yökul rose majestically before us, and in a northerly direction, we could descry the summit of *Sniáfjall*, but were prevented from seeing the regions in the interior by the peaks of the Yökul intercepting our view. We again reached *Quiskér*, much fatigued, about half past four o'clock in the afternoon.”

borne by the violence of subterraneous heat, have been whirled down in this direction, and lodged in the wildest confusion along the foot of the Yökul. Towards the heart of the mountain stretched a gloomy gulley, terminated by rugged shapeless rocks, round which in every direction lay masses of hoary ice, connecting with the Yökul behind, and mixing in every possible form with the ancient erupted matter of the volcano ; so that to no place could the poetic description of the throne of winter more aptly or more literally apply :

“ Beyond the pointed cliffs that girt the coast,  
 Extending to the dark horizon round,  
 Were huge dark masses of mis-shapen rocks,  
 With dreary glens between, rude defiles, fill'd  
 With frozen snow, accumulating still,  
 And glaciers vast of everlasting ice ;  
 A cheerless solitude, where nought was heard  
 But the wild uproar of contending winds,  
 Which, howling, swept at intervals the waste.” \*

Leaving this singularly gloomy desert, we passed over a sloping hill, for the most part covered with moss, and intersected by deep ravines, made by the inundations from the Yökul, and came into a level tract called *Hnappafells-sandar*, consisting of fragments of obsidian, pumice, slag, and large erupted masses of tuffa, some of which are entire, and others have been

\* Poetical Effusions, p. 12. Kendal, 1814.



split into several divisions by the violence of their fall. The north side of this plain is bounded by a high ridge of precipitous mountains, on which the Yökul rests as its basis; and near the middle, where there are two breaks in the ridge, the cliffs stand quite insulated, in the cold embrace of two glaciers, which hang down almost perpendicularly to the very end of the plain. About eight o'clock in the evening we arrived at *Hnappavellir*, so called from the Yökul that beetles over it at a great height, in which there is a large round black spot, like a knap or button, forming a striking contrast to the whiteness of the snow. It consists of two farms, which are situated close together; and, as I pitched my tent between them, the inhabitants seemed to dispute with each other to whom the right of hospitality ought to belong, bringing me large dishes of excellent cream, and, what I had not before observed in the east country, begging I would excuse them if I did not find it so *polished* as I might wish. The prospect of obtaining copies of the Bible gave them great joy; for there were none in the vicinity, and some of them had not so much as ever seen the precious volume. Scanty and precarious, therefore, as the pittance is which nature affords them, the famine they labour under is not so much a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, as a famine of the words of the Lord. Blessed be his name! there is reason to hope, that before twelve months have elapsed, it may be said of this de-

sert (*Örafi*,) “it shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon; they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the deaf shall sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert,” Isaiah xxxv. 1, 2—5, 6.

Directly opposite to *Hnappavellir* is the promontory of *Ingolfsküfi*, which derives its name from the circumstance of its being the spot where Ingolf, one of the first Norwegian settlers, landed, when he came out the second time in order to establish himself on the island. It has originally formed part of the main-land, but having been separated from it in some of the dreadful convulsions that have raged in the vicinity, it now forms a long insulated rock, which rises as it stretches into the sea, and ultimately falls perpendicularly into the water. At this place the sand reef ends, which, beginning at the north side of *Hannarsfiord*, runs along the whole of the south-eastern coast, at the distance of from one to two miles from the shore. From the *Horns* the coast stretches in a south-westerly direction till it reaches this promontory, when it immediately turns due west, and consists of a vast level tract, for the most part sandy, and in-

terscinded in divers places by broad rivers from the snow and ice mountains: the inhabited grounds lying along the front of the low mountains, which project from the interior, and line the sand in many parts, at the distance of fifteen and twenty miles from the sea.

Before leaving this station, I was furnished with a new proof of the disinterestedness of Icelandic hospitality. As my horses now began to get very fatigued from the length and nature of the journey, it became necessary for me to have them exchanged; and mentioning the circumstance to one of the peasants, he instantly trucked a strong fresh horse against one of my lean ones, without so much as expecting a single shilling to the bargain. This the natives call *Hesta-kaup*, and regard it as a duty they are indispensably bound to discharge towards travellers who may stand in need of their assistance in this way.

From *Hnappavellir* the road lay across a sloping swampy tract, which here stretches down from the foot of the *Yökul*, and brought us, in the course of an hour, to the brow of an abrupt descent, down which we proceeded, having on the left hand the beginning of the extensive sand just described, and close by, on the right, the rudely excavated side of a low mountain, where the range commences which forms the western base of the *Yökul*. Skirting the foot of these mountains, we arrived about eleven o'clock at a farm called *Hof*, where, as my ser-

vant wished to transact some business with the peasant, I stopped for more than two hours. A little to the north of this, I was shewn a high, white, and conic-shaped mountain, on the summit of which is an altar, consisting of a large square stone, somewhat hollowed in the middle, where human sacrifices were presented in the days of heathenism. The place is called *Goda-borg*. All the mountains in the vicinity are very precipitous; overhang the farms that are situated at their base; and besides having been subjected to the destructive effects of subsequent eruptions, appear evidently to be of volcanic formation. The farmer, who is known over the whole island by the name of "David of the wilderness," is remarkable on account of his enthusiastic fondness for ancient Scandinavian literature, and retains, perhaps, more of the habits and dispositions of his forefathers than any of his countrymen at the present day. He possesses upwards of an hundred sagas in MS. most of which he has by heart; and confirms almost every assertion by a long quotation of ancient authorities. He has also collected a vast number of more recent poems and rhymes, and is himself a rhymmer.

Having exchanged another horse at this place, and got some of the rest shod, we set out on the road to *Skafstafell*, a farm from which the Syssels derive their name, and were accompanied by David, who undertook to guide us across the tract that was laid waste by an exundation from

the western division of the Yökul, in the year 1727. It lies almost directly opposite to the church and parsonage of *Sandfell*, from which the ice-mountain behind takes the name of *Sandfell's-Yökul*, and consists of calcined stones, tuffa, pumice, and immense fragments of the Yökul, which, sheltered from the heat of the sun by the ashes and small stones that cover them, remain unmelted, and greatly retard the progress of the traveller. Some of the stones are of vast magnitude, little inferior to houses; and, from the large holes with which they are perforated, appear to have been exposed to an uncommonly strong degree of subterraneous heat. As no authentic account of this dreadful exundation of the *Öräfa* volcano has, as far as I know, ever been published in England, I will here insert the translation of a letter, addressed by Sira Jon Thorlakson, at that time minister of *Sandfell*, to Secretary Olavius, and published in his *Economical Travels in Iceland*, Copen. 1780. 4to.

“ In the year 1727, on the 7th of August, which was the tenth Sunday after Trinity, after the commencement of divine service in the church of *Sandfell*, as I stood before the altar, I was sensible of a gentle concussion under my feet, which I did not mind at first; but, during the delivery of the sermon, the rocking continued to increase so as to alarm the whole congregation; yet they remarked that the like had often happened before. One of them, a very aged man, repaired to a spring, a little below

the house, where he prostrated himself on the ground, and was laughed at by the rest for his pains; but, on his return, I asked him what it was he wished to ascertain? to which he replied, "Be on your guard, Sir; the earth is on fire!" Turning, at the same moment, towards the church-door, it appeared to me, and all who were present, as if the house contracted and drew itself together. I now left the church, necessarily ruminating on what the old man had said; and as I came opposite to *Mount Flaga*, and looked up towards its summit, it appeared alternately to expand and be heaved up, and fall again to its former state. Nor was I mistaken in this, as the event shewed; for on the morning of the 8th, we not only felt frequent and violent earthquakes, but also heard dreadful reports, in no respect inferior to thunder. Every thing that was standing in the houses was thrown down by these shocks; and there was every reason to apprehend, that mountains as well as houses would be overturned in the catastrophe. What most augmented the terror of the people was, that nobody could divine in what place the disaster would originate, or where it would end.

"After nine o'clock, three particularly loud reports were heard, which were almost instantaneously followed by several eruptions of water that gushed out, the last of which was the greatest, and completely carried away the horses and other animals that it overtook in its course. When these exundations were over, the ice,

mountain itself ran down into the plain, just like melted metal poured out of a crucible ; and, on settling, filled it to such a height, that I could not discover more of the well-known mountain *Lomagnupr*, than about the size of a bird. The water now rushed down the east side without intermission, and totally destroyed what little of the pasture-grounds remained. It was a most pitiable sight to behold the females crying, and my neighbours destitute both of counsel and courage : however, as I observed that the current directed its course towards my house, I removed my family up to the top of a high rock, on the side of the mountain, called *Dalskards-torfá*, where I caused a tent to be pitched, and all the church utensils, together with our food, clothes, and other things that were most necessary, to be conveyed thither ; drawing the conclusion, that should the eruption break forth at some other place, this height would escape the longest, if it were the will of God, to whom we committed ourselves, and remained there.

“ Things now assumed quite a different appearance. The *Yökul* itself exploded, and precipitated masses of ice, many of which were hurled out to the sea ; but the thickest remained on the plain, at a short distance from the foot of the mountain. The noise and reports continuing, the atmosphere was so completely filled with fire and ashes, that day could scarcely be distinguished from night, by reason of the darkness which followed, and which was barely ren-

dered visible by the light of the fire that had broken through five or six cracks in the mountain. In this manner the parish of *Öraefu* was tormented for three days together : yet it is not easy to describe the disaster as it was in reality ; for the surface of the ground was entirely covered with pumice-sand, and it was impossible to go out in the open air with safety, on account of the red-hot stones that fell from the atmosphere. Any who did venture out, had to cover their heads with buckets, and such other wooden utensils as could afford them some protection.

On the 11th, it cleared up a little in the neighbourhood ; but the ice-mountain still continued to send forth smoke and flames. The same day I rode, in company with three others, to see how matters stood with the parsonage, as it was most exposed ; but we could only proceed with the utmost danger, as there was no other way except between the ice-mountain and the *Yökul*, which had been precipitated into the plain, where the water was so hot that the horses almost got unmanageable ; and, just as we entertained the hope of getting through by this passage, I happened to look behind me, when I descried a fresh deluge of hot water directly above me, which, had it reached us, must inevitably have swept us before it. Contriving, of a sudden, to get on the ice, I called to my companions to make the utmost expedition in following me ; and, by this means, we reached *Sandfell* in safety. The whole of the farm, together with the cottages of two



tenants, had been destroyed ; only the dwelling-houses remained, and a few spots of the *túns*. The people stood crying in the church. The cows which, contrary to all expectation, both here and elsewhere, had escaped the disaster, were lowing beside a few hay-stacks that had been damaged during the eruption. At the time the exundation of the Yökul broke forth, the half of the people, belonging to the parsonage, were in four newly-constructed sheep-cotes, where two women and a boy took refuge on the roof of the highest ; but they had hardly reached it, when, being unable to resist the force of the thick mud that was borne against it, it was carried away by the deluge of hot water, and, as far as the eye could reach, the three unfortunate persons were seen clinging to the roof. One of the women was afterwards found among the substances that had proceeded from the Yökul, but burnt, and, as it were, parboiled ; her body was so soft that it could scarcely be touched. Every thing was in the most deplorable condition. The sheep were lost ; some of which were washed up dead from the sea, in the third parish from the *Órafsa*. The hay that was saved was found insufficient for the cows, so that a fifth part of them had to be killed ; and the most of the horses, which had not been swept into the ocean, were afterwards\* found completely mangled. \* The

\* According to Chief Justice Stephensen's statement, not fewer than 600 sheep and 160 horses perished in this eruption. See Iceland in the Eighteenth Century, p. 24. Copen. 1808. 8vo.

eastern part of the parish of *Sida* was also destroyed by the pumice and sand; and the inhabitants were, on that account, obliged to kill many of their cattle.

“ The mountain continued to burn night and day, from the 8th of August, as already mentioned, till the beginning of summer, in the month of April the following year, at which time the stones were still so hot, that they could not be touched; and it did not cease to emit smoke till near the end of summer. Some of them had been completely calcined; some were black and full of holes; and others were so loose in their contexture, that one could blow through them. On the first day of summer 1728, I went in company with a person of quality to examine the cracks in the mountain, the most of which were so large that we could creep into them. I found here a quantity of saltpetre, and could have collected it, but did not choose to stay long in the excessive heat. At one place, a heavy calcined stone lay across a large aperture; and as it rested on a small basis, we easily dislodged it into the chasm, but could not observe the least sign of its having reached the bottom. These are the more remarkable particulars that have occurred to me with respect to this mountain; and thus God hath led me through fire and water, and brought me, through much trouble and adversity, to my eightieth year. To Him be the honour, the praise, and the glory for ever.”  
Pp. 602—607.

As those who live in the vicinity of the volcano, had heard a number of *Yöklahliod*, i. e. reports in the Yökul this summer, they were living in the apprehension that a fresh revolution was at hand; such crackings and reports being considered as precursors of the calamitous event. It seems, however, more probable, that they were occasioned merely by the disruption of certain parts of the ice, in virtue of its own weight; especially as it has made considerable approximations towards the plain since last winter. It was my intention to have rode up to the foot of the mountain, and visited the present incumbent of *Sandfell*, but having been apprised of his absence from home, I pursued my course over a long tract of ashes and sand, which was ultimately relieved by a morass, that appeared to have the same materials for its foundation. The farm of *Skaftafell*, lying on the brow of a hill, was conspicuous at a distance, but we were benighted before we got within three miles of it, and had two formidable rivers to cross, the one of which, though not so broad, had nearly as rapid a current as that of the river on *Breidamark-sand*. After we had rode some time in the direction in which the house had appeared while it was light, we came to the eastern bank of the roaring *Skeiderá*, and entered a deep gully to the right, but were instantly arrested by a steep hill, which debarred all further progress. Surrounded as we were, on every hand, by Yökuls and Yökul rivers, enveloped in darkness,

and not being able to find any pass by which we might extricate ourselves, we began to feel our situation very unpleasant, and it is difficult to say what alternative we would have chosen, had we not been most agreeably relieved in the midst of our perplexity by a dog which "howled from the hut of the hill," at the distance of not more than a stone-cast above us. Never shall I forget the joyful emotion that started in my breast on this occasion; and while I meditate on the occurrence, I am more than ever convinced, that there is no such thing as chance under the government of God, and that all things, whether animate or inanimate, rational or irrational, are the subjects of his influence, though the mode of that influence be hidden from us, and contribute, each in its place, and according to the nature with which he hath endowed it, to the advancement of his infinitely wise and gracious designs.

On the 10th, we had a continuation of the same clear and favourable weather we had enjoyed the whole of the week. As one of the baggage-horses had gone astray in the night, I had plenty of time on my hand, and ascended the mountain behind *Skaftafell*, in the hopes of being able to command a prospect of the ice-mountains in the interior; but, after I had, with considerable exertion, reached the summit, I had the disappointment to find, that a long ridge of rugged pointed cliffs intercepted the view in that direction. However, I had no reason to

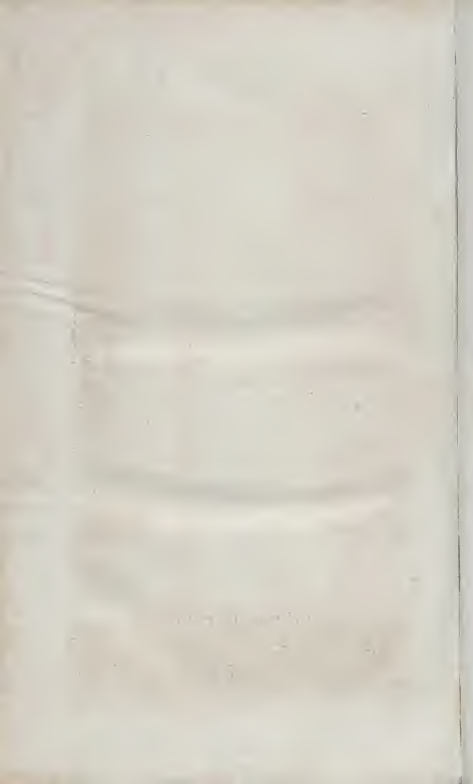
regret my toil, for I had still a noble and magnificent exhibition of the east country Yökul. To the south-east, rose the *Öræfa Yökul*, vying in splendour and altitude with the meridian sun. From the regions of perpetual snow, descended the glaciers of *Sandfell*, *Svinafell*, and *Skastafell*, the smaragdine appearance of whose base had the most vivid and enchanting effect. The flat sandy country in front, was beautifully divided by the multifarious branches of the *Skeiderá*, which has its egress close by, and pours an immense quantity of water into the main. Below me, to the right, lay the broad *Skeiderá Yökul*, over which, towards the north, appeared the ice-mountains in the vicinity of the *Skapta* volcano; while due west, beyond the dark projecting *Lomagnupr*, I could decrie the lofty *Eyafjalla Yökul*; to the north of which rose the aqueigneous volcano *Kötlugiá*, whose tremendously yawning crater was distinctly visible. Behind *Skastafell* lies a pretty extensive valley called *Morrár-dal*, which has constituted a parish in former times; but it has been entirely depopulated by the encroachments of the surrounding ice, and is now remarkable for nothing but its stunted forest, consisting of mountain-ash, birch, and willows, and a hot spring, the water of which, however, is not hotter than to admit of a person's holding his hand in it without being scalded. Previous to the fourteenth century, the whole of the district, between this place and *Breidamark-sand*, formed a fertile and po-



ÖREFTA YÖKUL AS SEEN FROM THE BASE OF LOMAGNUÞR

Engraved by W. T. L. L. L. L. L.

Published by J. B. Schmitt



pulous tract, under the denomination of *Litla Herad*, but has suffered so much from the effects of volcanic fury, that it now contains only *eight* farms, and well answers to its present name, *Öræfi*, or “the Desert.”

Having got all ready, we left *Skaftafell* about noon, accompanied by the peasant, who had undertaken to guide us through the different rivers that lay in our way. Following him into the *Skeiderá*, and proceeding in a zig-zag direction from one sand-bank to another, now fording the branches against the current, and now with it, we got across this dangerous river without much difficulty in somewhat less than an hour. On our right we had the *Southern Skeiderá Yökul*, which in situation and size pretty much resembles that of *Breidamark*, only it is not so high. Being more exposed to ashes, sand, &c. from the adjacent volcanoes, it is much blacker than any of the *Yökuls* along the coast, and its aspect is rendered still darker by the rocks which appear in it at different places, and which it has carried along with it from their original beds in the interior. But what makes it peculiarly remarkable, is the alternate progression and retrogradation to which at certain periods it is subjected. Some years it pushes forward till nearly in a line with the ancient promontory of *Lomagnupr*, and then moves back again to the distance of more than half a mile. In 1727, when both the *Öræfa* and *Northern Skeiderá* volcanic *Yökuls* were in activity, this low *Yökul* began



to rock, to the great danger and consternation of some people who happened to be travelling on the sand before it. According to the account they afterwards gave, it moved backwards and forwards, undulating at the same time like the waves of the sea, and spouting from its foundations innumerable rivers, which appeared and vanished again almost instantaneously, in proportion to the agitation of the Yökul. As the progress it made was inconsiderable, the spectators saved themselves on a sand-bank, but the suddenness and unexpectedness with which the rivers continued to rush forth, rendered it impossible to travel any more that way the whole summer.\*

On reaching the middle of the sand, we fell in with the remains of the projection that took place in 1787, consisting of an elevation of from thirty to fifty feet, and covering an extent of several acres, the surface of which has the same appearance with the rest of the sand. At first I had no idea of its being any thing else than an immense sand bank, or a rising ground, which had withstood the violence of the floods; but, after riding more than a mile on it, I discovered that I was proceeding over masses and caverns of ancient ice; and had it not been for the intelligence and experience of our guide, I certainly would not have hazarded the prosecu-

\* See Olafsen's og Povelsen's Reise, p. 780.

tion of my journey in this direction. Descending into a hollow, we passed through between extensive pools of white water, and rounded several sources from which considerable rivers were poured forth into the sand. This region may be about three quarters of a mile from the present margin of the Yökul; and near the middle of the intervening space are a number of inferior heights which have been left on the regress of the Yökul in 1812, the last time it was observed to be in motion.

To explain the cause of these phenomena, recourse has been had to a subterranean communication between this Yökul and the neighbouring volcanoes, but its progress may be accounted for on the same principle with that we have adopted in regard to *Breidamark Yökul*; and it seems equally natural to conclude that its falling back is occasioned by the sliding down of the hinder parts of the Yökul into the low space that had been occupied by the vast collection of water previous to its having rushed into the icy caverns in the interior of the mountain, from which it has again been emptied into the plain. This supposition is confirmed by the circumstance of the retrogression happening immediately after the mountain ceases to protrude, and it has discharged itself of the immense surplus of water with which it was glutted; and is rendered still more probable by the consideration, that the foundations of the Yökul must be entirely disengaged by its progress, so that no ob-

state can be presented from that quarter to impede its return to its former situation. The undulatory motions observable during its lesser convulsions, seem to arise from the violence with which the water forces its way through the internal caverns, just as its breaking out and disappearing again, almost the same moment, must be occasioned by the falling in of the caverns in the vicinity of the margin. That it was convulsed during the eruption of the adjacent volcano was a necessary consequence of the deluge of hot water that mountain poured forth, as there was no other way for it to make its escape than the low ground occupied by the moveable Yökul; but that its movements are dependent on volcanic eruptions is contradicted by the fact, that it has both advanced and retired during the period the volcanoes have been in a state of inactivity. Whether the sparks of fire said to have been seen above it\* did not originate in the volcano behind, may justly be doubted, as it is certain the account of the playing of flames in the middle of the fresh water lake *Grimsvötn*, during the eruptions of the *Northern Skeiderá Yökul* †, is wholly fabulous; or the sparks may have been produced by the violent collision of certain mineral bodies confined within the masses of the Yökul when these were torn and convulsed by the fury of the water below. The phenomena of these vacillating Yökuls

\* See Olafsen's og Povelßen's Reise, p. 780.

† Ibid.

would receive much elucidation from a survey of the situation and appearance of those parts of them which lie towards the interior of the island, but the dangers connected with every attempt to explore them are more than sufficient to damp the zeal, and check the enterprise of the most impassioned lovers of natural history.\*

At the western extremity of the sand we came to several rivers, that are known by the general name of *Gnupsvötn*, some of which we found still more formidable than the *Skeiderá*. These rivers are defended on the right by the long narrow mountain *Lomagnupr*, which projects into the sand, and bears every mark of its having been a promontory in former times. It is at least 1500 feet high, and is composed of rough brown tuffa, in the matrix of which is in-

\* Before leaving the subject of the moveable ice-fields in Iceland, I cannot but lay before the reader the following short account of a similar field in the valley of *Iustedal* in *Norway*: "The situation and appearance of this field of ice are very variable. Sometimes it continues to protrude into the vallies near it for the period of from thirty to sixty years, and again recedes for a time. When it moves forward, it cracks to the depth of several thousand feet; and when it returns back to its original position, the rents are all closed up, as if the mass had never been split. In its progress it has such a force, that it pushes before it stones or rocks, as large as houses; and should they happen to get jammed in between the ice and an adjoining mountain, they are crushed to pieces as it passes. On receding, it leaves behind it a sterile, dry, and sandy soil, on which no grass will ever afterwards grow." *Bomarc's Nat. Hist. Kiøb. 1769, vol. iv. p. 60, 61.*

bedded an infinite number of small pointed stones of a bluish colour, which I take to be pieces of basalt. Of this stone I saw some fine pentagonal specimens at the base of the mountain, but, owing to the gloom which the shadows of evening had already cast on its sides, it was impossible to discover their original bed.

We here proceeded with considerable difficulty, being directly above the river; and the track lying across large heaps of small stones that had been washed down by the torrents, had no solid foundation, but threatened, at every step, to give way, and plunge us into the raging flood, from which there was not the least possibility of extrication. Turning round the extremity of the mountain, which hangs almost directly over head, and resembles a vast square tower, at the angle of two ranges of ancient buildings, we fell in with numerous heaps of stones, and immensely huge masses of tuffa, which have been severed from the mountain, and hurled down into the plain, during the rockings occasioned by an earthquake in 1789. We now crossed a tract of lava, called from its colour "the Brown Lava;" which, as no mention is made of the circumstance in the ancient annals, is supposed to have flowed previous to the occupation of the island, and passing the farms of *Gnúpstadr* and *Raudaberg*, we forded the *Diupá*, a river of considerable breadth, the bottom of which is full of large stones, so that its passage is attended both with difficulty and

danger ; and arrived, about ten o'clock at night, at the parsonage of *Kálfafell*, where I was kindly received by the clergyman, Sira Jon Jonson, and pitched my tent a little to the south of the church.

The parish of *Fliotshverfi*, of which Sira Jon is minister, contains only a population of about seventy souls ; the tract having been much injured by the volcanic eruptions described in the following chapter ; yet, among that number of people, there only existed one Bible, besides the copy belonging to the church. They had long uttered complaints of the want of the sacred oracles ; but as there was no appearance of any supply, they had ultimately given up all hopes of ever seeing them more. Sira Jon is between fifty and sixty years of age, and appears to have more life and activity in religious concerns than many of his brethren. The exertions of the Bible Societies commanded his admiration, and excited the liveliest emotions of gratitude and praise.

## CHAP. VII.

*West Skaftafell's Syssel—Skaftár Volcano—Eruption of 1783 described—Sida—Hörgland Hospital—Icelandic Leprosy—Kyrkiubæ—Basalts—Landbrot—Passage of the Kudaflot—Thyckvabæ—Myrdals-sand—Wild Corn—Köttlugiár Volcano—Its Eruptions described—Vik—Hafursá—Narrow escape.*

THE two subdivisions of *Skaftafell's Syssel* are separated from each other by the *Gnupsvötn*, and the traveller, on passing that boundary, leaves the regions of perpetual ice and snow, and enters a tract, which, though greatly defaced by the terrible convulsions of nature to which the last century was witness in this neighbourhood, still exhibits ample specimens of that beauty and fertility for which it has been renowned. The *Northern Skeiderá* and *Skaptár Yökuls* lie at a considerable distance back from the farms, and the low flat hills which occupy the intermediate space, while they screen the inhabitants from the cold northern blasts of winter, afford their

flocks and herds a pretty luxuriant pasturage. The numerous cottages that line the base of the hills; the rich vegetation which clothes nearly two-thirds of the declivity; and the beautiful basaltic pillars appearing among the cliffs above, the tops of which are met by the descending heath: all combine to render the districts of *Sida* and *Fliotshverfi* the most delightful of any in Iceland. The latter district, however, which is the most easterly, has been exposed to two sad disasters since the middle of last century. In 1753, an eruption of the *Northern Skeiderá Yökul* took place, which, overcharging the *Diupá*, (Deep River,) it not only overflowed its banks, but gave rise to a new torrent, the consequence of which was, that the heath was deluged, and a considerable part of the grounds belonging to the glebe of *Kálfafell* greatly damaged by the pieces of ice, stones, and gravel, which were deposited on them by the water. The other rivers to the westward also overflowed their banks, and the ashes and pumice, carried in that direction by a north-east wind, laid waste, for some time, what the deluge had spared, and occasioned the death of a number of cattle. The fire-spouts, and cloud of smoke, were distinctly seen from the hills in the vicinity, but no lava was known to flow down from the *Yökul*. \*

\* Oláfsen og Povelsen ut sup. p. 776.



The eruption that took place in the year 1783 was of a very different description. It not only appears to have been more tremendous in its phenomena than any recorded in the modern annals of Iceland, but it was followed by a train of consequences the most direful and melancholy, some of which continue to be felt to this day. Immense floods of red-hot lava were poured down from the hills with amazing velocity, and, spreading over the low country, burnt up men, cattle, churches, houses, and every thing they attacked in their progress. Not only was all vegetation, in the immediate neighbourhood of the volcano, destroyed by the ashes, brimstone, and pumice, which it emitted ; but, being borne up to an inconceivable height in the atmosphere, they were scattered over the whole island, impregnating the air with noxious vapours, intercepting the genial rays of the sun, and empoisoning whatever could satisfy the hunger or quench the thirst of man and beast. Even in some of the more distant districts, the quantity of ashes that fell was so great, that they were gathered up by handfuls. Upwards of four hundred people were instantly deprived of a home ; the fish were driven from the coasts, and the elements seemed to vie with each other which should commit the greatest depredations ; famine and pestilence stalked abroad, and cut down their victims with ruthless cruelty ; while death himself was glutted with the prey. In some houses there was scarcely a sound indivi-

dual left to tend the afflicted, or any who possessed sufficient strength to inter the dead. The most miserably emaciated tottering skeletons were seen in every quarter. When the animals that had died of hunger and disease were consumed, the wretched creatures had nothing to eat but raw hides, and old pieces of leather and ropes, which they boiled and devoured with avidity. The horses eat the flesh off one another, and for want of other sustenance had recourse to turf, wood, and even excrementitious substances; while the sheep devoured each other's wool. In a word, the accumulation of miseries, originating in the volcanic eruption, was so dreadful, that in the short space of two years, not fewer than 9,336 human beings, 28,000 horses, 11,461 head of cattle, and 190,488 sheep perished on the island! \*

About a month previous to the commencement of the eruption, a submarine volcano burst forth at the distance of nearly seventy miles in a south-west direction from *Cape Reykianess* in *Gulldbringe Syssel*, and ejected such an immense quantity of pumice, that the surface of the ocean was covered with it to the distance of a hundred and fifty miles, and the spring ships considerably impeded in their course. As they approach-

\* See "Iceland in the Eighteenth Century," Pp. 27—29; and "An Account of the Eruption," Copenhagen, 1785, 8vo. both written by Chief-Justice Stephensen.

ed the place, they found that a new island had been thrown up, consisting of high cliffs, within which the fire was in violent action, and emitting smoke and pumice from two or three different places. The island was claimed by his Danish Majesty, who denominated it *Nyöe*, or the New Island; but ere a year had elapsed, the sea resumed her ancient dominion, and the island has never been seen since. A concealed rock, however, was discovered at the same time, almost in a direct line between the site of the volcano, and the chain of rocks called *Fugle Skiere*, which have anciently been thrown up in a similar manner.

The *Skaptár* volcano, so called from the river of the same name, down which the greater part of the lava was poured, is situated close to the eastern boundary of *West Skaftafell's Sysse*, about thirty-two British miles due north of *Kyrkiubæ Abbey*, and near the contiguous sources of the rivers *Túná*, *Skaptá*, and *Hverfisflot*. It lies principally in the valley called *Varmárdal*, and consists of about twenty red conical hills, stretching in nearly a direct line, from E. N. E. to W. S. W. which have served as so many furnaces, from which the melted matter has been discharged into the valley. From these craters the lava has flowed which inundated the low country, through the channel of the *Skaptá*. What flowed down the *Hverfisflot*, has had its source in some other craters situated farther to the north-

east, but which are evidently connected with the former hills, and would, in all probability, have poured their contents down *Varmárdal*, had it not been completely filled with the lava, which had already been emptied into it.

None of the Icelandic annals make mention of any preceding eruption from this volcano; yet, if we may judge from the situation of the ancient lavas, that are to be met with both in the inhabited and uninhabited parts of the vicinity, it is likely they have flowed from the same source at some remote period. Nor is it at all improbable, that the eruption of water which inundated the same tract, exactly thirty years before the recent catastrophe happened, had its origin in the subterraneous channels connecting with this very volcano, though it may not have been thrown up from the identical craters. But why stop at probabilities? The *Northern Skeiderá*, *Sida*, and *Skaptár Yökuls*, are only different designations of the same ice mountain, according to its different projections or aspects; and if it be allowable to speak of the eruptions of *Öræfa* in 1362 and 1727, as proceeding from the same mountain, though there be a distance of several miles between the craters, it seems still more proper to view the *Yökuls*, just mentioned, as one general volcano, whose foundations are cracked by the powerful action of subterraneous fire, which makes a passage for itself, now in this quarter, and now in that, according to the situa-

tion and quantity of the combustible matters by which it is fed, and the facility with which it reaches the surface of the earth.

From the 1st to the 8th of June, 1783, the inhabitants of *West Skaftafell's Syssel* were alarmed by repeated shocks of an earthquake, which, as they daily increased in violence, left no reason to doubt that some dreadful volcanic explosion was about to take place. Pitching tents in the open fields, they deserted their houses, and awaited, in awful suspense, the issue of these terrifying prognostics. On the morning of the 8th, a prodigious cloud of dense smoke darkened the atmosphere, and was observed to be continually augmented by fresh columns arising from behind the low hills, along the southern base of which, the farms, constituting the parish of *Sida*, are situated. A strong south wind prevented the cloud from advancing over the farms; but the heath, or common, lying between them and the volcano, was completely covered with ashes, pumice, and brimstone. The eruption had now actually commenced; and the raging fire, as if sublimated into greater fury by the vent it had obtained, occasioned more dreadful tremefactions, accompanied by loud subterraneous reports, while the sulphureous substances that filled the air, breaking forth into flames, produced, as it were, one continued flash of lightning, with the most tremendous peals of thunder that ever were heard. The extreme degree to which the earth

in the vicinity of the volcano was heated, melted an immense quantity of ice, and caused a great overflow in all the rivers originating in that quarter.

Upon the 10th, the flames first became visible. Vast fire-spouts were seen rushing up amid the volumes of smoke, and the torrent of lava that was thrown up, flowing in a south-west direction, through the valley called *Ulfarsdal*, till it reached the river *Skaptá*, when a violent contention between the two opposite elements ensued, attended with the escape of an amazing quantity of steam; but the fiery current ultimately prevailed, and, forcing itself across the channel of the river, completely dried it up in less than twenty-four hours; so that, on the 11th, the *Skaptá* could be crossed in the low country on foot, at those places where it was only possible before to pass it in boats. The cause of its desiccation soon became apparent: for the lava, having collected in the channel, which lies between high rocks, and is in many places from 400 to 600 feet in depth, and near 200 in breadth, not only filled it up to the brink, but overflowed the adjacent fields to a considerable extent; and, pursuing the course of the river with great velocity, the dreadful torrent of red-hot melted matter approached the farms on both sides, greatly damaged those of *Hvammur* and *Svinadal* to the west, and that of *Skaptárdal* to the east; laid waste the two tenancies of *Svartinupar* and *Litlanes*, belonging to the church of *Búland*, which

it also damaged, and, by the evening of the 12th, it had advanced to *A*, when it instantly overflowed the houses, pasture-grounds, and meadows, together with the greater part of the common. In the mean time, the thunder, lightning, and subterraneous concussions were continued, with little or no intermission; and besides the crackling of the rocks and earth, which the lava burnt in its progress, the ears of the inhabitants were stunned by the tremendous roar of the volcano, which resembled that of a large caldron in the most violent state of ebullition, or the noise of a number of massy bellows, blowing with full power into the same furnace.

On gaining the outlet, by which the hills that confine the channel of the *Skaptá* open into the plain, it might naturally have been supposed, that the burning flood would at once have deluged the low fields of *Medalland*, which lay directly before it; but contrary to all expectation, it was arrested for some time, by an immense unfathomed abyss in the bed of the river, into which it emptied itself with a great noise. When this chasm was filled, the lava, augmented by fresh effusions, rose to a prodigious height, and breaking over the masses that had cooled, it at length proceeded southwards across the plain. In the night between the 14th and 15th, its western edge overran the farm of *Nes* in *Skaptártunga*, which it entirely consumed, with all its grounds and woodlands. The main current now struck off towards the east, and ran close past the farms

of *Skál* and *Hollt*, before which it stopped a few days; but had, in the meantime burnt up the wood of *Brandaland* belonging to *Kyrkiubæ Abbey*. The torrents that continued to be poured down, proceeded slowly over the tract of ancient lava to the south and south-west of *Skál*, and setting fire to the melted substances, they underwent a fresh fusion, and were heaved up to a considerable elevation. It also rushed into the subterraneous caverns, and during its progress under-ground, it threw up the crust either to the side, or to a great height in the air. In such places, as it proceeded below a thick indurated crust, where there was no vent for the steam, the surface was burst in pieces, and thrown up with the utmost violence and noise to the height of near 180 feet.

On the 18th, another dreadful ejection of liquid and red hot lava proceeded from the volcano, which now entirely covered the rocks that had towered above the reach of the former floods, during their progress through the channel of the *Skaptá*, and flowed down with amazing velocity and force over the masses that were cooling, so that the one stream was literally heaped above the other. Masses of flaming rock were seen swimming in the lava. The water that had been dammed up on both sides of its course, was thrown into a violent state of ebullition, and overflowing its boundaries, it did great damage to the grounds of *Svinadal* and *Hvammur*, which farms had already been attacked by



the edge of the lava, as also to the underwood of *Skaptárdal* on the east.

Continuing its progress, the following day, the lava divided into two streams, one of which flowed with the same velocity as the day before due south, along the river *Melquisl* into *Medal-land*; while the other took an easterly direction over the parish of *Sida*, burning the tract about *Skálarstapa*, and running with inconceivable force from thence to *Skálarfiall*, by which it was prevented from spreading further north. But, rising on the hill, it rolled up the soil before it, and approached within 120 feet of the church and houses of *Skál*, and overran the whole tract between that place and *Hollt*. As *Skál* had now escaped the fury of two successive floods of lava, sanguine hopes were entertained of its safety; but a great quantity of rain having fallen on the 21st, and swelled the water already dammed up in the valley, the church, the parsonage, and outhouses were completely overflowed; and the whole tract was observed, the following morning, to be covered with water in a state of violent ebullition. The western branch having pursued its course along the channel of the *Melquisl*, and spread itself to a great extent on both sides, crossed the river *Steinsmyrarfliot*, and burnt up the church of *Holmasel*, with all its houses and grounds, together with the farm of *Holmár* on the opposite side of the river. Following the *fliot*, it advanced close to the farm of *Efri-Steins-*

*myri*, and greatly spoiled its grass-lands: from thence it inclined towards the south, passing *Sydri-Steinsmyri*, a farm consisting of five separate dwelling-houses, and stopped about 1800 feet from the most northerly, without doing any material injury to the farm. The western edge of this branch, spread itself, at the same time, across the river *Fedgaqvist*, and overran the farms of *Sydri* and *Efri-Fliota*, with the houses and neighbouring grounds, burnt up *Botnar*, and laid the greatest part of the farm of *Hnausar* under water.

From the 22d of June to the 13th of July fresh eruptions took place at intervals, and the lava being impelled forward over the floods and tracts that had attained to some degree of solidity, the mass was raised higher and higher; and making its escape, at length, by three or four different channels, the fiery stream rushed on to finish the work of devastation. The farm of *Nes*, with its houses, meadows, and the most of its pasturage; all the meadows, commons, and wild-corn fields belonging to the glebe of *Asar*; and the greatest part of the meadows, with part of the adjacent grounds and commons of *Ytri-Asar*,—all became a prey to the flaming flood. Happily, the priest saved the most of his effects, with all the ornaments and documents belonging to the church, and betook himself to the western parts of the Syssel. From these farms, it proceeded across the low lands towards the south, till it fell in with the *Kuda-*

*fliot* ; and, after running for some time along its eastern margin, it stopped to the north of the farm *Leidvöltr* : while the rest flowed a little to the east of this farm till it came close to *Stadarholtt*, whence it flowed eastward towards *Hnau-sar*, where it also stopped. Meanwhile, one of the branches that had run in an easterly direction, destroyed the wild corn sands in the *Landbrot* ; and the other, skirting the *Sida* hills, on the 2d of July, broke into the valley, at the upper end of which *Skál* was situated, and, at last, completed its desolation by covering the church and all the houses with lava. The farm of *Hollt* was next attacked, and its houses, with the meadows and excellent pasture grounds belonging to them, were totally destroyed. Pursuing an easterly course, it followed the channel of the *Skaptá* for several days, completely stopped up the river *Fiadrá*, and was poured down a prodigious cataract called *Stapasfoss*, where it totally filled the profound abyss, which that cataract had been making for ages. It now overflowed *Dalbær* in the *Landbrot*, with all its houses, damaged at the same time the farms *Heidi* and *Hunkurbacka* ; and after spoiling part of *Holmur*, the eastern arm of the lava was arrested on the 20th of July, near the high rock *Systrastapi*, about a mile to the west of *Kyrkiubæ Abbey*.

While these awful devastations were going forward in the divisions of *Skaptártunga*, *Medal-land*, *Landbrot*, and *Sida*, the only inconveniences felt by the inhabitants of *Fliotshverfi*, were

the destruction of vegetation by the showers of red hot stones and ashes which fell upon it, and the impregnation of the atmosphere and water with mephitic substances. They had, indeed, twice been enveloped in almost total darkness, especially on the 28th of June, when it was so thick, that it was scarcely possible, at noon day, to distinguish a sheet of white paper, held up at the window, from the blackness of the wall on either side; but they flattered themselves in the hope, that the lava would soon all be ejected, and, at all events, that it would continue to flow in the direction it had originally taken. However, on the 3d of August, they were alarmed by a quantity of smoke, which they observed arising out of the river *Hverfisfliot*; and, as the heat, which was also found to be in the water, daily increased, till at last the river was totally dried up, they concluded, that the same destruction was about to be poured down upon them, which had overwhelmed the parishes to the west.

Nor were their apprehensions without foundation; for the floods of lava having entirely choked up the *Skaptá*, and all the low channels to the west and north of the volcano, it was forced to assume a new course, and running in a south-east direction between mount *Blængur* and *Hverfisfliot*, it was discharged at length into that river, which occasioned vast volumes of steam and smoke to arise from that quarter, attended with dreadful noises and lightnings,

The burning flood now ran down the empty channel, and, filling it to the brink, overflowed the low grounds on both sides ; and, by the evening of the 9th, it had not only reached the outlet into the open and level country, but, in the course of a few hours, had spread itself to the distance of nearly six miles across the plain, and stopped up the road between *Fliotshverfi* and *Sida*. The volcano still continuing to send forth fresh supplies of lava, the red hot flood spread itself wider and wider, and in its progress destroyed the farms of *Eystradal* and *Thverárdal*, the houses, meadows, and neighbouring grounds of which are so completely covered, that the spot where they lay is no longer visible. It also did considerable injury to the farms *Selialand* and *Thverá*, and obliged their inhabitants, as well as the whole parish of *Kálfafell*, to flee for their safety ; yet the above-mentioned were the only houses it burnt. Though this branch ceased to extend over the low country after the end of August, quantities of fresh lava continued still to be thrown up out of the volcano, and a new eruption is said to have taken place so late as the month of February 1784, during the greater part of which year columns of smoke were observed to ascend from many parts in the lava, and it had not quite cooled for nearly two years after the eruptions were over.\*

\* When Mr. Paulson visited this tract in the year 1794, he found a column of smoke still arising from certain parts of the lava ; and some of the rents were filled with hot water.

With respect to the dimensions of the lava, its utmost length from the volcano, along the channel of the *Skaptá*, down to *Hnausar* in *Medal-land*, is about fifty miles, and its greatest breadth in the low country between twelve and fifteen miles; the *Hverfisflot* branch may be about forty miles in length, and seven at its utmost breadth. Its height in the level country does not exceed an hundred feet, but in some parts of the *Skaptá* channel it is not less than six hundred feet high. \*

Such were the phenomena of this dreadful volcanic eruption. Its consequences have already been detailed. The quantity of ashes, brimstone, &c. thrown up into the atmosphere was so great, that nearly the whole European horizon was enveloped in obscurity. Salto-sulphureous rains fell in several countries of the north. In the Faroe islands, the ground was at times almost entirely covered with sand, ashes, and pumice; and luminous meteors were observed in *England*, *Holland*, and other parts of the Continent. It is to these, and the tremendous earthquakes felt the same year in different parts, that Cowper alludes in the second book of his *Task*:

“ Fires from beneath, and meteors from above,  
Portentous, unexampled, unexplained,  
Have kindled beacons in the skies; and the old

\* Chief Justice Stephensen's description of the Eruption of 1783, altered according to Mr. Paulson's MS.

And crazy earth has had her shaking fits  
More frequent, and foregone her usual rest,  
Is it a time to wrangle, when the props  
And pillars of our planet seem to fail,  
And nature, with a dim and sickly eye,  
To wait the close of all ?

The contemplation of so tremendous an event is certainly calculated to produce a train of serious thought in every reflecting mind. While the sceptical speculatist pronounces it to be absolutely incompatible with the infinite wisdom and benevolence of a Supreme Superintending Intelligence, the more experienced and modest naturalist, not only concludes *a priori*, from the skill and fitness discoverable in the general constitution and course of things, that such apparent disorders and irregularities must be conducive to the good of the universal system, but offers very probable proofs of the beneficial tendency of volcanic eruptions, as affording a partial vent to those inflammable substances, which, however necessary as component parts of the terrestrial globe, would, if allowed to accumulate in particular places, ultimately burst forth with such inconceivable violence, that its crust would be shattered to pieces, or at least all that inhabits, beautifies, and adorns its surface, involved in one scene of undistinguishable ruin. The Christian, too, not satisfied with merely tracing the concatenation of natural causes and effects, but believing an established connection to exist between the physical and moral governments or

God, is anxious to ascertain the spiritual ends these extraordinary phenomena are designed to answer, and make the improvement which they so loudly suggest. "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" Yet he is glorious in holiness, fearful in the manifestations of his attributes, and wonderful in all his operations. At his rebuke the foundations of the world are discovered. The earth shaketh and trembleth: the foundations of heaven move and shake because of his anger.

"What then!—were they the wicked above all,  
 "And we the righteous, whose fast-anchored isle  
 "Moved not, while their's was rocked, like a light skiff,  
 "The sport of every wave? No: none are clear,  
 "And none than we more guilty. But, where all  
 "Stand chargeable with guilt, and to the shafts  
 "Of wrath obnoxious, God may choose his mark:  
 "May punish, if he please, the less, to warn  
 "The more malignant. If he spared not them,  
 "Tremble and be amazed at thine escape,  
 "Far guiltier England, lest he spare not thee!"

COWPER.

On the 11th of September, about eleven in the forenoon, I took my departure from *Kálfafell*, and proceeded on to the division of *Sida*. Previous to the eruption, the road lay straight west, along the foot of the hills; but the eastern branch of the lava is so cavernous and rugged, that it can scarcely be crossed on foot, and the traveller is now obliged to go entirely round the tract which it occupies, and has thus to add, at least,



twelve miles to his journey. The *Hverfisfliot* again flows among the lava, and from the difficulty I found in fording it, a little below its egress, it would appear that it has not lost any thing by its desiccation. It is not only extremely broad, but deep, and the bottom is so soft that the horses sink at every step. The son of the clergyman, who did me the favour to accompany me, and whom I found an intelligent well-informed young man, rode first into the stream, and desired me to ride after the baggage-horses; which I found to be an excellent plan, as by that means my horse walked on a more indurated soil. The lava is, for the most part, black, like that near *Myvatn*, but in some parts it approaches to a dark grey, and is more strongly vitrified. The crust is strangely heaved up and cracked, and in many places, a great quantity of rough slag is attached to it.

Having skirted the margin of the lava for more than four hours, surrounded on every side by the blackest and most melancholy gloom, we at last reached *Sida*, the farm-houses and grounds of which presented a very different prospect to our view. Close to the most easterly farm, a beautiful cascade is poured over the brow of the hill, and, on the banks of the river, which is formed by its water, are superb ranges of basaltic pillars, which are so strikingly artificial in their construction, that they have received the name of "The Elfin Chambers." The verdure of the sloping pasture-grounds, and the number of the

sheep and cattle that were browsing on them, produced a very pleasing effect on the mind.

A little to the west of this place, we came to *Hörghland* hospital, one of the four establishments existing on the island, for the reception of incurable lepers, where I had an opportunity of contemplating that loathsome disease, so particularly described in the Levitical code, and which gave occasion to the composition of one of the most sublime pieces of Hebrew poetry that is to be met with in the sacred volume.\*

\* The assertions of Manetho, an ancient Egyptian writer, so eagerly received by the abettors of infidelity, that the whole Hebrew nation was infected with the leprosy, and that this was the cause of their expulsion from the land of Egypt, are ably refuted by Josephus, in his work against Appion, I. 29; and are rejected, even by Toland himself, as destitute of probability. That numerous cases of leprous affection, however, existed in a community of more than two millions of people at the time of their leaving the original seat of the disease, is not at all unlikely; and the particularity and minutiae of the regulations prescribed by Moses, not only display a laudable solicitude for preventing the progress of this formidable evil, but discover a considerable knowledge of medical science, and shew that he had also made proficiency in this department during his residence at the Egyptian court. In the thirteenth chapter of Leviticus, he specifies different eruptions of the skin, the appearance of which rendered the subject suspected of the leprosy, and lays down a number of determinate rules, according to which a judgment was to be formed, whether the appearances in question were infallible symptoms of that malady, or mere innocuous tumours and pimples. These suspicious spots are: 1. *שַׁעֲתָה* *scéth*, which the LXX render *ουλες*, a tumour or lentiginous appearance; ver. 2—10—19—23.—2. *סַפַּח־חַת* *sapakhath*, a furfuraceous tetter, which, though not always, yet,

Two females were at this time in the hospital, the one about thirty, and the other upwards of fifty years of age. The latter of these objects exhibited the most miserable spectacle I ever

as it was generally a precursor of the leprosy, the LXX. have given it by *σημασια*, a mark or sign, verse 2, 6, 7, 8.—3. *בוהרת* *bohereth*, LXX. *τηλαυγης*, a whitish glossy scurf, answering to the *αλφος λιυκος* of the Greeks, and the *morphea alba* of the middle ages, verse 2, &c.—4. *שחי* *shehin*, LXX. *ιλκος*, an ulcer, or inflammatory botch, verse 18.—5. *שן מכוה* *nichvath-esh*, LXX. *κατακαυμα πυρος*, a sore arising from an actual burn, verse 24, &c.; and lastly, a *נבש* *nega*, or bruise on the head, or beard, causing a tenuity of hair, verse 29, &c. These different pustules, and blemishes, the priests were enjoined to examine with the utmost care; and should they be attended with any of the following symptoms, they were to be regarded as certain indications of the leprosy:—

1. The change of colour in the hair from black, which is the prevailing colour in the east, to white or yellow, while at the same time a tenuity ensued, verse 3 and 30.

2. The depth of the suspected pustule. If it only existed in the cuticle or outer skin, it was pronounced innocuous, but if it appeared to fret or penetrate deeper, it was considered to be an infallible prelude, verse 4—20—25, 26—30—34.

3. Its growth or luxuriance: While it continued stationary, and manifested no signs of increase or extension, there was reason to hope it was harmless; yet this was not sufficient to do away all suspicion: the individual was ordered to be confined, during two periods of seven days each, and if no change took place before that time was expired, he was to be declared clean; the eruption being merely *מספודת* *mispakhath*, a morpew or dry scab, verse 6—8—22, &c.

4. Its exhibition of red or living flesh. This was viewed as a symptom of an advanced state of leprosy, verse 9—17. If the wound of an ulcer, or burn, assumed a whitish colour, verging to red (*לבנה אדמדמת* *leghanah adamdameth*), it was also

beheld. Her face and hands were swelled to a frightful degree, and full of livid red sores or botches, between which appeared scars or rents, resembling cuts in a high state of inflammation.

an infallible symptom ; but if it became pallid, or dark, there was no further ground of suspicion, verse 26, &c. The obscure white spots, mentioned verse 39, are declared to be innocuous, forming a species of eruption, there called ברוק *bohak*, and which, according to Niebuhr and Forskål, still prevails among the Arabs, who give it the same name, and neither consider it to be contagious nor mortal. They do not even scruple to lie with the person that has it.

As no notice is taken by Moses of the anæsthesia, which is an inseparable attendant of the genuine Elephantiasis, it has, after all, been doubted whether this be the identical malady he is here guarding against ; but to this it has been replied, that insensibility does not take place in the very first stages of the distemper ; and as Moses had no intention of giving a medical description of all its characters, there was no occasion for his mentioning a sign which did not exist till it had made some degree of progress. Besides, as it was an easy matter for such as wished to conceal the leprosy, to feign sensibility, the publication of the symptom in question would, in a great measure, have defeated the end of his political regulations on this head.

It is evident, not only from the name given to the disease, but also from the complaints uttered by Job, and the general strain of the arguments used by his friends, that that pious man was afflicted with the elephantiasis, or the worst kind of Oriental leprosy. In Chap. ii. 7 it is called שחין רע *shehin rá*, a malignant ulceration ; and as this disease was both dreadful in its symptoms, and incurable, it was viewed by the ancients as a peculiar punishment inflicted by God on such as were guilty of some flagrant act of wickedness. Hence its Hebrew name נגע צרעת *ne tzeraath* “ The stroke of the scourge.” Hence, Job’s wife, viewing his recovery as impossible, bids him bless God and die. His being unable to make

The other seemed to be affected with a less malignant species of the same malady: for though her face was also swelled, no pustules appeared; but the skin was covered with whitish glossy scales, and in some places intersected by reddish streaks, which are most probably a disposition to wrinkles. They were both sitting in the door of the Lazar-house, and the deepest melancholy seemed depicted in their looks.

It is now generally agreed among physicians, that the Icelandic leprosy is the legitimate *Elephantiasis*, or *Lepra Arabum*, one of the most Herculean distempers ever employed as scourges to the human race. In its primary stages, its symptoms are inconsiderable, and very ambiguous. A small reddish spot, scarcely larger than the point of a needle, breaks out at first

any farther use of his fingers, ii. 8; the corroded, stiff, cloddy, cracked, and loathsome state of his skin, vii. 5. xiii. 28. xvi. 8. 14. xix. 26; the fœtidness of his breath, xvii. 1. xix. 17; the gloominess of his looks, xvi. 16; the pain in his bones, xxx. 17; his wearisome nights, vii. 3, 4; terrific dreams, ver. 14; his wishing for death, vi. 8—10, vii. 15, 16. x. 1; and his being shunned by his intimate friends and relations, xix. 13—16; these, and other characters which might be collected from this poem, all shew that he was afflicted with the Arabian leprosy. Nor must I omit mentioning the coincidence, that one of the Hexaplar versions actually has ελεφαντις, the elephantiasis, Job ii. 7; as also that this disease still exists about Damascus, in the vicinity of which Job is supposed to have lived. The author of the ancient Norwegian work, intituled, "The Royal Mirror," says expressly, that Job was smitten with "ögurligri likthrâ," a terrible leprosy:

about the forehead, nose, corner of the eyes, and the lips; and, in proportion as it increases, other pustules make their appearance on the breast, arms, arm-pits, &c. which generally dry up in one place and break out in another without pain, till the disease has considerably advanced, when they cover almost the whole body, give the skin a scabrous appearance, stiffen it, and terminate sometimes in shining scales, which fall off like dust, sometimes in malignant tumours and swellings. The patient, in the mean time, labours under lassitude of body, anæsthesia, and lowness of spirits. When the malady becomes inveterate, the breath, which before was disagreeable, now gets intolerably foetid; a strong unctuous matter is perspired; the hair, already changed in colour, falls off; the voice grows hoarse and nasal; and the face becomes terribly deformed. The look is wild and haggard; the pallid red colour of the body is only relieved by the most disgusting ulcers, which, becoming deeper, putrid, and virulent, not only affect the bones and joints, but, as they spread over the skin, deep ravines are formed, which give it an elephantine appearance, whence the name elephantiasis. The fingers get quite stiff and crooked, and the nails and other parts of the body fall off by degrees. During the night the patient is harassed with terrible dreams, and he is oppressed by day with a tedious melancholy, in which he is often tempted to make away with himself. He gradually surrenders one part of

his body after another to the insatiate malady; and at length, death, the long wished-for deliverer, comes suddenly and puts an end to his misery. \*

As the leprosy is infectious, almost every person shuns the company of the sufferer, which must greatly add to the misery of his situation; nor can he flatter himself, after the distemper has advanced to a certain degree, with any hopes of relief from medical assistance. It is considered to be irregularly hereditary; yet the symptoms do not become visible before the person has reached the years of maturity. In cases of infection too, it generally happens that three or four years elapse before any eruption breaks out in the skin. It then proceeds with slow, but steady progress, and it is possible for the person who is afflicted with it, to drag out a wretched existence to the protracted term of fifty or sixty years. Very emphatically have the inhabitants of the East given this disease, among other significatory designations, the name of "The First-born of Death." Nor is the Icelandic "Líkthrá" scarcely less striking. It properly signifies a rancid, putrefying corpse, than which there is nothing a person inveterate-

\* Gieslesen de Elephantiasis Norvegica, and Schilling de lepra in Michaelis' Orient. und Exeget. Biblioth. xvii. 1 and Neu. Orient. und Exeget. Biblioth. iii. 168. together with Henslers Geschichte des Abendländischen Aussatzes, and Jahn's Biblische Archäologie, 1 Theil, § 213.

ly affected with the leprosy more perfectly resembles.

The origin of this dreadful malady has been traced to Egypt, where it still exists, as also in Arabia, Morocco, China, Tartary, some parts of Russia and Sweden, the sea-coasts of Norway, the West Indian and Feroe islands, and Iceland. It was first transported by the Phœnicians into Greece: it followed the Romans on their return from Asiatic conquest; and from the twelfth to near the end of the sixteenth century, it was the terror and scourge of Europe, into which it was introduced a second time by the Crusaders. What a mercy that we are now almost entirely freed from a disease whose victims were at one time so numerous in Europe, that every country in it was filled with hospitals for their reception! \*

The leprosy prevails most in the south and west quarters of Iceland, which is to be ascribed to the inhabitants of these parts being mostly employed in fishing, the rancidity of their food, their wet woollen clothes, an insalubrious air, and their not paying due attention to habits of cleanliness. The four hospitals, one in each quarter, were established in the year 1652, as appears from two royal rescripts of that date, in virtue of which, four farms belonging to the crown were appropriated to that purpose; the supernumerary utensils and articles in the pos-

\* Jahn. ut sup.



session of the cloisters, were to be devoted to their establishment; and a privilege was granted, authorizing collections to be made, and certain fines and taxes to be appropriated for their maintenance. The managers were allowed a certain gratuity for their trouble, and were, besides, exempted from paying the common taxes. \* These establishments have been subject to several changes since first instituted; and, at present, they are placed under the direction of the Stifamtman and the Bishop, and enjoy only the fish-tax, which is collected in the following manner: On the first fishing-day after Easter, an equal share of the fish taken by all the six-oared boats, is appropriated to the hospital, except when the number of fish that is caught does not amount to five, in which case the hospital gets its share the following day. Considering the number that are afflicted with this evil, these establishments do not by any means appear adequate to their relief. It is seldom they receive more than eight lepers altogether; and, in the year 1785, not fewer than ninety-nine leprous persons were found in the diocese of *Skalholt*. † What little funds they possessed, have been nearly annihilated by the recent depreciation of Danish currency.

Skirting the base of the hills, and fording the river *Geirlandsá*, we arrived, about six o'clock,

\* *Histor. Eccles. Island. Tom. III. pp. 460, 461.*

† *Island i det Attende Aarhundrede, p. 347.*

at the abbey of *Kyrkiubæ*, a place of great celebrity in the annals of Iceland. It would appear, from the *Landnámabok*, that, previous to the arrival of the Norwegians, *Kyrkiubæ* had been inhabited by *Papar*, or Irishmen, professing Christianity, on which account it was held in such sanctity, that it was deemed impossible for any idolater to live here. \* It was, accordingly, taken possession of by a Norwegian, of the name of Ketell, who had received his education in the Hebrides, and was branded, for his attachment to the Christian religion, with the opprobrious appellation of *enn Fíflski*, the Foolish. Unmoved by the sneers of his heathen neighbours, this man adhered to the true religion; and, if we may judge from the conduct of his descendants, he must have taken great pains in instilling its principles into the minds of his children, for they walked in his footsteps for many generations. On the death of Ketell, his heirs and successors were expelled from *Kyrkiubæ* by Hildir, the son of a neighbouring peasant, who, placing no faith in the supposed sanctity of the place, was determined to occupy it; but, it is told, that, on his approaching the wall of the *tún*, he was instantly struck dead, which circumstance tended in no small degree to raise its repute. About the middle of the twelfth century, it was in the possession of a rich and learned

\* “ Höfdo thar ádur setit *Papar*, oc eigi máttu thar heidner menn búna.” Part IV. cap. xi.

priest, named Biarnhard, who, confirmed in his resolution by the advice of Klang, bishop of *Skalholt*, erected a nunnery here, of the order of St. Benedict, which was dedicated by said bishop in the year 1186, and continued to be governed by a series of twelve Abbesses till the Reformation, when it was secularized, and its possessions, which at that time amounted to no less than thirty-one farms, were annexed to the private domains of the King of Denmark. In the year 1542, Christian III. wrote to Halldora, the last abbess, ordering her to establish a school at the abbey, in which the youth in the vicinity might be taught to read and write, and be instructed in the principles of the Reformation; but the plan was never carried into effect.\* At present it is rented by a Hreppstiori, and is still superior in appearance to any farm in the district. The church is also in good condition, having been lately repaired with the drift-wood which the sea deposits in great abundance on the coast. At the church-door is a Runic epitaph, hewn in a polished stone of blue basalt; but the characters are so obliterated, that the inscription is no longer intelligible. In the church-yard are numerous Icelandic epitaphs on the same kind of stone, several of which are composed by the clergyman's lady, who is said to possess some share of poetical talent.

\* Hist. Eccles. Island. Tom. IV. pp. 77—82.

A little to the east of *Kyrkiubæ* is one of the finest specimens of basaltic architecture I have ever beheld. It lies close to the road, in the middle of the sand, and forms nearly a perfect square, measuring twenty-five feet in length, by twenty in breadth. The pillars are all pentagonal, and are joined together in the most exact manner. The interstices between them are nicely filled up with a thin stratum of a yellowish colour, and about the eighth part of an inch in thickness, which, being edged in along the surface, as if done with a trowel, suggests at first sight the idea of mortar. On a closer survey, however, it evidently appears to be a natural cement that has run in a liquid state while the pillars were forming. Their greatest diameter is about nine inches. The surface, which is nearly level with the sand, is as smooth as pavement; and, having been bleached by the rains, wears a greyish aspect, which renders the spot very conspicuous, and is finely contrasted with the blackness of the surrounding sand. According to a tradition still current in the neighbourhood, these pillars were the foundation and floor of a monastery at a very remote period; and indeed, considering the fact that Irish Christians once frequented the place, it is not altogether improbable, that, on their discovery of this bed of basalt, they may have erected a religious house on it, especially as it bore so striking a resemblance to the Giant's Causeway in their native country.

At an early liour on the 12th, I proceeded into the division called the *Landbrot*, which is separated from *Sida* by the *Skaptá*, whose water again flows in part in the former channel, after having sought its way through the rents and cavities of the lava. Nearly the whole of this tract consists of lava, which must have flowed long before the occupation of the island, for it is covered, in most places, with a thick soil, and overgrown with grass. From the inequalities of the surface, and the deep chasms which every now and then make their appearance, it is evidently of the more cavernous lavas; yet, surprising as it may seem, a vast number of farms and hamlets are raised on this calcined and vaulted foundation. In many parts are large apertures in the middle of the pasture grounds, where the crust has lately given way; and, viewing the situation of the houses, it is impossible not to tremble for the safety of the inhabitants, since, in all probability, many of them are separated from a watery tomb only by a porous dome, not exceeding a foot or a foot and an half in thickness.

Passing *Arnardrángar*, a farm situated close to the margin of what seems to be a more recent lava, I came to *Efristeinsmyri*, where the new lava begins; and, skirting it for some time, I arrived at the *Eldvatn*, a broad river, or rather lake, which derives its name from its having broken forth subsequently to the late eruption, and appears to be the reservoir of the

*Steinsmyrarfliot*, and several other inferior streams, whose course was changed by the progress of the lava. I should here, in all probability, have finished my pilgrimage, had not that God who had hitherto watched over me again interposed for my deliverance. At different distances in the water are long poles, which have been thrust in with a view to point out the proper fording-place; but, as their position is only known to those who live in the neighbourhood, they are more apt to decoy a stranger into peril, than furnish him with a safe direction. Just as I was on the eve of entering the water, with the intention of crossing it above the poles, yet as close to them as possible, it was forded by a lad from the opposite side, who directed me to keep below the poles, as the bottom above them was full of deep holes, and rents, and absolutely unfordable. I was now able to account for the shouting of the people at a farm I had passed, but who, as I did not give any heed to them, must have supposed I was acquainted with the danger.

Having got safely over, I rode on to *Hnausar*, the abode of Sira Jon Jonson, who immediately changed his clothes, and saddling his horse, accompanied me in order to guide me across the *Kudafliot*, the broadest river in Iceland.\* By the way, our conversation naturally turned upon the situation of his parishioners with respect to the

\* On account of its size, this river has been called the *Nile* of Iceland.

Scriptures; and I learned, with concern, that though his parish contains a population of more than 250 souls, not more than six families are in possession of a Bible. Before reaching the margin of the river, Sira Jon engaged a peasant in the vicinity to proceed with us, as he was not without apprehensions of danger. Like that of the *Hverfisfliot*, the bottom of the *Kudafliot* is full of uliginous matter, and, in many places, the water is so deep as nearly to cover the back of the horses. It took us a complete hour to ford it: having accomplished which, we crossed a pretty difficult morass, and, in the course of another hour, arrived at *Myrar*, where Sira Sigurdr Gisleson resides, and pitched my tent on a green spot behind the houses. The reception I met with was distinguishingly kind, and warm milk, the dish I always chose on my arrival at any place in the evening, was almost instantly served up to me.

Sira S. is a young man, has officiated some years as chaplain to the Archdeacon at *Gardè*, and has only lately been married, and removed to the living of *Thyckvabæ*, the church and ancient monastery of which lie a little to the west of this place. The tract is called *Alftaver*, or "the Station of Swans," owing to the multitude of these fowls that frequented a lake in the vicinity in former times. The monastery was founded and dedicated in the year 1168. The monks were of the order of St Augustine, and were under the direction of a series of abbots, nineteen in number, till the Reformation. Brandr Jonson, the

sixth in the series, was the most learned and indefatigable man of his day, and being in great favour with Magnus, King of Norway, that prince prevailed on him to translate into Icelandic, or to speak more properly, the Norse language, the history of Alexander the Great, and several other Roman authors, together with the famous work *Stjórn*, \* which was long mistaken for the Bible, and of which a particular description will be found in the historical and critical view of the Icelandic Scriptures inserted in the Appendix. It is a remarkable fact, that in the parish of *Thyckvaba*, where, about the middle of the thirteenth century, the first attempts were made to translate the Bible into the vernacular language, not a single copy of the divine oracles should exist at the present day! Sira Sigurdr was extremely happy to find the wants of his parishioners would now be supplied, and assured me of his determination to point out to them the importance of reading the Scriptures, and to exhort such of them as were able, to purchase copies for themselves and their children.

From *Alftaver* and *Skaptártunga*, which lies to the north, on the opposite side of the river, there is a road to the southern parts of the island, which, as it runs along the back of the mountains on the coast, has obtained the name of *Fialla-bak*. By pursuing this route the traveller not only saves two days journey, but

\* Hist. Eccles. Island. tom. iv. p. 58.



cludes the dangerous rivers which are poured forth from the Yökuls. As it was necessary for me to be at *Eyrarbacka* or *Reykjavik* before the last of the ships sailed for *Copenhagen*, in order to write for more Bibles and New Testaments for the following year, I had some thoughts of following this track; but considering, on the other hand, that it lay through a totally uninhabited part of the country, and it being of importance that I should visit the Dean of *West Skaptafell's Sysse*, I preferred the common road. A little to the north of the *Fiälla-bak* lies the *Torfa Yökul*, remarkable on account of the boiling springs which are situated in the midst of the ice, and send forth immense columns of steam into the atmosphere.\*

About noon the following day I left *Myrar*, accompanied by the two clergymen, (Sira Jon having stopped all night,) both of whom insisted on proceeding with me to *Vik*, a circumstance which proved the more gratifying, as it gave rise to an interesting conversation relative to the importance of the work of the ministry, the responsibility attaching to the discharge of its functions, and the necessity of personal religion, and unremitting fervent prayer in order to any legitimate hopes of success. At a short distance from *Thyckvabæ* monastery, which is only distinguishable from the surrounding hamlets by its church, we entered *Myrdals-sand*, a desert

\* *Olafsen's og Povelsen's Reise*, p. 766.

tract, consisting for the most part of lava and ashes, which have been deposited on it by the neighbouring volcano of *Köllugiá*.

We here observed a number of people cutting the wild corn, \* a vegetable which grows in different parts of the island, but nowhere more plentifully than among the sand and ashes which cover the grounds along the coast at this place. They cut it with a sickle considerably above the root, and, collecting it in small bundles, twenty of which form a *kerfi* or sheaf, they bind three sheaves together, and make what they call a *baggi*, one of which is placed on each side of a horse, and thus conveyed home, when they dry and thresh it (Iceland. *dusta*,) and then lay it up in heaps against the winter. The straw is used for thatching the houses. Having been dried in the *sofn* or kiln, the corn is ground, as it is needed, by hand-mills, the stones of which are usually made of lava; and these, with a few exceptions, are the only kind of mills on the island. They are generally wrought by two females, as in oriental countries, Math. xxiv. 41. and are driven by a handle of wood fixed on an iron pivot near the circumference of the upper millstone. The work is very laborious, so that the women must constantly relieve each other; and as none but the lowest of the servants are employed in it, we may perceive the force of the prophet's address to the princely daughter of Babylon,

\* *Arundo Arenaria*, Iceland. *Melur*.

“ Take the millstones, and grind meal,” Isaiah xlvii. 2. See also Exod. xi. 5. The Icelanders use the meal of the wild corn both for porridge and a kind of thin soft cakes, resembling the barley bannocks which are common among the Scotch peasantry. Their taste, though peculiar, I found by no means unpleasant. The meal is also made up into small lumps of dough, which are eaten in milk, and sometimes given to the shepherds, who eat it raw on the mountains, and are very fond of it. Several parishes are thus supplied with the spontaneous production of the sand; and the meal is held in such estimation, that it is sent to distant parts of the island, where it is deemed rare and delicious. \*

The lava in *Myrdals-sand* is supposed to have flowed about the year 900, shortly after the tract was taken possession of by the Norwegians. We are told in the *Landnámabok*, that Rafn Hafnarlykell, who inhabited *Dynskógum*, having a presentiment of the eruption, removed his dwelling to *Lágey*, where he was secure from danger. From the same annals, it appears, that the tract was beautiful and well inhabited before the eruption of the subterraneous fire; but that event compelled the settlers to flee west to *Höfðabrekka*, where they pitched their tents in a plain, called from that circumstance, *Tialldavöllu*, but owing to the savage disposition of a smith of the

\* Olafsen og Provelsen, p. 829—832.

name of Vemundr, they were obliged to decamp, and seek shelter farther west.\* Crossing the lava, we had on the left hand the large triangular promontory of *Hiörleifshöfði*, where Hiörleif, the companion of Ingolf, landed in the year 874, and being decoyed into a neighbouring wood by his Irish slaves, the following spring, in search of a bear, he was murdered by them, together with the rest of his company. The slaves, gathering his property together, fled to the *Vestmanna* islands; but were afterwards discovered, and killed by Ingolf, in revenge for the murder of his friend. From his lamentation over Hiörleif's dead body, we are left to infer, either that Hiörleif professed Christianity, or that he was influenced by atheistical principles, though the former be the more likely: *Litit lagdest her fyrer godan dreng, er leoter thrælar skyldo at bana verda, oc sva se ec hvereom verda er eigi vill blota.* "What an ignoble thing, for so excellent a man to fall by the hand of vile slaves! But such must ever be the fate of those who will not sacrifice to the gods." †

The promontory of *Hiörleifshöfði* stands quite isolated; and, being somewhat hollow in the middle, it is inhabited by a solitary farmer. Its sides are nearly perpendicular, in some places excavated, and, to the west and east, its base has been terribly scooped by the deluges poured down

\* Landnámabök, Part 4. cap. xii.

† Ibid. Part. 1. cap. vi. vii.

upon the plain by the volcanic *Yökul Kötlugiá*. This mountain occupies a distinguished place among the Icelandic volcanoes. It is situated about twenty miles back from the coast, and forms the eastern termination of the *Eyafialla Yökul*. Towards the south, in which direction a number of glaciers descend from it, lie *Köllu* and *Myrdals-sands*, a tract of about twenty square miles in extent, consisting entirely of ashes and other volcanic substances, deposited there during the eruptions, and forming one of the rudest and most forbidding scenes imaginable. As the volcano is almost entirely covered with ice, in which are large and deep fissures, it has never been fully explored; but its crater is visible at a distance, and consists of an immense gap, surrounded by black rugged rocks, which, in all probability, are nothing but lava that has been instantly cooled, on its ejection, by the superincumbent ice. Olafsen and Povelsen proceeded within a short distance of it in 1756; but were obliged to give up their attempt, as they were enveloped in snow and mist, and exposed to the rage of the volcano, which had been seen to emit flames only two days before. From the occupation of the island to the present day, *Kötlugiá* has been known to disgorge flames, and either lava, or immense exundations of hot water, *eight* different times.

The first eruption, which is also the first phenomenon of this kind, mentioned in the annals of Iceland,\* took place about the year 894; and

\* See Landnámabok.

its effects are still visible, in the tract of ancient lava to the east of the mountain. It was again in action in the year 1311, continuing to vomit ashes and sand the greater part of the winter; and, melting the ice about the crater, the inhabited tract in the vicinity was inundated, and all the inhabitants, except two, perished in the flood. The third eruption happened in the year 1416, and the fourth, in the year 1580; but they appear to have done little damage to the inhabitants.

Of the fifth eruption of *Kötlugiá*, which happened 1625, the following account is given by Thorstein Magnusson, at that time the occupant of *Thyckvabæ* cloister:—"At day-break on the 2d of September, it began to thunder in the *Yökul*; and, about eight o'clock, floods of water and ice were poured down upon the low country, and carried away upwards of two hundred loads of hay, which lay in the fields about *Thyckvabæ*. These floods continued to be poured forth, like a raging sea, till past one o'clock in the afternoon, when they gradually diminished; but were succeeded by terrible darkness, earthquakes, thunder, flames, and showers of sand. Nor was it in the immediate vicinity of the crater alone that the fire appeared, but down in the inhabited tract, at the distance of nearly twenty miles from the mountain, igneous vapours were seen attaching themselves to the clothes of the inhabitants. This dreadful scene continued, with little variation, till the 13th of the month. It was frequently so

clear at night, that the mountains, with all their clefts and divisions, were seen as distinctly at the distance of twenty miles as they were in the clearest day. Sometimes, the flames were pure as the sun: sometimes they were red; and, at others, they discovered all the colours of the rainbow. The lightnings were visible, now in the air, and now running over the surface of the ground; and such as witnessed them, were less or more affected, in such parts of their bodies as were uncovered. These flashes were accompanied by the loudest claps of thunder, and darted backwards and forwards, now to the ground, and now into the air, dividing sometimes into separate bolts, each of which appeared to be followed by a separate report; and after shooting in different directions, they instantly collected again, when a dreadful report was heard, and the igneous appearance fell, like a water-spout, to the ground, and became invisible. While the showers of sand lasted, it was frequently so dark in the day-time, that two individuals, holding each other by the hand, could not discover each other's face."

The sixth eruption took place in the year 1660, and the quantity of ice, &c. carried down by the inundation was so great, that, where it was deposited, it rose to the height of forty-nine fathoms above the surface of the former depositions. One of the floods carried away the houses and church of *Höfdubrecka*; and the church was observed to swim among the masses of ice, to a

considerable distance in the sea, ere it fell to pieces. The volcano appears, with some intermission, to have erupted sand the two following years.

In the year 1721, the inundations lasted nearly three days, and carried along with them such amazing quantities of ice, stones, earth, and sand, that the sea was filled with them, to the distance of three miles from the shore. The sun was darkened by the smoke and ashes, which were thrown into the air; sand and pumice were blown almost over the whole island; and the ice and water desolated a considerable tract of grass land over which they flowed.\*

The last eruption, however, or that of 1755 and 1756, was inconceivably more dreadful than any of the preceding, and was rendered the more famous by the terrible convulsions to which, at the same time, a great part of the terrestrial globe was subjected. Not only were the British isles rocked by repeated and violent shocks of an earthquake, houses thrown down, rocks split, and the waters of the sea and lakes heaved up; but in Norway, Sweden, Germany, Holland, France, and Italy, the same phenomena were experienced. Spain and Portugal, however, suffered most from the shocks. Numerous villages, convents, and churches, were demolished; the largest mountains shaken from the foundations; and the low

\* Mr. Paulson's MS. and Horrebow's Nat. Hist. of Iceland, p. 12.



grounds inundated by the swelling and overflowing of the rivers. Lisbon, in particular, exhibited a scene the most tragical and melancholy. The most ponderous edifices were heaved up and shaken; steeples, towers, and houses, thrown down; the ground and streets danced under the feet of the inhabitants; and many thousands of them were buried in the ruins. Nor was the earthquake confined to Europe. It stretched over into Barbary, and destroyed upwards of a dozen of cities on the coast of Africa. Its concussions were also felt in Persia, in the West Indies, and in America. \*

The inhabitants of the tract about *Kötlugid* were first apprised of the impending catastrophe on the forenoon of the 17th of October, by a number of quick and irregular tremifactions, which were followed by three immense floods from the *Yökul*, that completely overflowed *Myrdals-sand*, and carried before them almost incredible quantities of ice and gravel. Masses of ice, resembling small mountains in size, pushed one another forward, and bore vast pieces of solid rock on their surface. After the rocking had continued some time, an exceedingly loud report was heard, when fire and water were observed to be emitted alternately by the volcano, which appeared to vent its rage through three apertures, si-

\* Stukeley's *Philosophy of Earthquakes*, pp. 9—30. Third Edit. Lond. 1756. 8vo.

tuated close to each other. At times the column of fire was carried to such a height, that it illuminated the whole of the surrounding atmosphere, and was seen at the distance of a hundred and eighty miles: at other times, the air was so filled with smoke and ashes, that the adjacent parishes were enveloped in total darkness. Between these alternations of light and obscurity, vast red-hot globes were thrown to a great height, and broken into a thousand pieces. The following night presented one of the most awful and sublime spectacles imaginable. An unremitting noise, like that produced by the discharge of heavy artillery, was heard from the volcano; a fiery column of variegated hues rose into the atmosphere; flames and sparks were scattered in every direction, and blazed in the most vivid manner.

The eruption continued, with more or less violence, till the 7th of November, during which period dreadful exundations of hot water were poured forth on the low country; and the masses of ice, clay, and solid rock, that they hurled into the sea, were so great, that it was filled to the distance of more than fifteen miles, and in some places where formerly it was forty fathoms deep, the tops of the newly-deposited rocks were now seen towering above the water. A violent eruption happened again on the 17th of November, when the volcano remained inactive till the following year, during which it emitted fire and water

five times, viz. January 15th, June 28th and 29th, and August 12th and 25th.

The principal damage occasioned by these eruptions consisted in the destruction of the pasture-grounds throughout the most part of the Syssel; in consequence of which, about fifty farms were laid waste, and the inhabitants reduced to circumstances of extreme distress. Numbers of cattle were carried away by the deluge; and the mephitic substances, with which every thing was impregnated, brought on a raging mortality in different parts of the country. On the breaking forth of the water, a number of people fled for refuge to an insulated mountain called *Hafursey*, where they were obliged to stay seven days, without either meat or drink, and were exposed to the showers of stones, fire, and water, which fell around them. The lightning, which was very violent during the eruption, penetrated through solid rocks, and killed two people and eleven horses, three of which were in a stable. One of the persons killed was a farmer, whom it struck dead as he left the door of his house. What is remarkable, his upper clothes, which were of wool, wore no marks of fire, but the linen he had under them was burnt; and, when he was undressed, it was found, that the skin and flesh of his right side were consumed to the very bone. His maid-servant was struck with the lightning at the same time; and though her clothes were instantly changed, it continued to burn in the

pores of her body, and singed the clothes she put on. She died a few days afterwards, having, in the mean time, suffered inexpressible pain. \*

Since the above mentioned period, *Kötlugiá* has remained in a state of tranquillity. The weather being extremely hazy while I was in this quarter, I was denied the pleasure of seeing the volcano itself; but on crossing a pretty deep river, called *Mulequisl*, I observed several of the small mountains, consisting of ice, sand, and gravel, which it has hurled along in its fury. At the termination of the sand stands a mountain of an ordinary size, the sides of which have been terribly washed away by the inundations from the *Yökul*; and the road lying close past its western division, the cliffs assume a most threatening appearance over the head of the traveller. Incredible as it may seem, there is a farm situated on the mountain, close to the edge of the precipice, where it may be about six or seven hundred feet of perpendicular height. Its name is *Höfdabrecka*, or "Breakneck," and lay formerly on the plain, but was removed, after an eruption, to its present elevated position, that it might escape similar accidents in future.

Turning the rocks, which are composed of tuffa, and present a very rugged and excavated appearance, we came to two beautiful dales which run up into the mountain, and are clothed on both sides with the richest grass. In the latter of these, the farms of *Vik* are situated, where

\* *Olafsen og Povelsen*, pp. 756—762.

the Sysselmand Jon Gudmundson and the Surgeon Svend Paulson reside. They are surrounded by high ridges of mountains, which form an excellent defence against the rage of the volcano, except in front, where a noble view of the sea presents itself. At the termination of the mountain on the right, several high rocks appear in the water, which, in foggy weather, resemble a fleet of ships; and, indeed, I actually mistook them for ships at first sight. As the house of the surgeon came first in my way, I sought shelter with him from the heavy rain to which we had been exposed most part of the road. This gentleman is indisputably the first Icelander of the age with respect to natural science, especially those departments of it which more nearly concern his own island. He has travelled through the most of it, for the purpose of examining the numerous interesting phenomena with which it abounds, and has constantly kept a journal of his travels. Were this to be published, it would certainly present the world with a fuller and more accurate account of the natural history of Iceland than any we have yet received. He has also written a topographical description of the Yökuls, and other mountains of the island, which were communicated to a society in Norway, but, as that society ceased to exist immediately after, Mr. Paulsen's essay never appeared. Were he invited to become a member of any of our geologic societies, he would be able to furnish them with much valuable information. One would

almost suppose he had fixed his residence at this place, for the express purpose of watching the motions of *Köllugiá*, as he has only to repair to the summit of the mountain behind his house, in order to obtain a magnificent view of the whole region.

The rain continuing on the 14th, I did not leave *Vik* till three o'clock in the afternoon, when I proceeded with Mr. Paulson into *Myrdal*, or the Valley of Bogs, from which the whole tract takes its name. As the afternoon was serene, the smoke arising from the numerous cottages, scattered on both sides of the valley, produced a very fine effect. Crossing the swamps with considerable difficulty, we ascended a bare and stony mountain, the opposite side of which we reached a little before dark, when I prevailed on Mr. P. to return, after he had pointed out to me the house of a clergyman where I intended stopping all night. My servant and I now descended into the plain; and after riding about a mile in it we came to *Hafursá*, a river otherwise of no great magnitude, but which was now much swelled by the rain. Having forded several inferior branches, we arrived at the main stream, which the servant immediately entered; but he had only proceeded a short way, when his horse was carried off his feet, and once or twice both he and the horse were completely immersed in the flood. The baggage-horses following, they were rolled furiously down by the impetuosity of the current to the distance of ten or twelve yards,

so that I gave up all for lost ; but, in the kind providence of God, they reached a sand bank on the opposite side of the stream, and got all safely to the margin. To pursue the tract marked by them I considered presumptuous, notwithstanding their having eventually succeeded in getting over; and riding a little higher up, I attempted to ford the same division of the stream where it broke off from the body of the river ; but my horse, as if sensible of the risk his companions had run, would not proceed, and turned just in time to save both himself and me. I then returned, and called to my servant to proceed to the house, which lay close by, and request some of the people to come and shew me the proper fording-place. After an interval of about twenty minutes, I could but just discover a person on horseback endeavouring to come over to me ; but, being always forced back again, I was at last told that the river was *ofer*, or unfordable, and had no resource left but to endeavour, as well as I could in the dark, to reford the branches I had already crossed, and, as there were no houses in the vicinity, to ride back to the side of the mountain, where I resolved to spend the night. As I returned, I descried a light moving in the vicinity of the river ; and, my imagination being somewhat disturbed by the gloominess of the scene, I fancied I heard a person screaming, which gave me great uneasiness, as I feared either my servant, or some person belonging to the house, had fallen into the

river ; but I learned next morning that the light had been exposed by the good people of *Holt*, to prevent me from bewildering myself in the dark. Having reached a part of the mountain where there was plenty of good grass, I took the saddle off my horse, and tying what strings I had about me to his bridle, I fixed the other end to the stirrups, in order to give him as extensive a range as possible, and sat down on the saddle, which kept me off the wet ground, and in this situation awaited the return of day. In one sense, I could say with Colma, "It is night. I am alone ; forlorn on the hill of storms. The wind is heard in the mountain. The torrent pours down the rock. No hut receives me from the rain ; forlorn on the hill of winds." But I could also, with a nobler propriety, adopt the effusions of Thomson :

" 'Tis nought to me ;  
 Since God is ever present, ever felt,  
 In the void waste, as in the city full ;  
 And where he vital breathes, there must be joy."

The night was long, and a number of showers fell ; but the length of the one was shortened, and the disagreeableness of the other ameliorated by the happy state of my mind, to which a sense of Divine preservation, and an unshaken confidence in God, had given a tone of elevation and joy. The following lines were so completely in unison with my feelings, that I could not



refrain from repeating them aloud as I approached the mountain :

“ Jesus, lover of my soul,  
 Let me to thy bosom fly ;  
 While the raging billows roll,  
 While the tempest still is high !  
 Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,  
 Till the storm of life be past ;  
 Safe into the haven guide ;  
 O receive my soul at last !  
 Other refuge have I none,  
 Hangs my helpless soul on thee ;  
 Leave, oh ! leave me not alone,  
 Still support and comfort me.  
 All my trust on thee is stay'd,  
 All my help from thee I bring ;  
 Cover my defenceless head  
 With the shadow of thy wing.”

About two o'clock, as I felt rather fatigued, I went to some cliffs that were fast by, and, in imitation of the patriarch Jacob, “ took off the stones of that place, and put them for my pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep.” After day-break, when the shadows of night had vanished, I began to survey the surrounding scenery. To the right, at no great distance, lay the volcanic Yökul ; the isolated mountain *Pietursey* appeared in the plain to the left, and before it the breakers were dashing with a tremendous roar upon the rocks. Direct before me lay the plain, through which the river was still pouring its restless contents : and, in the dis-

tance, I could descry the *Solheima*, and part of the *Eyafialla Yökuls*. Committing my way afresh to the Lord, I saddled my horse about five o'clock, and as I approached the river, I was met by a peasant on horseback, who had come over to my assistance. The water having now considerably abated, we got over without much difficulty ; and, arriving at *Hollt*, my servant and I congratulated each other on our again meeting in the land of the living. I was immediately presented with an excellent dish of boiled milk, on which, in addition to what I had in my provision-chest, I made a most hearty meal, not having partaken of any food since the forenoon of the preceding day.

## CHAP. VIII.

*Fell—Solheima—Yökul River—Solheima Yökul  
—Caves—Steinar—Varmahlid—Vestmanna Is-  
lands—Algerine Pirates—Hollt—Markarfliot  
—Intelligent Peasant—Fliotshlid—Oddè—  
Dean Jonson—Samund Sigfusson—Mount  
Hekla—Number of its eruptions—Eyrarbacka  
—Desolate Mountains—Rein-deer—Reykjavik.*

ON the 15th of September, after spending about an hour and a half in the company of the clergyman's wife at *Hollt*, who could not sufficiently regret the absence of her husband, I proceeded round the hill to *Fell*, where I was kindly received by the Dean, Sira Thord Bryniolfson. As this gentleman had only been recently invested with the office of Dean, it was not in his power to give me an exact idea of the actual state of the people within his bounds relative to the Holy Scriptures; yet he was of opinion that not many copies of the entire Bible were to be met with, but that several copies of the New Testament, published in 1807, had found their way thither. He engaged to exert himself to the

utmost in ascertaining what number of copies would be wanted ; to write to his clergy, requesting them to notify the arrival of the Scriptures to their congregations ; and after he had learned the result, to transmit it to *Reykjavik*, in order to secure the requisite supply.

About ten o'clock the Dean dressed, and accompanied me to *Solheima*. Excepting a small tract to the west of *Fell*, which consists for the most part of stones and sand, and is intersected by floods from the *Yökul*, the road lay over hills that were completely covered with rich grass ; and as no cliffs or breaks were visible, the landscape reminded me of some familiar lawns in the Lowlands of Scotland, while the herds that were browsing on it apprised me of the wealthy circumstances of the *Solheima* farmers. On our arrival at *West Solheima*, where there is a church and several houses of a superior appearance, we were instantly shewn by the peasant into a large room well furnished with books, among which I was happy to observe a folio Bible ; and as his wife was from home, he set to work himself with the coffee-mill, and prepared for us an excellent dish of that expensive article of foreign luxury.

The Dean now returned, after having committed me to the care of the peasant, who undertook to guide me across the dangerous *Yökul* river on *Solheima-sand*. This river, which forms the division between the eastern and southern *Fiordungar*, was originally only a small stream.

let, but was increased to such a degree by the revolution that took place in the Yökul about the year 900, that it inundated the plain, and washed away the whole of its soil. The phenomena were so novel to those who had fixed their habitations in the vicinity, that the frequency with which it changed its course was ascribed to the influence of magic. \* It was called *Fulalæk*, or the fœtid torrent, on account of the sulphureous smell of its water, a property the river still has, and which shews that a quantity of sulphur must exist in the bowels of the Yökul in which it originates. It has gradually deepened its channel in the sand; and the eastern bank, towards which the most of the water inclines, is from thirty to fifty feet in height. The whole breadth of the channel may be about a quarter of a mile. On our arrival at the margin, we had at once a full view of the mighty waters, hastening, with resistless fury, down the sloping descent to the ocean, which received them at no great distance. We here stopped while the peasant descended into the river, but after several venturesome attempts, he was obliged to return; and, riding a little farther down, we entered it where its waters were more spread, and found it nearly as formidable as that on *Breidamark sand*, only we were unmolested by masses of ice. Owing to the breadth and rapidity of the current, the tra-

\* Olafsen og Povelsen, p. 845. Landnámabok, Part. IV. cap. v.

veller is apt to become giddy in passing these rivers ; and instances have been known, of persons who, by that means, have fallen off their horses and perished.

I have the greater reason to be thankful for the distinguishing goodness of God in preserving me from danger on the present occasion, as I have since been informed, that only a few days after I forded this dangerous river, two travellers, in attempting to cross it, were carried away by the stream, one of whom was never more seen, and the other was found the same day, almost half dead, on a small sand-bank in the middle of the river ! The horse of the former shared the same fate with his master ; and the latter owed his ultimate escape to his horse being on the same sand-bank on which he was lying, as it would otherwise have been impossible to discover him.

The *Solheima Yökul* stretches here along the north side of the sand, and is relieved on the east by *Myrdal's Yökul* and *Köttlugiá*, and on the west by the lofty *Eyafialla Yökul*, which is about 5,500 feet in height, and is more than half covered with snow and ice. It is this ice mountain which is generally first discovered by those who sail for the southern ports of the island, to whom it is known by the name of the Eastern Yökul, in distinction from that of the *Snæfell*, which they call the Western Yökul. Both the *Eyafialla* and *Solheima* are volcanic mountains ; and it was most probably one of them that emitted fire

in 1717, of which mention is made in the annals of the country, where it is indefinitely termed *Austur-Yökul*. It is remarkable, that the last eruption of *Köttlugiá* threw the *Solheima* Yökul into such violent convulsions, that it rose and fell by turns, and was at last raised so high that it appeared double its former size. \* As the most of it was shrouded in mist, I was denied a sight of the superior regions, but I had a fine view of a magnificent glacier, which descends into the plain at the egress of the river.

From this place, the road runs past the two farms of *Skogar*, close by the more westerly of which, is the most beautiful water-fall on the island. The river descends between high ledges of broken rock till it reaches a perpendicular precipice, over which it is thrown in one unbroken sheet, measuring at least fifteen feet in breadth, and about forty in height. Crossing the *Cataract* river, I came to a mountain called *Hrutafell*, which is extremely narrow, but stretches about two miles in a westerly direction. It is composed of a rough species of tuffa, and has been terribly rent and disrupted by the earthquakes which are so common in this quarter. Masses, several hundred square feet in size, have been dislodged on the plain; and at one place in particular, nearly the half of the mountain appears to have been overthrown, while the remainder assumes the most impending attitude. Yet

\* Olafsen og Povelsen p. 763.

in this situation, perilous as it may appear, several farmers have raised their habitations, and turned the disrupted masses of rock to their advantage, by converting the large caves, which are contained in them, into sheep-cotes, stables, and hay-lofts. One of these I entered on passing, and found it nearly full of hay, together with harness, and other implements of husbandry, which were hanging around the walls; but am sorry that the hay prevented me from discovering the entrance to what, I have since been apprised, forms the most remarkable thing about the cave—a vast apartment, measuring seventy-two feet in length, by twenty-four in breadth, and twelve in height, within which is a smaller room, serving for a bed-chamber, which is fifteen feet long, and nine in breadth. Both places are said to have been cut out by people in former times; and, according to a tradition, current in the neighbourhood, it was inhabited by a champion named Hrutur; who retiring into this stronghold, set his enemies at defiance, till at last they dug through the roof of this cave and killed him. \*

At the western termination of this mountain, the plain runs back between the mountains forming the base of the *Eyafjalla Yökul*; and, though the tract be of no great breadth, I question if there be a spot in Iceland that is better inhabited. At one view, I counted not fewer than twen-

\* Olafsen og Povelsen, p. 927.



ty-five farm houses and two or three churches. The ground is rather marshy, but yields a considerable quantity of hay. Having scrambled over the bogs, which were greatly softened by the heavy rain that had fallen the most of the day, I reached the base of the long, precipitous, and rugged ridge of sand-stone cliffs in front of the Yökul; and passing through *Steinar*, a village consisting of seven families, and the first I had seen since leaving Zealand, I arrived, about seven in the evening, at a farm called *Varmahlid*, and tented on a dry sloping ground to the east of the houses. The rain now began to pour down in torrents, and for some time prevented me from obtaining the rest I so much needed, and to which I instantly repaired after having enjoyed my evening repast.

Next morning, before I got fully dressed, I was surprised by the peasant, who, drawing aside the cloth of my tent-door, presented me with a large bowl of excellent coffee. It was in vain I remonstrated against the trouble to which they had put themselves; he courteously replied, that I was so uncommon a guest, that centuries might elapse ere another such traveller came to *Varmahlid*, and the object of my journey being so noble, it was their duty to contribute the little that lay in their power to my accommodation and comfort. I had no sooner left my tent, than I was invited into the house, where I found a mahogany table, furnished with a delicious dish of hashed fish, after which, skyr and cream were

served up. I had also the pleasure of eating rye-bread, baked in the Icelandic manner. The rites of hospitality were performed by an elderly female, step-mother to the peasant, who was dressed in her Sunday clothes, and presented a very respectable appearance. Every thing about the room looked neat and clean; and the small library was adorned with a well-bound copy of the quarto Bible.

From this place, as the morning was clear, I had a magnificent prospect of the *Vestmanna* islands, which lie at the distance of about fifteen miles from the coast, and take their name from the Irish slaves, who, as has already been mentioned, fled thither for refuge in the year 875. These islands are fourteen in number, but consist entirely of barren vitrified rocks, except four, on which there is a scanty supply of pasture. Only one of them is inhabited; and from that circumstance is called *Heimaey*, or *Home-Island*. It is defended by high cliffs on all sides; and its surface is diversified by a considerable quantity of lava, and several low volcanic hills, which are said to have been in action at no very remote period. \* There is a harbour here, within a high perpendicular rock, which receives the breakers as they fall upon it, and renders the water behind perfectly smooth. The trade is considerable, and consists chiefly of fish and the feathers of the birds that inhabit the cliffs. These the

\* Olafsen og Povelsen, p. 857.

people catch in abundance, being wonderfully expert in climbing the most hideous precipices, and descending by ropes to the roosts of the fowls. They not only use their flesh for food, but convert it, after it has been properly dried, into fuel, the smell of which renders their hovels, otherwise disagreeable, absolutely intolerable to strangers.

The *Vestmanna* islands have a separate Sysselmand and two clergymen, who both officiate in the same church, which was rebuilt of stone, at the royal expense, in the year 1774, and is said to be one of the best belonging to Iceland. It is worthy of notice, that the tithes are still raised here according to the Norwegian mode, which is ascribed to their having been bequeathed by one of the *Skalholt* bishops, before the Reformation, to the monastery of St. Michael in *Bergen*.

Fortified as the inhabitants are, both by their poverty, and the steepness of their native cliffs, they have, nevertheless, been twice exposed to the outrageous depredations of merciless pirates. The first time they were attacked was in 1614, when the crew of an English vessel landed here, under the command of one John, commonly called *Gentleman*, from the softness of his manners, maltreated the persons of the inhabitants, and pillaged the church and other houses on the island. On their return to England, they were detected and punished, and the church-property was restored three years afterwards by order of King James. A more direful calamity, however,

overtook them in the year 1627. A number of Algerine pirates, after having committed several acts of rapine and cruelty, both in the southern and eastern quarters of Iceland, arrived at *Heymaey*, took most of the inhabitants captive, and bound them with fetters on board the corsair, and pillaged and burnt the church, and other houses on the island. One of the clergymen, Jon Thorsteinson, the first translator of the Psalms of David into Icelandic verse, and who also translated the book of Genesis and other parts of Scripture in a similar manner, was basely murdered by one of his own countrymen who had embarked in the expedition, and he has on that account obtained the name of martyr. The other clergyman, Olafur Egilson, was carried, with his wife and children, and near four hundred of his countrymen, into a state of wretched captivity, to *Algiers*, whence he was released two years afterwards, and wrote an account of their miseries, which was afterwards published in Danish. Only thirty-seven survived their calamities, having been released at the royal expense in 1636; yet even of that number, not more than thirteen persons regained their native island.\*

Leaving *Varmahlid*, I proceeded on to the church and parsonage of *Hollt*; on my arrival at

\* Hist. Eccles. Island, tom. iii. p. 80—83. At p. 138 of the same work, is inserted a most pitiable letter from the captives, dated Algiers, 1635.

which, I discovered that the clergyman, Sira Bryniolfr Sivertson, was the same individual who had long officiated in *Reykjavik*, and had only left it for this place a few weeks before I came to the island. It was cause of mutual regret that I had not spent the night with him, especially as the exchange of a few words convinced us that we were "of one mind," relative to the importance and value of the Gospel of Christ. After spending about an hour and a half with him and his interesting lady, who kindly prepared coffee for me, I again left *Hollt*, accompanied by Sira B. who proceeded till within a little of the termination of the *Eyafialla* mountains, and expressed the most lively joy on hearing of the mighty triumphs of divine revelation. A little before we parted, we stopped a few minutes to survey a curious cascade on the brow of the mountain, at least eight hundred feet high. What rendered it peculiarly interesting was the circumstance, that though the quantity of water precipitated over the rocks was by no means inconsiderable, yet it was prevented from falling by a strong current of air ascending from the foot of the mountain, which converted the whole column into spray, and carrying it up like a cloud into the atmosphere: nothing could more exactly resemble the column of steam arising from the hot springs. I was told by the clergyman that this cascade serves as a mark to the fishermen, who repair from the main-land to the *Vestmanna* Islands, as its fall-

ing in an unbroken sheet to the base of the precipice is a proof that there is but little wind sweeping along the coast ; but when it is borne up in the manner just described, they are then certain that the beach is inaccessible. It is called *Drifanda Foss*, or "The Driving Cascade." The fishermen have a similar mark at the islands, by which they know whether they may proceed with safety from the shore or not.

Almost close to the termination of the long range of mountains, forming the base of the *Eyafjalla Yökul*, flows the *Markarflíot*, a broad river, which receives its waters from the Yökuls, and, dividing into a number of considerable streams, previous to its junction with the sea, it forms several islands that are inhabited chiefly by fishermen. Like similar Yökul rivers, which flow through sandy plains, it does not always keep the same course, and is frequently unfordable near the coast ; in which case, travellers are obliged to go round by *Hlidarenda*, which lies farther back on the opposite side of the valley, and is famous for its having been the abode of Gunnar, who occupies so conspicuous a place in the Saga of Niál Thorgeirson. Its inhabitants have always been people of the first respectability ; and at present it is occupied by the Sysselmand, Cancellieraad Thorarínson, who is connected with the best families on the island.

Fording the river, which, notwithstanding its breadth, was accomplished without much difficulty, I entered the tract called *Flíotshlid*, which

is for the most part low and swampy, but gets more fertile towards the hills on the eastern side of the plain. As I rode along, I was entertained by the interesting conversation of a peasant, who was travelling to *Reykjavik* in order to dispose of his country produce. The knowledge he discovered of the geography and politics of Britain quite astonished me. He gave me a long detail of the events that transpired during the usurpation of Cromwell, and proposed several questions relative to the *Thames, Tay, Forth, &c.* His acquaintance with these things he has chiefly derived from Danish books; and having lately fallen in with an interesting work in German, he has begun to learn that language, in order to make himself master of its contents. I could not help smiling when he told me, in as grave and positive a tone as if he had been versed in all the learning of the schools, that the late Dr. Jonson of *Skalholt*, was profoundly skilled, not only in theology, but also in *philosophy*. This last word he pronounced with an emphasis and an air which indicated a conviction of his having said something big with important meaning. As a proof that he had not read the Scriptures without reflection, I may mention his being somewhat at a loss to account for the term wrath being ascribed to God in the Bible; and it was not till I had explained to him the difference between holy and reasonable anger, and that which is unreasonable and malicious, and shewn him that the expression, as applied to the Divine

Being, signified his disapprobation of every species of iniquity, and was ultimately resolvable into his love of righteousness, that he declared himself satisfied on the subject.

As the road to *Oddè*, where I intended stopping all night, was distinctly visible, being well trod, and lying across a tract covered with volcanic sand, I left the men to bring on the baggage at their leisure, and proceeded forward by myself, in order to call on the conrector of the late school at *Skalholt*, whose house lay directly in my way. Forging the *Thverá*, which was in some places so deep that my horse swam with me, I encountered a pretty extensive tract of swampy ground, in which I completely missed the road; and it was not till I had made considerable progress in the vast plain before *Mount Hekla*, that I found the path I was following led into the division, called *Hreppar*. I therefore struck off to the left, and after riding about an hour, I reached the bank of the *Eastern Rångá*, where I fell in with two lads belonging to the conrector, who put me into the tract leading to his house. This aged gentleman I found to be a zealous lover of sacred literature; and, what is of still greater importance, a sincere friend to vital and practical religion. Having spent about two hours with him, he favoured me with a man to conduct me through the river to *Oddè*, where I arrived a little past nine o'clock.

On entering the house, it gave me pain to think I had come so late, as most of the family



were gone to bed, but I had not spent many minutes in admiring the neatness and modern style of a room into which I was shewn, when the Dean, Sira Steingrimr Jonson, made his appearance, and in the frankest and most affectionate manner, bade me welcome to Iceland and to his house. In this gentleman, my expectations, which had been raised to no ordinary pitch by what I had read in Sir George Mackenzie's Travels, were fully met, and even exceeded; and I can only, with that traveller and his companions regret, that I did not enjoy more of his company. With his extensive classical acquirements, he unites great urbanity of manners; and is deservedly held in the highest esteem and repute by his countrymen. After finishing his studies at the University of Copenhagen, he acted for some time as secretary to the late Bishop Finnson, and having been appointed Lector Theologiæ in the school of *Bessastad*, he continued to fill that office with great credit and ability till the year 1810, when he received the Deanery of *Rângárvalla Syssel*.

In a short time, his lady, the relict of the Bishop just mentioned, came into the room, and very politely served up an excellent supper of rice and milk. About midnight I was shewn into a sleeping-room, where there was an excellent bed, which I could not but conclude, from every appendage, to have belonged to the episcopal see; and not having slept in a house since leaving *Beruford*, which was now upwards of

a fortnight, I was the more sensible of the luxury of my accommodation.

It frequently happens, that places which have been rendered famous by the celebrity of their possessors, fall in the course of time into other hands, and scarcely retain a single vestige of their former lustre. It is, however, very different at the present day with respect to *Oddè*. Its present occupant is a worthy successor of Sæmund Sigfusson, Jon Loptson, and other distinguished characters who have flourished here during the earlier and more interesting periods of Icelandic literature. Sæmund, commonly surnamed *Frodè*, or *The Learned*, who had spent several years at the most renowned Universities of Germany and France, and would, in all probability, have been lost to his country, had it not been for the interposition of his relation Jon Ogmundson, entered into holy orders on his return to Iceland, and established, at *Oddè*, a seminary for the education of youth. He likewise applied himself to the composition of several literary works, none of which, however, have reached our times, except the poetic part of those valuable remnants of Scandinavian antiquity, comprehended under the general name of *The Edda*; and, from this circumstance, intitled Sæmund's *Edda*, to distinguish it from the prosaic part which is generally ascribed to Snorro Sturluson. For a further account of this famous work, the reader is referred to the Appen-

dix ; and I would only further observe here, that, as Snorro spent sixteen years at *Oddè*, under the tuition of Jon Loptson, the grandson of Sæmund, he had an opportunity of acquiring a knowledge, not only of the Eddaic poetry itself, but also of the sources from which it had been derived. The *Oddè Annals* have also been ascribed to Sæmund ; but Bishop Jonson shews them to be the production of a more recent age. \*

*Oddè* is situated on the south-east side of a number of low hills, which are completely overgrown with grass, and form a very extensive *tun*. On the morning of the 17th, the Dean accompanied me to the top of the highest, from which I had a fine view of the surrounding plain. It is perhaps the most extensive that is to be met with on the island, being not less than twenty miles in every direction ; and as the volcanic ashes and sand, which compose its foundation, are in most places covered with a pretty thick soil, it affords uncommonly rich pasturage. I had, at the same time, a magnificent view of *Mount Hekla*, which reared its snow-capped summits to the clouds, and, by calling to mind the desolations it has spread upon the adjacent country, inspired the mind with a temporary melancholy and gloom. Were it not for this circumstance, combined with the number of its re-

\* Hist. Eccles. Island. Tom. I. p. 199. Note.

corded eruptions, there is little in the appearance of Hekla to attract the notice of the traveller, even supposing him never to have seen any other mountains but those in the vicinity. The *Trehyrning*, or Three Horned Mountain, between *Hekla* and the *Eyafjalla Yökul*, has a far nobler and more picturesque appearance. Having been accustomed to hear of this volcano as rivalling *Vesuvius* and *Etna*, a strong prejudice in favour of its magnitude and grandeur had rooted itself in my mind, and I had formed the idea that the very sight of it must be replete with gratification. Now, however, when I had it direct before me, at the distance of about four-and-twenty miles, it sunk into comparative insignificance; nor do I conceive there is any thing about *Hekla* that is calculated to make an indelible impression on the memory, except an actual eruption, which, of course, must present a spectacle never to be forgotten.

*Hekla* is situated about thirty miles back from the coast, and is estimated at somewhat near 4000 feet in height. Its summit is divided into three peaks, the middle of which is the highest. The craters form vast hollows on the sides of these peaks, and, according to the last accounts, are partially filled with snow. The mountain itself consists for the most part of sand and slags; the lava being confined to the lower regions, and forming an immensely rugged and vitrified wall around its base. From this circumstance it has been con-

cluded, that the lava has not proceeded from the craters at the summit of *Hekla*, but from apertures at no great elevation on its sides. There was very little snow on it at this time ; and, indeed, the Dean informed me, that there has been a considerably less quantity than usual observed these last three years, which is most probably owing to an increase of heat in the interior of the mountain, and, taken in connection with the long interval which has now elapsed since its last eruption, has naturally given rise to the apprehension that some new explosion is at no great distance. Sir George Mackenzie, Dr. Holland, and Mr. Bright, are the last travellers who have ascended *Mount Hekla*. On the 3d of August, 1810, they gained its summit, at which time they observed the vapour of water ascending from several parts of the middle peak, and the heat in the mountain was so intense, that on removing a few of the slags from the surface, they found those below too hot to be handled ; and on placing a thermometer amongst them, it rose to 144°. \*

This famous volcano is supposed to have emitted lava previous to the occupation of the island ; but, subsequent to that period, *twenty-three* eruptions are recorded, of which the dates, and the intervals that existed between them, are as follows :

\* Travels in Iceland, p. 218.

Number.	Date.	Interval between the eruptions.
1.	A. D. 1004	- -
2.	1029	25 years.
3.	1105	76 —
4.	1113	8 —
5.	1157	44 —
6.	1206	49 —
7.	1222	16 —
8.	1294	72 —
9.	1300	6 —
10.	1340	40 —
11.	1374	34 —
12.	1390	16 —
13.	1436	46 —
14.	1510	74 —
15.	1554	44 —
16.	1583	29 —
17.	1619	36 —
18.	1625	6 —
19.	1636	11 —
20.	1693	57 —
21.	1728	35 —
22.	1754	26 —
23.	1766—1768	12 —

From these dates it will appear, that sometimes a considerable period intervenes between the eruptions, and that nearly fifty years have now elapsed since the last time the volcano was in action. The dates are taken from the original of Von Troil's Letters ;\* in which they are stated to be founded on the accounts of Jacobsen, Olafsen, and Povelsen, and others. The latter gen-

\* Upsala 1777, 8vo. p. 235.

tlemen, after regretting the inaccuracy of the annals on this subject, mention their firm conviction, that twenty-two eruptions had taken place previous to the time they wrote, independent of the irregularity of the records. It is to be observed, however, that these eruptions have differed greatly, both in point of magnitude and duration. Some of them have only lasted a few days, others for months, and some have continued more than a year.

The surrounding country was formerly inhabited almost close to the mountain, and is said to have been uncommonly beautiful and fertile; but the successive inundations of lava have entombed the farms; and the verdant meadows have been almost entirely covered with sand and pumice. The circumjacent farms suffered considerably in the eruption of 1766; but the principal damage was done to the districts in the north of Iceland, by the ashes that were carried by the wind to that quarter.

The population of *Rángárvalla-Syssel*, of which Sira Steingrímur is Dean, consists of 3,999 souls; few of the families are in possession of the Scriptures; and not more than the half are able to purchase copies of the present edition, notwithstanding the low price at which they are sold. Sira S. had already matured a plan for their distribution, and he assured me they would be received with the utmost gratitude and joy.

After spending the forenoon in a very interesting conversation, which embraced various li-

terary topics, and especially those connected with sacred learning, I left *Oddè* about twelve o'clock, and was accompanied by the Dean across the *Western Rángá*, and the extensive marshy waste which lies between *Oddè* and the *Thiorsá* ferry. Having given his boy directions to proceed with me to *Eyrarybacka*, and seen me into the boat, the Dean returned, and we immediately launched into the stream, which at this place is very broad; and being extremely shallow towards the opposite side, we were obliged to land on a sand-bank, a little past the middle, where we mounted our horses, and forded the remainder of the river. The road now lay through a level tract, the soil of which was wet, but, being supported by lava, at no great depth, we crossed it with great ease; and arriving at the sea, we proceeded along the beach to *Eyrarybacka*, which we reached about eight o'clock in the evening. I was here hospitably received by my friend *Kammer-Assessor Thorlacius*, who had only arrived with his family a few days before me; as also by the merchant to whom the trading-station belongs, *Mr. Lambasson*, in whose vessel a considerable quantity of New Testaments had arrived from *Copenhagen*.

*Eyrarybacka* is the first harbour on the south coast of *Iceland*, the beach being inaccessible along the whole of the intermediate space between this place and *Berufjord*, owing to the heavy swell in the sea, and its being entirely without shelter, either from rocks or islands.



There is here a number of blind volcanic rocks a short way out from the shore, by which the swell is in a great measure broken. Owing, however, to the same reason, the entrance is very crooked and dangerous; and, even when a vessel has got in, she is obliged to be fastened by four or five strong cables, which, at great expense, are made fast to large iron rings, soldered into the surrounding rocks. As the beach on which the dwelling-house and warehouses stand is low, the sea breaks completely over it in winter, and has more than once inundated the houses, though a formidable barrier of stones has been raised in front, for the purpose of defending them against the fury of that turbulent element.

Having letters to write to Copenhagen, I did not leave *Eyrarbacka* before the afternoon of the 19th, when proceeding about a mile to the north-west, I came to the ferry over the *Ölfus-á*, a mighty river, nearly half a mile in breadth, which is formed by the confluence of the *Sog*, and the *Bruarár-vatn*, together with a number of inferior rivers, with the *Hvitá*, which I had passed, near its egress, on my way to the north, and which even then wore a formidable appearance. As the adjacent country lies very low, it is frequently overflowed, especially in spring, when a thaw happens to take place on the mountains before the river has been cleared of the masses of ice that had collected in it during the winter. From the ferry, I proceeded nearly two miles

along the west side of the river, and after crossing a rugged stream of lava, arrived a little after dark at *Breidabolstad*, the last farm on the south side of the mountains, where I pitched my tent, and was treated with the usual Icelandic hospitality.

On Tuesday, the 20th of September, I started at an early hour, in order to finish the last stage of my journey for the present season. From *Breidabolstad*, the road runs in a northerly direction, and leads, all at once, into one of the most gloomy and inhospitable regions I had yet traversed. It forms part of the long range of irregular and shapeless mountains, which stretches the whole way from *Thingvallavatn* to *Cape Reykianess*; and which, partly owes its origin to the awful effects of subterraneous fire, and has partly been overturned during subsequent convulsions. Beds of lava lie scattered here in every direction; and I found it no easy matter to elude the cracks and fissures which every now and then opened into the road. Having traversed the lava for some time, my attention was attracted by a number of craters to the right, which are known by the name of *Trölladyngjar*, or "Magic Heaps." They are mostly of a conic form, and hollow within, and are covered with red slag, the last effects of subterraneous heat. It was from this tract that the famous eruption of A. D. 1000 proceeded; while the national assembly was deliberating whether the Christian religion should be adopted or not, and which gave rise

to the well known argument of Snorri Godi.\* According to the statement of Bishop Gisle Oddson, in his Collect. MSS. ad Hist. Nat. another eruption took place in 1340; † and, indeed the place bears every mark of reiterated devastation.

Just before leaving this singularly wild desert, I was surprised by a fine flock of rein-deer, marching slowly down the side of a mountain close beside me. They were more than fifty in number, and were under the guidance of a noble stag, who led the van, and every now and then turned round to look at me, and inspect the state of his troops.

“ Nor yet appear his care and conduct small;  
 “ From rank to rank he moves and orders all.  
 “ The stately ram thus measures o’er the ground,  
 “ And, master of the flocks, surveys them round.”

What is said of the wild ass, may equally apply to the stag: “ Whose house I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwellings. The range of the mountains is his pasture, and he searcheth after every green thing.” Job, xxxviii. 6, 8. It was in these mountains, that three rein-deer were introduced from Lapland, in the year 1770, and they have now multiplied to that degree, that they form numerous herds, and subsist on the moss, which grows plentifully in this quarter. It is but seldom that any of

\* P. 29.

† Olafsen og Povelsen, p. 74.

them are killed, the inhabitants suffering them to remain in quiet possession of these desolate regions. They appeared much tamer than I should have supposed, and allowed me to ride within half a gun-shot of them, before they mended their pace.

At the termination of the lava I descended by a very precipitous path into a deep gulley, the bottom of which was covered with slags and volcanic sand, and, extricating myself by a pass, the sides of which exhibited huge masses of tuffa, I entered a vast plain entirely overrun with lavas, the various ages of which were not only visible from the streams which had successively been heaped above each other, but also from their colour, and the greater or less quantity of soil which is here and there attached to their surface. After a very fatiguing ride, I came to the *Trölla-börn*, or "Giants' Children," a number of minute, but singularly interesting volcanic chimnies, which have been formed by the cooling of the lava. They are from five to eight feet in height, and the largest may be twenty feet around the base. They are all hollow within; most of them domed, and presenting more or less of a lateral opening through which the melted substances have obtained a fresh vent. The lava is strongly vitrified, and its colour varies from a black to a light green. The outside of the dome exhibits a slaty appearance, resembling the scales of a fish, while it is hung within with the most beautiful stalactites. Some of

these craters serve for sheep-pens; and in one of them I discovered a hard bed of lava, which is used by those who traverse this tract in winter. I had no sooner quitted this interesting spot than I recognised the *Esian* and other mountains to the north-east of *Reykjavik*. I now applied for the last time to my stock of provisions, and leaving my servant to bring up the baggage horses at his leisure, I rode on to *Reykjavik*, where I arrived about five o'clock in the afternoon, after an absence of fifty-eight days, and performing a journey of more than 1200 British miles.

## CHAP. IX.

*Winter in Iceland—Climate—Greenland ice—Aurora Borealis—Travelling—Occupations in general—Winter employments—Fishery—Manner in which the Icelanders spend the long evenings—Family devotion—Education—Bessastad school—Solitude of Winter—Tone of Society at Reykiavik.*

THOUGH this island occupies a more southerly latitude, and presents, on the whole, a much greater extent of vegetation than the adjacent continent, it has nevertheless been unfortunately doomed to bear the repulsive name of *Iceland*, while the other has been favoured with the pleasing and animating appellation of *Greenland*. The imposition of these names was wholly arbitrary, according to the accidental circumstances of the individuals with whom they originated. Floki, the third adventurer to Iceland, happening to ascend one of the mountains in the western peninsula, discovered a bay completely filled with *Greenland ice*, and, therefore, thought himself entitled to change the name given to the

island by his predecessors, to that which it has ever since retained. The consequence has been, that the generality of those who inhabit more genial climes, have viewed it as equally inhospitable with the most rigid of the polar regions, and considered the natives as exposed to all the benumbing influence of relentless frosts, and perpetually immersed in ice and snow. This, however, is far from being the case. The climate is perhaps more unsettled, but it is very seldom that the cold is more intense than in the south of Scandinavia. At first, I confess, I shuddered at the idea of spending a winter in Iceland; but what was my surprise when I found the temperature of the atmosphere not only greater than that of the preceding winter in Denmark, but equal to that of the mildest I have lived either in Denmark or Sweden!

In the month of November, the mercury in Fahrenheit's thermometer did not sink lower than  $20^{\circ}$ , and it was nearly as often above the freezing point as below it. On the 6th of December, with clear weather and a light breeze from the east-north-east, it sunk to  $8^{\circ} 30'$ , after which, especially towards the end of the year, the weather became remarkably mild, and continued in this state till near the middle of January; the thermometer for the most part between  $34^{\circ}$  and  $40^{\circ}$ . On the 10th and 11th of January it fell as low as  $15^{\circ} 30'$ , but rose again in a short time, and continued much more frequently above than below the point of congela-

tion till the 7th of March, when we had a strong wind from the N. N. W., and the mercury, which had stood the preceding day between  $30^{\circ}$  and  $34^{\circ}$ , sunk in the morning to  $9^{\circ}$   $30'$ , at noon to  $8^{\circ}$ , and at 9 o'clock in the evening it fell as low  $4^{\circ}$   $30'$ , which was the strongest degree of frost we had the whole winter. The following evening it was at  $6^{\circ}$ ; on the 9th it rose to  $10^{\circ}$ ; on the 10th to  $19^{\circ}$ ; and so on till the 13th, when it got again to  $32^{\circ}$ , and continued for the most part above it the whole of the month. On the 12th of April it fell to  $19^{\circ}$ , but otherwise kept varying between  $32^{\circ}$  and  $52^{\circ}$ . About the middle of May the atmosphere grew colder, occasioned most probably by the approach of some masses of Greenland ice, and on the 18th and several of the following days the mercury was at  $29^{\circ}$ .

The quantity of snow that fell during the winter was very considerable, especially in the northern parts of the island, where many of the peasants were reduced to circumstances of great distress by the total consumption of the fodder they had provided for their cattle. The atmosphere was on the whole rather clear and serene, than darkened by mists, which is in a great measure to be ascribed to the prevalence of brisk land winds, to which the mountainous nature of the country is extremely favourable.

It must, at the same time, be allowed, that the winter of 1814, as well as that which immediately preceded it, was considered by the Ice-



landers as uncommonly mild. In the course of the last century, the winters of 1717, 1742, 1784, and 1792, were excessively severe; and the salt water itself was frozen to such an extent, that a communication was kept up for some time on the ice between the coasts on some of the principal bays, as also between the different islands in the *Breidafjord*. The keenest frost ever experienced in Iceland was in the year 1848, when the ocean was congealed all round the island, so as to admit of the inhabitants riding on horseback from the one promontory to the other on the ice.

Nothing so materially affects the climate of Iceland as the arrival of the floating ice from the opposite coast of Greenland. Generally towards the end of winter, and sometimes in the beginning of summer, it is seen moving towards the coast in immense masses, which are not unfrequently piled one above another, and more resemble islands with mountains, castles, and spires, than bodies of ice. They are so thick that they have been known to run aground in eighty fathoms' water. Their motion is not so much accelerated by the wind as by the current; but their rapidity, when impelled by these two causes conjointly is so great, that no six-oared boat is able to keep up with them. When the sea is agitated by a storm, the ice-islands are dashed against each other in the most tremendous manner; the noise arising from the crash is heard at a great distance; and, as often hap-

pens, the drift timber jammed in between the masses takes fire from the friction, presenting to the eye of the spectator a scene the most incongruous that can possibly be imagined. The quantity of floating ice is commonly so great, that it not only chokes up all the friths and bays, but extends to such a distance in the ocean that its termination cannot be discovered from the summit of the highest mountain; and in the year 1766 the whole of the vast strait between Iceland and Greenland was entirely closed up with it.\* It principally infests the northern, and part of the eastern coasts, as likewise the western friths, but it is seldom that it surrounds the whole island.

While the masses of ice remain in a state of fluctuation, sometimes at a distance, and sometimes nearer the coast, the weather is very unsettled, and the winds are cold and damp; but when they are driven into the bays, and the salt water freezes around them, the weather becomes more steady; the cold increases; and insalubrious fogs are carried over the whole island. The consequences are, that the winter snows are longer in melting; it is late before the frost leaves the ground; vegetation is more backward and scanty; and the summer so short, that the peasants have great difficulty in getting home the small quantity of hay that may have been produced. Add to this, the devastations committed by the Greenland bears, which some-

\* Tremarec's *Relat. d'un Voyage dans la Mer du Nord.*

times arrive in considerable numbers on the ice.\* Fortunately for the natives, they have now been three winters exempt from any quantity of drift ice, though many of them begin to be apprehensive lest this period of respite should be more than counterbalanced by the severity of the ensuing season. †

\* It frequently happens that the natives of Iceland are pursued by the Polar bear, when he has been long at sea, and his natural ferocity has been strengthened by the keenness of hunger; yet, though unarmed, they generally make their escape. Observing him approach them, they simply throw down a mitten into the path, and the bear, on coming up to it, is so powerfully attracted by the operation of the smell of the perspiration on his olfactory nerves, that he instantly stops, and it is not till after he has turned the thumb, and every finger of the mitten inside out, that he recommences the pursuit. By this time the Icelanders have got to a considerable distance; and should he again threaten to overtake them, they have a fresh *corps de reserve*, and by dropping one mitten after another, they may succeed in retarding his progress till they have effected their escape.

As soon as it is known that a bear has arrived on the island, the inhabitants of the district collect, and go with fire-arms in pursuit of him; and the individual who kills him is not only well paid for the skin, which is reckoned very valuable, but receives besides a considerable reward from the King of Denmark.

† I have since been informed, that a vast quantity of Greenland ice has been floated into the bays about Iceland in the spring of 1816, and a still greater quantity in 1817, which must have arisen from the breaking up of the immense barrier of ice by which the east coast of Greenland has been surrounded for the last four centuries. However, if this enormous mass should entirely have disappeared, there is every reason to anticipate a very considerable amelioration in the climate of Iceland.

The most striking ærial phenomenon exhibited by an Icelandic winter, is doubtless the aurora borealis, or northern lights, which are here seen in all their brilliancy and grandeur. I had an opportunity of contemplating them almost every clear night the whole winter, sometimes shooting across the hemisphere in a straight line, and presenting to the view, for a whole evening, one vast steady stream of light; but, more commonly, they kept dancing and running about with amazing velocity, and a tremulous motion, exhibiting, as they advanced, some of the most beautiful curvated appearances. On gaining one point of the hemisphere, they generally collected as if to muster their forces, and then began again to branch out into numerous ranks, which struck off to the greatest distances from each other as they passed the zenith, yet so as always to preserve the whole of the phenomenon in an oval shape; when they contracted nearly in the same way as they expanded; and, after uniting in a common point, they either returned in the course of a few minutes, or were lost in a stream of light, which grew fainter and fainter, the nearer it approached the opposite side of the heavens. They were mostly of a dunnish yellow, yet often assuming mixtures of red and green. When they are particularly quick and vivid, a crackling noise is heard, resembling that which accompanies the escape of the sparks from an electric machine. They almost always took their rise from the summit of *Mount Esian*, which is about

due north-east from *Reykjavik*, and proceeded in a south-west direction. When visible the whole length of the hemisphere, they were uniformly strongest towards the north and north-east, and were always sure to be seen in that quarter, when they appeared nowhere else. Once or twice I observed them in the south, but they were very faint and stationary.

In the days of superstition, these celestial wonders were viewed as portending certain destruction to nations and armies, and filled the minds even of the more enlightened with terror and dismay. At the present day, the Icelander is entirely free from such silly apprehensions, and only regards their uncommonly vivid appearance as predicting a hurricane or storm: an observation founded on experience, and which I frequently brought to the test, when it invariably turned out, that in less than twenty-four hours after the northern lights were in great commotion, we had either sudden squalls or a heavy gale of wind from the north.

It was scarcely ever possible for me to view this phenomenon without reflecting on Job xxxvii. 22. "The golden splendour cometh out of the north;" and it seems extremely probable, that it is to them Elihu here alludes. The idea not only agrees with the light spoken of in the preceding verse, but is far more suitable to the latter clause of this same verse, "with God is terrible majesty." In some parts of Asia, the northern lights are so terrible, that "they strike the beholders

with horror. Every animal is struck with terror; even the dogs of the hunters are seized with such dread that they will fall on the ground, and remain immoveable till the cause is over." \*

From the picture which the foregoing part of the journal presents of the state of the roads, and the difficulties inseparably connected with travelling in Iceland during the summer, an idea may be formed of the almost total impracticability of any such attempt in winter. The distance between the houses; the dreadful chasms and rents in the lava hidden by the snow; the rivers either choked full of ice, or but slightly frozen, with numerous other circumstances,—all combine to present obstacles, which few have the courage, or the physical strength, to surmount. In general, no Icelander undertakes a journey of greater length the whole winter than to his parish-church; and it often happens—though never without reluctance—that he must abandon even this tour for weeks together. Two posts are dispatched each season from the north, and one or two from *Reykjavik* to the eastern and western quarters of the island: otherwise, a traveller is scarcely ever heard of till near the end of winter, when the people begin to come from the north to the fishing. They then proceed across *Holltavörduheidi*, which is the shortest desert between the north and south countries; yet they frequently suffer

\* Penant's Arctic Zoology, Introduct. p. 102.

much from the journey, and it is seldom a winter passes without some perishing in this way. This very season several have fallen a prey to the inclemency of the weather. In a journey of this sort, it is not often that horses can be used: the traveller is obliged to trudge it on foot, to ford the rivers, if the ice should not be capable of bearing him, and, when benighted at a distance from any house, he either seeks shelter in a subterraneous cavern, or builds a house of snow, in which he reposes till the light of day again calls him to proceed on his journey. His greatest danger arises from his exposure to heavy falls of snow, by which the bearings of the mountains (his only way-marks) are concealed from view.

It appears from several of the ancient Sagas that sledges were in pretty common use in former times in Iceland. At present they are almost wholly unknown, which will be deemed the more surprising by those who are acquainted with their utility to the Laplanders, as the island abounds with rein-deer, which might easily be tamed and inured to the yoke,

Strictly speaking, there are only two seasons in Iceland, summer and winter; the former of which, short and precarious as it is, the natives must employ with assiduity in order to make provision for the latter. From the 3d of February to the 12th of May, is what the Icelanders call the *ver-tima* or fishing season; at which period vast numbers of the inhabitants flock to the southern and western shores from the districts in

the north and east, where the fishing is generally impracticable at this time, owing to the bays and creeks being filled with polar ice. They provide themselves with a complete skin-dress, consisting of the *brok* in the shape of small clothes and stockings, all in one piece; the *stack* or large jacket, which falls down, and is tied close over the *brok*, so as to prevent the water from getting in between them; and tight-sitting shoes of the same material, below which are worn coarse woollen stockings for greater warmth. The most of them live almost entirely, during this period, on butter and fish. They breakfast about two hours before sun-rise, and taste nothing till they return from sea in the evening, excepting sometimes a little whey which they take with them for the purpose of quenching their thirst. The boats are generally manned with six or eight hands besides the steersman, and row sometimes to a great distance out to sea.

When they return from fishing, and land on the beach, the boat is hauled up, and the fish are thrown out and heaped together in separate parcels, according to the number of men in the boat, with two additional shares which belong to the boat, and are claimed by the owner for the use of it, and the fishing lines and hooks, which are provided at his expense. The fishermen being fatigued, repair immediately to their huts, and the splitting and carrying home of the fish is commonly left to the women and children,



The principal fish they catch in this way is the cod, which they spread out on the cliffs to dry; and from this circumstance it obtains the name of klip-fish. They cut off the heads, which they also dry, and sell to the poorer part of the population; the bones are sometimes used for feeding their cattle with; and in some parts of the island they use them for fuel. When thus prepared, the fish are laid out on the cliffs, or a large surface of flat stones on the beach, and there dried in the sun, while the utmost care is taken that they are not exposed to rain or damp. They dry in the course of three weeks, and afterwards are stacked upon the beach, and take no damage whatever from the rain.

Sometimes the fish are hung up and dried in houses called *hiallar*, which are so constructed that the wind has a free passage through them, while they are sufficiently covered to keep out the rain. The fish dried in this way are called *hengi-fiskar*, or hung fish, in distinction from the *flat-fiskar* dried on the rocks.

Besides supplying the natives with one of their most essential articles of food, they are thus provided by the sea with a valuable barter against foreign productions which they may need; and the Danish merchants not only supply, in a great measure, the north of Europe with dried cod-fish, but send several cargoes of them to Spain, and the markets in the Mediterranean, where they are purchased for the use of the Catholics during lent.

When the snow leaves the ground, the females spread the manure which had lain on the *tun* in heaps all winter, and collect any stones that may have gathered on it. The men are employed in cutting turf both for fuel and a covering to their houses, and making charcoal for the use of the smithy. When the young cattle have been turned out on the mountains, the care of the cows and sheep is left to the female part of the family, who milk them twice a-day, make curds, butter, cheese, &c.; and they repair in companies, about the middle of summer, to collect the *Fiallagrös*, or Lichen Islandicus, in the uninhabited parts of the country. They have, generally, a man or two with them: and the few weeks they spend in this employment in the desert, are regarded as the happiest of the whole year. They live in tents, which they remove from place to place, according to the greater or less abundance of the moss. At this time the men are either out at the fresh-water fishing, or proceeding in cavalcades to the factories, where they barter their home productions against articles of necessary use for the winter.

The most important branch of rural labour in Iceland is the hay-making. About the middle of July, the peasant begins to cut down the grass of the *tun*, which is immediately gathered to a convenient place, in order to dry, and after having been turned once or twice, is conveyed home on horseback to the yard, where it is made up into stacks. This hay is called *tada*, to dis-

tinguish it from the inferior sort called *uthey*, because cut in the meadows or vallies at a distance from the farms. At the poorer farms, both men and women handle the scythe ; but, in general, the women only assist in making the hay after it is cut. In many parts of the island, where there is much hay, the peasants hire men from the fishing-places, to whom they give the name of *Kaupamenn*, who are paid for their labour at the rate of thirty pounds of butter per week. They cut by measurement ; the daily task, called *dagsláttá*, being about thirty square fathoms.

Hay-harvest being over, the sheep and cattle that had been out all summer on the mountains are collected ; the houses are put in a state of repair for the winter ; the wood needed for domestic purposes is brought home to each farm ; the turf is also taken in ; and the labours of the season conclude with the removal of manure to different parts of the *tun*.

During the winter, the care of the cattle and sheep devolves entirely on the men ; and consists chiefly in feeding and watering the former, which are kept in the house, while the latter are turned out in the day-time to seek their food through the snow. When the snow happens to be so deep that they cannot scrape it away themselves, the boys do it for them ; and as the sustenance thus procured is exceedingly scanty, they generally get a little of the *ut*, or meadow-

hay, about this time. The *tada*, or farm hay, is given to the cows alone. All the horses, excepting perhaps a favourite riding horse, are left to shift for themselves the whole winter, during which season they never lie down, but rest themselves by standing in some place of shelter.

The domestic employments of this season are multiplied and various. The men are occupied in fabricating necessary implements of iron, copper, wood, &c. ; and some of them are wonderfully expert as silversmiths, their work, at times, in this branch, being only distinguishable from that done in Copenhagen by the absence of the stamp. They also prepare hides for shoes ; make ropes of hair or wool ; and full the woollen stuffs, which is generally effected in the following curious manner. Both ends being knocked out of a barrel, it is filled with the articles to be full'd, when it is laid on the side, and two men lie down on their backs, one at either end, with their feet in the barrel, and literally *walk* the cloth, by kicking it against each other. Smaller articles they full by placing them between their knees and breast, and then moving backwards and forwards with the body, turning them always with their hands till ready. This accounts for the very awkward motion which the Icelanders almost always fall into when sitting, and from which many of them cannot refrain even in church. The fishermen full their mittens by dipping them now and then in the salt water, while plying at the oar. In some parts of the

country, the men also spin and knit like the women, and some of them weave.

Besides preparing the food, the females employ their time in spinning, which is most commonly done with the spindle and distaff; knitting stockings, mittens, shirts, &c. as also in embroidering bed-covers, saddle-clothes, and cushions, which they execute with much taste, interspersing flowers and figures of various colours.

A winter evening in an Icelandic family presents a scene in the highest degree interesting and pleasing. Between three and four o'clock the lamp is hung up in the *badstofa*, or principal apartment, which answers the double purpose of a bed-chamber and sitting-room, and all the members of the family take their station, with their work in their hands, on their respective beds, all of which face each other. The master and mistress, together with the children, or other relations, occupy the beds at the inner end of the room; the rest are filled by the servants.

The work is no sooner begun, than one of the family, selected on purpose, advances to a seat near the lamp, and commences the evening lecture, which generally consists of some old saga, or such other histories as are to be obtained on the island. Being but badly supplied with printed books, the Icelanders are under the necessity of copying such as they can get the loan of, which sufficiently accounts for the fact, that most of them write a hand equal in beauty to that of the ablest writing-masters in other parts

of Europe. Some specimens of their Gothic writing is scarcely inferior to copperplate. The reader is frequently interrupted, either by the head, or some of the more intelligent members of the family, who make remarks on various parts of the story, and propose questions, with a view to exercise the ingenuity of the children and servants. In some houses the sagas are repeated by such as have got them by heart; and instances are not uncommon of itinerating historians, who gain a livelihood during the winter, by staying at different farms till they have exhausted their stock of literary knowledge. It is greatly to be deplored, that a people so distinguished by their love of science, and possessing the most favourable opportunities of cultivating it, should be destitute of the means necessary for improving them to advantage. Surely the learned in Europe who have profited so much from the ancient labours of the Icelanders, and are now in possession of their most valuable manuscripts, are bound in justice to reciprocate, and furnish them with such books in their own language, as would make them acquainted with the more important branches of human knowledge.

The custom just described, appears to have existed among the Scandinavians from time immemorial. The person chosen as recitor was called *Thulr*, and was always celebrated for his knowledge of past events; and the dignity and pathos with which he related them. It is to him, and the seat or pulpit on which he was elevated,

that Odín alludes, in the following part of the *Hávamál*, or “Sublime” :—

Mál er at thylia	<i>'Tis time to recite</i>
Thular stoli á,	<i>From the seat of eloquence,</i>
Urthar brunni at ;	<i>Close by the fountain of Urd : *</i>
Satec oc thagthac,	<i>I sat and was silent,</i>
Sa ec oc hugthac,	<i>I saw and reflected,</i>
Hlydda ec á manna mál.	<i>I listened to that which was told.</i>

Instead of the Sagas, some of the more pious substitute the historical books of Scripture ; and as they always give the preference to poetry, most of these books have been translated into metre, chiefly with a view to this exercise.

At the conclusion of the evening labours, which are frequently continued till near midnight, the family join in singing a psalm or two ; after which, a chapter from some book of devotion is read, if the family be not in possession of a Bible, but where this Sacred Book exists, it is preferred to every other. A prayer is also read by the head of the family, and the exercise concludes with a psalm. Their morning devotions are conducted in a similar manner, at the lamp. When the Icelander awakes, he does not salute any person that may have slept in the room with him, but hastens to the door, and lifting up his eyes towards heaven, adores Him who made the heavens and the earth, the author and preserver

\* By the *Brunn*, or “fountain of Urd,” the poet here means the source of wisdom, and intimates, that as he had long sat and listened to the tales of other years, he was now qualified for the chair himself.

of his being, and the source of every blessing. He then returns into the house, and salutes every one he meets, with "God grant you a good day."

There being no parish schools, nor indeed any private establishments for the instruction of youth in Iceland, their mental culture depends entirely on the disposition and abilities of the parents. In general, however, neither of these is wanting; for the natives of this island are endowed with an excellent natural understanding, and their sense of national honour, generated by their familiar acquaintance with the character and deeds of their forefathers, spurs them to emulation, independent of the still more powerful inducement arising from the necessity and importance of religious knowledge. The children are taught their letters, either by the mother, or some other female; and when they have made some progress in reading, they are taught writing and arithmetic by the father. Every clergyman is bound to visit the different families in his parish twice or thrice a year, on which occasions he catechises both young and old; but the exercise is attended to, chiefly with a reference to the former, in order to ascertain what degree of knowledge they possess of the fundamental principles of Christianity, and on this account it is called, *at lesa frædinn*.

These are all the means of instruction which the great bulk of the Icelandic youth enjoy; nevertheless, the love of knowledge, superinduced



by the domestic habits of those who are their superiors in point of age and mental acquirements, often prompts them to build, of their own accord, on the foundation that has thus been laid; and I have frequently been astonished at the familiarity with which many of these self-taught peasants have discoursed on subjects, which, in other countries, we should expect to hear started by those only who fill the professor's chair, or who have otherwise devoted their lives to the study of science.

On the introduction of the Reformation into the island, it was designed to establish schools at the different convents, each of which was in possession of landed property more than adequate to defray the expenses; but to what cause soever it was owing, whether difficulties were thrown in the way, by such as were still Catholics in heart, or whether it was deemed more advisable to turn the proceeds of the farms into the royal treasury, so it happened that this charitable purpose was never carried into effect. Two Latin schools, however, were founded at the episcopal sees of *Holum* and *Skalholt*, and so much landed property was appropriated to each, as enabled them to support and educate about forty scholars. At these institutions many of the Icelanders have received a good classical education, by which they have afterwards attained to a distinguished rank in the paths of literature.

In the year 1741, Bishop Harboe was sent to Iceland, for the purpose of examining the state

of the churches and schools; and the alterations introduced, in consequence of his representations, were attended with very beneficial effects: but towards the close of last century, the business of the schools got involved in numerous disputes; committee was appointed after committee, for the purpose of bringing it to an issue; and, ultimately, a number of no less partial, than artful statements, effected the abolition both of the sees and the schools attached to them. All the estates by which they were supported were added to the crown, one bishop was appointed for the whole island, and, in lieu of the two seminaries, a school was established at the factory of *Reykjavik*, the teachers of which were to be paid out of the public treasury. A worse place could not have been selected for the purpose, as the young men were not only exposed to contamination from the immorality of foreigners, but tempted to weigh every thing in the balance of lucre, and view the gratification of the senses as the summit of human felicity.

In the year 1805, this school was removed to *Bessastad*, a place only a few miles distant from *Reykjavik*, once the property of Snorro Sturluson, and long the residence of the governors of the island. The school-house is a large stone building, well adapted to the purpose, but the favourable impression made by its external appearance is soon effaced on entering the passage to the rooms, by the quantity of filth that is suffered to accumulate in every corner. The

students are taught in the rooms below stairs, and have their sleeping apartments above. The same want of cleanliness appears here, as the bed-steads are filled with dried sea-weed, which gives a very disagreeable smell, and the place is so confined that no air can get admission into it. Adjoining is a small dark room, containing the library, which consists of about 1000 volumes, most of which are in the Latin, Danish, and German languages. It contains some editions of the classics, but the great bulk of the works are of theological import.

The establishment is conducted by a master, who has the title of *Lector Theologiæ*, and is allowed a salary of about *L.50 per annum*; and two under teachers, who have annually about *L.30* each. Owing to the late dilapidation of the public funds, the school can only receive at present about twenty-five young men, who are taught the Latin, Greek, Danish, and Icelandic languages. Of the Hebrew, it is seldom that they learn more than the alphabet. They are also taught theology, geography, history, and arithmetic. None can be admitted to the school but such as are recommended by the clergymen of their respective parishes; and this testimonial must be submitted to the Bishop, to whose general superintendence the institution is committed.

The period allotted for instruction begins about the first of October, and lasts till the end of May, when a public examination is held in

the presence of the Bishop and other public officers, in order to ascertain the talents and proficiency of the students. The length of time they spend at the school is left undetermined, and depends entirely on the diligence and abilities of the individual. Should any, however, be so uncommonly dull, as not to pass after a fair trial of *seven* seasons, he is dismissed as incapable of tuition. Those who have acquired the needful qualifications obtain a demissus, and, after having made some farther progress under the inspection of their minister or dean, may present themselves as candidates for public offices. Very few of those who fill the pastoral office enjoy any other means of improvement. Such as have wealthier friends prosecute their studies at the university of Copenhagen, and either remain in Denmark, or return to their native island in expectation of being promoted to some of the better situations its official departments present.

It not unfrequently happens that young men of considerable parts and learning come to *Reykjavik* for ordination, who have never spent an hour at this establishment. They either learn the elements of the Latin and Greek tongues from grammars which had been put into their hands, or receive some little instruction from the minister of the parish; and by an ardent thirst for knowledge, and the force of application, they make themselves masters of a book or two of the *Iliad*, and the most of the Greek

Testament. In many parts of the island the peasants rather choose to allow their sons to follow this method than run the risk of sending them to the south ; it being a fact, that many of those who have studied there, have afterwards manifested a strong inclination towards scepticism and infidelity, an effect more directly produced, perhaps, by their intercourse with foreigners, than the instructions of their teachers. It must, nevertheless, be allowed, that the use of the elemental book of Niemeyer has a great tendency to produce in the mind a culpable indifference about the distinguishing doctrines of Revelation ; and experience has evinced, that where this state of mind has gained ground, the tenets of Socinianism have been embraced, and these in their turn but too naturally lead to déism and total unbelief.

In the year 1759, Jon Therkelson, formerly rector of the school at *Skalholt*, bequeathed all his landed property, besides the sum of 4000 rix-dollars, for the purpose of founding a charity school in *Gullbringe Sysset*, in which twelve poor children might receive a decent education ; but the capital, which was placed out on interest in Denmark, was unfortunatly lost. A second capital was produced, however, by the sale of the estates, and the school was ultimately established at *Hausastad*, a place in the vicinity of *Bessastad*, in the year 1791 ; and the intended number of children continued to be instructed here till a few years ago, when, in de-

fiance of every principle of justice, and of respect for the memory of the deceased, the institution was given up, and the money appropriated to the *Bessastad* establishment.

During the long winter of eight months which I spent in Iceland, I was never farther from my lodgings than a quarter of a mile, excepting once, that I paid a visit to my worthy friend the Archdeacon at *Gardè*. The house I occupied belonged to a Danish merchant, and the uniform prospect which the light of a few hours presented to my view, embraced the bleak and rugged mountains in the *Gullbringe* Syssel, the volcano *Henglafell*, and the beautiful conic-shaped *Keilar*, with the numerous subordinate hills of a similar description in the vicinity. The cathedral also, and part of the lake behind it, with a number of the houses about the town, crowded into the scenery. Cut off from all communication with the rest of the world, completely excluded from the possibility of obtaining the least intelligence respecting those in whom I felt most deeply interested, and denied the privilege of free intercourse with a few friends of congenial views and feelings with myself, I should certainly have most keenly felt the solitude of my situation, had it not been for a good supply of books which I took with me from Copenhagen, and my employing a great part of my time in writing out the notes which I had collected for my journal the preceding summer. What also tended in no small degree

to relieve the monotony of my winter avocations, was the agreeable company of my countryman, Mr. Hodgson. The acquaintance we had formed with one another on our journey to the Geysers now ripened into friendship; and our conversation, which at first principally turned on the wonders of nature, gradually ascended to the miracles of grace. We generally saw one another once a-day, and always spent one evening in the week together.

*Reykjavik* is unquestionably the worst place in which to spend the winter in Iceland. The tone of society is the lowest that can well be imagined. Being the resort of a number of foreigners, few of whom have had any education, and who frequent the island solely for purposes of gain, it not only presents a lamentable blank to the view of the religious observer, but is totally devoid of every source of intellectual gratification. The foreign residents generally idle away the short-lived day with the tobacco pipe in their mouths, and spend the evening in playing at cards, and drinking punch. They have two or three balls in the course of the winter, and a play is sometimes acted by the principal inhabitants. To these purposes they appropriate the Court-house, and without ceremony, take the benches out of the cathedral, to supply the want of seats. An instance has even been known of the same individual, who performed one of the acts in a play till late on Saturday night, making his appearance the following morning in the

pulpit, in the character of a public teacher of religion!

The influence of such a state of society on the native Icelanders, in and about *Reykjavik*, is very apparent. Too many of them seem to imbibe the same spirit, and their "good manners" are evidently getting corrupted by the "evil communications" of the strangers by whom they are visited.

END OF VOLUME FIRST.