part of Iceland, but to these articles being brought by the people from different parts of the island, for the purpose of bartering with the merchants of this place.*

There is perhaps no part of the world where the cod fishery can be carried on so extensively, so easily, or so safely, as in Iceland. When the distance of Newfoundland, and the stormy weather which prevails in that quarter, are comparatively considered, together with the expence of our establishments there, Iceland offers the most important advantages as a fishing station. The facility with which the fishing is carried on by the natives is really astonishing. In the morning they go out in small skifts, to the distance of a few miles from the shore, and in the afternoon return with as many fine fish as their boats can contain. Even in the very harbours, as was the case at Reikiavik soon after we left it, abundance of cod are sometimes taken. The rivers are frequented by vast numbers of salmon, an article on great demand both in this country and in the West Indies. But they are neglected; no means being employed for a regular capture, except in the small river near Reikiavik; and the salmon from that river are almost all consumed in the country.

Fish and oil are the chief articles of export, which could be extended to an indefinite amount. Wool is an article not required in Britain; but, by improving the land, the stock of cattle and sheep might be greatly increased, so that the quantity of hides and tallow would become considerable. The disposition of the English Government to be humane towards that miserable country, cannot be doubted; and to the feelings which dictated the Order in Council, dated in February 1810, much credit is due. That compassionate

* See Journal, page 202.

and well-meant Order was not at first attended with any advantage to the Icelanders. Though permission was given to trade with the natives, the duties on the goods brought home still remained prohibitory; and several ships belonging to Iceland, which came to this country on the faith of the Order, were, on account of the duties, long detained at Leith, till strong representations being made, they were permitted to sail to Denmark with their cargoes. Sir Joseph Banks, with that humanity which distinguishes him, has made many applications in behalf of Iceland; and we have not failed to represent the case of that country, as we found it, to those under whose management our foreign relations and trade are placed. The Board of Trade has shewn a great inclination to favour the Danish merchants trading to Iceland; and indulgences, far beyond any which have ever been given to an enemy, have been granted to them. Unless these merchants be permitted to carry Icelandic produce to Denmark they cannot afford to carry provisions to Iceland. As the enrichment of a few individuals, who are subjects of a hostile power, cannot possibly injure this country, humanity to the wretched Icelanders dictates the permission of free intercourse with Denmark.

ON THE GOVERNMENT, LAWS, AND RELIGION.

CHAP. VI.

Since the period when Iceland was first annexed to a European monarchy, the progress of time has effected little change either in the physical condition or political situation of its inhabitants. The general form of government, which was established nearly six centuries ago, is still preserved; and the circumstances of the people have required few important alterations in the code of laws, which was then transmitted to them by the Norwegian monarchs. Even this form of government, and these laws, were founded upon the existing usages of the country; and we must principally look to the wisdom of those, who framed the ancient commonwealth of Iceland, for the origin of institutions, which, in this later age, preserve to their posterity all the blessings of tranquillity and social order.

The government of Iceland is committed to an officer, appointed by the crown of Denmark; who is occasionally a native of the island, but more frequently a Dane or Norwegian by birth. This supreme magistrate has the title of Stift-

amtmand. It is his office to conduct the various public concerns of the country; to preside in the courts of law; to superintend the execution of the laws, and the collection and disposal of the public revenue; and, in conjunction with the Bishop, to regulate the schools and certain ecclesiastical concerns of the island. He receives a salary, as Governor, of 2,000 rixdollars per annum; and has a house appropriated to his use.

Since the disturbances which occurred in Iceland in the summer of 1809, there has been no regular governor in the country; and it is probable that the appointment of one will not be made, till the war between England and Denmark has been brought to a termination. After Jorgensen had been deposed, and Count Trampe taken to Britain in the Talbot sloop of war, the functions of the government were undertaken by Mr Stephenson, who retained this office till the month of June 1810; when the change took place which has already been mentioned in the narrative.

Immediately subordinate to the Governor are the Amtmen, or Provincial Governors. The island is divided into four provinces; but as the jurisdiction of the northern and eastern are united, and as the Governor of Iceland assumes the office of Amtmand of the southern province, in which he resides, there are, in fact, only two officers who possess this title. Their duties are very similar to those of the Stiftamtmand, though on a more limited scale. They inspect the conduct of all the subordinate officers, and hold provincial courts, at which a report is made of all the public proceedings within their districts. The present Amtmen are Mr Stephenson of Huaneyrè, who has the jurisdiction of the western province; and Mr Thoranson, who holds the northern and eastern provinces of the island.

The Sysselmen, though of inferior rank, are, in the offices they sustain, of great importance in the country. They have the personal charge of collecting the taxes in their several districts or Syssels; they hold courts of law and pronounce judgment in all cases; they watch over the public peace, officiate as public notaries, and maintain the rights of inheritance. The Sysselman is appointed by the Crown; and the office, on account of its importance, is always given to one of the most respectable landed proprietors within the district.

There is still a subordinate local officer, called the Hreppstiorè, whose jurisdiction is a parochial one, and whose duty it particularly is to attend to the condition and maintenance of the poor, and to assist the proceedings of the Sysselman in all that relates to the preservation of public order. Where the population of a parish exceeds four hundred persons, the office is committed to two individuals; who usually belong to the class of farmers, and are invariably chosen from a regard to their abilities and steadiness of character. By a late edict of the Danish Government, these inferior magistrates, as well as their children, are exempted from the levies for the support of the poor, and are allowed also to use a dress appropriate to their situation. In each parish, beside the Hreppstiorè, there are a certain number of individuals (Forlikunarmen), appointed for the express purpose of accommodating any disputes which may arise among the inhabitants.

The laws of Iceland, it has been already remarked, are founded principally upon the ancient code, called the Jonsbok, which was introduced into the island A. D. 1280. Certain changes have since been introduced into the substance of these laws, and several additions made to them by the edicts of the Norwegian and Danish Kings; but none such as to affect materially their general spirit or character. The al-

terations, however, which have taken place in the judicial establishments of the country, have been much more considerable; and the forms of justice, in consequence of progressive changes, are now in many respects similar to those in the continental dominions of Denmark.

Of the judicial establishments of the island, the court of the Sysselman is the first to which all cases, whether criminal or civil, are referred. This court, which is called the Hieradsthing, is officially held only once in the year in each Syssel; but should the public business of the country require it, an extraordinary court may at any time be appointed, with the same jurisdiction; either by the Crown in criminal cases, or by the petition of the litigants in causes of a civil nature. Every public suit brought before this tribunal is instituted by the Amtmand of the province, as the representative of the Crown.

In criminal cases, an examination of the suspected person, and of the witnesses, is made immediately after the apprehension of the former; and the results of the examination are transmitted to the Amtmand, who decides upon these grounds whether a trial is required. If it be deemed necessary, the prosecution is conducted in the Sysselman's court by a public pleader on the part of the Crown, who is opposed by another pleader appointed for the defendant. Upon the evidence and the pleadings, the decision of the court is founded; the Sysselman in his judicial capacity being assisted by four persons, called Meddoms-menn, *(consessores judicii)* who both register the proceedings, and give their suffrages, together with the Sysselman, in the decision upon every cause.* The

* A similar institution, with respect to the assistant inferior judges, exists in the inferior courts of Denmark. See Dissert. de Offic. Judicum Inferior. in Dania. (Havniæ 1801, p. 17,) by Snæbiorn Stadfeldt.

sentence proceeds upon a plurality of these suffrages. At Reikiavik the Bifoged, or Sheriff of the town, has a jurisdiction similar to that of the Sysselmen in the larger districts.

From these provincial courts appeals are permitted, and are usually made in all important civil or criminal cases, to the superior court of justice, which has its ordinary sittings at Reikiavik six times in the course of the year.* This tribunal, in its present form, was constituted as lately as the year 1800; at which period the judicial assemblies, held annually at Thingvalla during so many centuries, were finally abolished, and their place supplied by the present establishment, considerably altered in its constitution and forms. The court is composed of the Stiftamtmand or governor; of three judges; of a secretary; and two public pleaders. The governor officiates as president, but takes no part whatsoever in the judicial proceedings. Of the judges, one has a superior rank, with the title of Justitiarius, which office, since the institution of the court, has been held by Mr Stephenson of Indreholm, with credit to himself, and advantage to his country. The other judges, entitled the Assessors, are Mr Grondal of Reikiavik, whose poetical celebrity has elsewhere been mentioned, and Mr Einarson of Bessestad. Though inferior in rank to the Justitiarius, they have an equal weight with him in the decisions of the court, every sentence being determined by a plurality among their three votes. In the proceedings of the tribunal, much impartiality is observed. The evidence and pleadings for each party are respectively heard; and the sentence is pronounced by the Justitiarius, after the votes of the other judges are obtained. As was remarked in the Pre-

* This court is called the *Konunglegi Lands-yfur-rettur:* according to a literal translation, The Royal court of justice over the land.

liminary Dissertation, there are at present in Iceland no vestiges of the trial by jury.

From the superior court of justice at Reikiavik, a final appeal is still in all cases reserved to the authority of the higher courts at Copenhagen. Since the interruption, however, of the ordinary intercourse between Iceland and Denmark, by the war with England, it has been found desirable to establish a court in the island, with the authority of passing a final judgment in criminal cases; which court is constituted by the governor, the three judges, and one or two other members specially appointed by the governor in every cause. This tribunal, being created by an emergency, will doubtless be abolished as soon as the necessity for it has ceased.

Though the transference of the superior court from Thingvalla to Reikiavik has probably, on the whole, been attended with advantage, yet there are some reasons why the Icelanders, as a people, should contemplate this change with feelings of regret. The annual meeting at Thingvalla was not merely that of a tribunal of justice, but an assembly of the nation; and though the importance of this assembly was diminished, and its dignity degraded, by the subjection of the island to a foreign power, yet, on the spot where the greatest among his ancestors had so often stood, the mind of the Icelander must ever have been awake to enthusiasm and patriotic pride. 'Hic sacra, hic genus, hic majorum multa vestigia!' To the eye too of the poet, every thing is lost in this change. The Icelanders are now summoned to the public courts of the country in a small and miserable apartment, destitute of all ornament, and even of common furniture; where there is nothing present to confer external dignity upon the meetings, or to mark the character of a national establishment. At the assemblies of Thingvalla, though artificial splendour was

wanting, yet the majesty of nature presided, and gave a superior and more impressive solemnity to the scene. On the banks of the river Oxeraa, where its rapid stream enters a lake, embosomed among dark and precipitous mountains, was held during eight centuries, the annual convention of the people. It is a spot of singular wildness and desolation; on every side of which appear the most tremendous effects of ancient convulsion and disorder; while there is now a death-like silence amidst the horrors of the scene. Here the legislators, the magistrates, and the people met together. Their little group of tents placed beside the stream, was sheltered behind by a rugged precipice of lava; and on a small grassy spot in the midst of them was held the assembly, which provided by its deliberations for the happiness and tranquillity of the nation.

The study of their own laws, as well as of the principles of law in general, has ever been a favourite pursuit among the Icelanders; and both in ancient and modern times, a great number of writings, connected with this subject, have appeared in the island. In consequence of this minute attention, all the laws of the country, both civil and criminal, are very distinctly defined; and even among the inferior magistrates, are so well understood, that their execution is every where conducted with fidelity and exactness.

The punishments for theft, prescribed in the criminal law, are varied by the degree of the offence. In cases where the theft is of little importance, or the crime committed for the first time, the offender is whipped, in the presence of only the judge and two witnesses. This punishment is allotted also to other trifling offences, when the poverty of the persons convicted makes it impossible for them to pay a pecuniary fine. In cases where petty thefts have been a second time commit-

ted, the criminal is usually sent to Copenhagen; in the work-house of which city he is confined for the term of three or five years, according to the degree of his guilt. Thefts of a more serious nature, as the breaking into churches or houses, or the stealing of horses, are punished either by public whipping, or by a sentence of perpetual confinement in the Copenhagen work-house.* Where such thefts have been committed for the fourth time, or still more frequently, the punishment is confinement for life in the public prisons of Denmark. The operation of these more severe laws is, however, very seldom required; crimes of this description being by no means frequent among the natives of Iceland.

The only public prison in the island is that of Reikiavik, which was erected about fifty years ago. By a mistake, not unnatural in such a country as Iceland, this building has been rendered greatly more comfortable than the common habitations of the natives; so that, were it not for the privation of liberty, the Icelander might well be content to exchange his own abode, for one where his actual comforts are little inferior, and where he is exempted from many of the evils incident to his usual mode of life. Sheep-stealing is the most common offence for which imprisonment here is adjudged; the term of confinement extending from two to five years, and a certain portion of daily labour being appointed for each prisoner. The crime of adultery committed for the third time, is punished by a confinement of two years. At the time we visited Iceland, there were six people imprisoned

* In the work-house at Copenhagen there are different sections, allotted to different classes of criminals. The men condemned to confinement there are kept in a part of it called the *Rasp-huus*, where they are employed in rasping dye-woods; an occupation considered very dangerous to the health.

in this place; but this is probably rather below the usual number.

Capital punishment, though strictly provided for by the laws in cases of murder, &c. is scarcely ever required among a people, gentle in all their dispositions, and possessing moral qualities of an excellent kind. Examples of this have been so very rare, that a few years ago, when a peasant was condemned to die for the murder of his wife, no one in the island could be induced to perform the office of executioner, and it was necessary to send the criminal over to Norway, that the sentence of the law might be carried into effect. The method prescribed for inflicting death, is that of taking off the head with an axe. In all cases where capital punishment or perpetual imprisonment have been adjudged by the courts, the ratification of the king of Denmark is required, before the sentence can be acted upon.

By a law enacted a few years ago, it is provided that no Icelander, unless under an accusation which might subject him to capital punishment, or to imprisonment for life, shall be kept in confinement before the time of his trial. When an individual is accused of any inferior crime, he is admonished by the Hreppstiorè in the presence of witnesses, not to leave the parish in which he resides. If he infringes upon this obligation, and is afterwards apprehended, he remains under strict confinement, until judgment upon his case has been pronounced.

Some of the Icelandic laws with respect to property have been mentioned in the chapter on Rural Affairs. The law of inheritance is well defined, and acted upon with much strictness. No entail of landed property is allowed; but upon the decease of an individual, a division is made of his lands, or of a value equivalent to them by estimate, in which an equal

share is allotted to every son; with the right, however, in the case of the eldest, of chusing the farm or share of the property, which may be most agreeable to him. The daughters have each the half of a son's portion. If the wife survives her husband, she has half of his estate; or if she dies first, the husband retains the same proportion of the property which she brought him at her marriage.

The tributes paid by the Icelanders are by no means considerable; and do not even suffice for the support of the civil establishment of the island. They are collected in different ways. Some of them are strictly taxes on property; founded upon an estimate which is annually made, under the superintendance of the Hreppstiores, of the possessions of the several individuals in each parish. This estimate is conducted in a somewhat singular way; its basis being a very ancient regulation of property, according to the number of ells of *wadmal*, the cloth of native manufacture, which each individual possessed, or was enabled to manufacture in the course of the year. The term *hundred*, which was formerly a division derived from the number of ells, is now applied to other descriptions of property. An Icelander is reckoned the possessor of a *hundred*, when he has two horses, a cow, a certain number of sheep and lambs, a fishing boat furnished with nets and lines, and forty rixdollars in specie; and it is by this ratio, that the amount of all possessions is ascertained, and the tributes levied upon them. One of the tributes called the *Tuind's*, requires from every person possessing more than five hundreds, the annual payment of twelve fish, or an equivalent amounting to twenty-seven skillings, or somewhat more than a shilling of English money. This tax increases in an uniform ratio with the increase of property; and its produce is allotted in equal portions to the public revenue, to the

priests, to the churches, and to the maintenance of the poor. Another tribute, called the *Skattur*, consisted in former times of twenty ells of wadmal, but is now commuted to money, at the rate of four skillings and a half per ell. It is paid to the public revenue by the owners of farms, and by all whose property, estimated in hundreds, exceeds the number of individuals composing their families. A third tax, called the *Olaftollur*, is paid either in fish or money; likewise in proportion to the property of each individual. A few others are collected in the country; but they are very inconsiderable in amount, and devolve little burthen upon the inhabitants. The commerce of the island, since the year 1787, has been exempted from all duties.

The management of the taxes is entirely in the hands of the Sysselmen, who collect them from the inhabitants at the public meetings which they hold in their respective districts. The payment is for the most part made in produce of various kind; fish, tallow, butter, fox-skins, wool, or woollen goods. As the Sysselman is required to pay the amount of the taxes in money to the Landfoged, or treasurer of the island, it becomes a part of his office to dispose of these articles to the merchants; in which transaction, he is himself subject to the chances of gain or loss that may arise from fluctuations in the market price. A third part of the produce of the taxes is retained as his own salary; nor is this more than sufficient to compensate him for the labour and responsibility which he incurs in the discharge of his various duties.

The Icelandic laws respecting the condition and maintenance of the poor, are very strictly enforced; and become much more burthensome to the farmers and peasants of the country, than the taxes to which they are subject. With the exception of three small buildings, for the admission of a few

incurable lepers, there is no public establishment in the island, which affords a permanent abode to the aged and destitute; and by all such, the more immediate assistance of their fellow-citizens is therefore imperiously required. The laws render it necessary for every farmer or householder to receive into his family, and to give support, to those of his relations, even in the fourth degree of kindred, who may be in a destitute condition. If he has no such calls made upon him by consanguinity, he is still required to assist in the support of the poor, either by admitting some orphan or aged person into his house, or by contributing an annual sum proportioned to the value of his property. It not unfrequently happens, that a landed proprietor, who pays little more than two rixdollars to the public revenue, is called upon for forty, fifty, or even sixty, as his ratio towards the maintenance of the poor in the district; when he is unwilling to receive any of these into his own habitation. The execution of the poor-laws is committed to the Hreppstiorè of each parish; and form the most essential part of the duties of his office.

In the preceding parts of this volume, much has been said respecting the history of religion in Iceland, the services of the Icelandic church, and the general condition of the priests throughout the country. A brief account of the nature of the religious establishment, and the mention of a few miscellaneous facts, will give the reader all the information that remains upon this subject.

The reformation of religion in Iceland took place A. D. 1551; since which period the doctrines of the Lutheran church, as it exists in the northern kingdoms of Europe, have been strictly maintained in the island. At the present time,

not a single dissentient is to be found from the established religion of the country; and the only instance of the kind on record, is one which occurred about the end of the 17th century; when Helgo Eiolfidas, a man who had acquired much knowledge of German literature, espoused the Socinian doctrines, and taught them openly to his children and friends; till compelled by the judgment of the Ecclesiastical Court to make a public renunciation of his belief. Doctrinal discussion is of course little known among the Icelanders; and the contests which have existed in their church, relate chiefly to external ordinances, and to the situation and rights of the clergy of the island.

The religious establishment of Iceland is formed on a more extensive scale, than might have been expected from the nature of the country and the condition of the people. The inhabited parts of the island are divided into 184 parishes; a division which gives to each parish an average population of about 260 persons. From the great extent, however, of these districts, it has in many instances been found necessary to erect more than one church in a parish; and the total number of churches in the island somewhat exceeds three hundred. The duty of each parish devolves upon a single priest; with the permission, however, if his own circumstances do not allow the full discharge of his duties, to take an assistant from among the young men educated for the church, who have not yet obtained a permanent situation in life. The number of the officiating ministers of religion is of course various at different times, though never greatly exceeding that of the parishes. Immediately superior to the common priests are the Provosts, or Deacons, whose office it is to exercise a general superintendance over the churches in each Syssel, and who are chosen in general from a regard to their talents and

respectability of character. There are nineteen of these deacons in the island; but their number is included among that of the priests, just mentioned, as they severally have parishes allotted to them, of which they discharge all the ordinary duties. A small additional stipend is attached to the office, which renders their situation somewhat superior to that of the other clergy.

During a period of seven centuries, Iceland was divided into two bishoprics; that of Skalholt comprehending the southern, that of Hoolum the northern, districts of the island. The sees becoming vacant at the same time, they were united in 1797 by the order of the Danish government; and the title of Bishop of Iceland was conferred upon the learned and respectable Geir Vidalin, the present possessor of this dignity. The duties of the office are important and extensive. The Bishop superintends the general concerns of the religious establishment; he inspects the conduct of the priests, regulates any ecclesiastical disputes which may occur, ordains those who are entering upon the pastoral office, and watches over the education and moral conduct of the people at large. It is a part of his duty also to visit at stated periods the different districts of his diocese, for the purpose of personal inspection; and the farmers of the country are required to assist him, while making these journies, with every accommodation which their means may afford. The appointment of the Bishop is vested in the Crown. While there were two bishoprics in Iceland, the revenues of each were very small, and ill adapted to support the dignity, scarcely even the necessary duties of the office. In consequence of the union of the sees, a considerable augmentation was made in the revenues of the present Bishop, which now amount to about 1800 dollars per annum; derived chiefly from the pub-

lic treasury of the island. Did he reside in the interior of the country, this sum would raise him to the highest rank of opulence; but making his abode in Reikiavik, he is subject to many additional expences, not only from the different mode of life among the Danes, but also from the necessity of entertaining the country priests, who come to barter their commodities with the merchants at this place. The singular hospitality and kindness of heart, which distinguish the character of Bishop Vidalin, would keep him in a state of poverty, even were his means of exercising these dispositions much greater than they actually are.

The patronage of the church in Iceland was formerly in the hands of the people and the proprietors of land; was afterwards assumed by the Bishops, as the representatives of the Papal authority; and finally, at the period of the reformation, was transferred to the crown of Denmark. The power is now, in most cases, exercised by the Governor of the island, with the assistance and advice of the Bishop. The revenues of the clergy are derived in part from the lands annexed to the churches; partly from tithes upon the landed property of the country. These tithes are paid by the farmers, in a ratio determined, not by the quantity of produce raised upon each farm, but by the fixed rents of the land; from the nature of which rents, as described in the chapter on Rural Affairs, it will appear that the value of the tithes is subject to very little variation. More than half a century has elapsed since the estimate was made, upon which the regulation of their value was founded; but this regulation probably falls little short of the present revenues of the Icelandic church, in as far as they are derived from tithes. To afford an idea of the extreme scantiness of the provision which is thus made for the clergy, it may be sufficient to state, from

the tables drawn up at that time, that the whole revenue by tithe, in 184 parishes, does not exceed the sum of 6400 specie dollars; giving an average of 34 or 35 dollars for each parish in the island. The distribution of the stipends is by no means equal, owing to the difference in the extent and value of the land under cultivation in different districts. The most valuable living in the island is that of Breidè-bolstadr, in Rangaavallè Syssel, the stipend of which is upwards of 180 dollars: the parish contains 376 people. In the parish of Kröss, in the same district, where there are two churches, and a population exceeding 500, the stipend amounts only to 33 dollars. In Aarnes Syssel, the parish of Torfastadir, in which the Geysers are situated, contains five churches; while the salary of the priest and his assistant, amounts scarcely to 30 dollars. In numerous instances, however, the stipends are still much smaller; and there are two or three parishes in the island, where the annual sum of five dollars forms the whole provision which is made by tithe for the support of the ministers of religion. The stipends, though specified according to their value in money, are very generally paid, like the taxes, in different articles of produce; which the priests either consume in their own families, or barter with the merchants for other articles which they more immediately require.

These scanty pittances would obviously be insufficient to the support of the religious establishment, were they not assisted by the value of the glebe-land, which is annexed to the church in each parish. Every priest thus becomes a farmer; and though the land which they hold is in general of small extent, yet there are certain rights attached to it, which augment considerably the profits derived from this source. Beside the tithe upon his rent, each farmer in the parish is required to give annually to the priest, either a day's work, or

an equivalent value in money; and likewise to keep one of his lambs during the winter season; taking it home in October, and returning it in good condition the following spring. It is customary, also, for the more wealthy of his parishioners, to make him a small offering, of the value of eightpence in English money, three times in the course of the year; besides which, a trifling perquisite is occasionally obtained for the performance of particular services, as baptism, marriage, and burial. These are all the sources from which the Icelandic priest obtains a livelihood for his family.

In the preceding narrative of our travels, the general appearance and construction of the churches in Iceland has been minutely described. It would be difficult, indeed, to convey to one who has not visited the country, an adequate idea of the extreme wretchedness of some of the edifices which bear this name. But it must be recollected, that if a greater size, or more decoration, had been given to these places of worship, their number would have been diminished in the same proportion; and in looking therefore at the Icelandic churches, as they now are, no feeling of contempt can have place in the mind, but rather a sentiment of admiration, for the judgment with which the means of the people have been applied to the great object in view. The charge of attending to the condition of the churches is committed to the Hreppstiorè of each parish; while to provide for any necessary repairs, a small tax is levied upon the inhabitants, and the personal labours of the peasants are occasionally required. The present war between England and Denmark, unfortunate for Iceland in so many points of view, has here also inflicted some of its evils. The accustomed supply of timber from Norway being suspended, many of the churches in the country are getting into a ruinous state; and during

the last summer, communications were made to the Bishop from different parishes, representing the impossibility of continuing public worship from this cause.

The education of the priests at the school of Bessestad, will be described in the next chapter. When a young man, intended for this office, has undergone the required examinations, he leaves the school, and usually returns to his native place; where, in assisting his family to obtain their scanty and hardly-earned provision, he submits to the same labours as the meanest of those around him. During our first journey in Iceland, we were attended by a person in this situation, who performed for us all the menial offices of a servant and guide. These young men are still called upon, however, to pursue their theological studies in as far as their limited means will allow; and, to provide for this necessary part of discipline, the superintendance of the Bishop is continued, who annually transmits to each candidate for the priesthood, a series of Latin questions, as a test of his diligence and proficiency. The nature of these questions will be seen from the subjoined list, which was sent to some of the students of divinity in the summer of 1810.* The dissertations in reply to them, are conveyed to the Bishop at Reikiavik by those who come down

* Examen Theologicum Candidato.....solvendum.

1. Quanam cautione opus est in prophetiis Veteris Testamenti explicandis?
2. Quid libri Veteris Testamenti docent de resurrectione mortuorum.
3. An mali genii homines ad peccandum solicitant?
4. In quo consistit venia peccatorum nobis per Jesum parta?
5. Æternitas pœnarum post hanc vitam quibus argumentis probator, et quomodo cum benignitate Summi Numinis concilianda est?
6. Explicentur Matt. xv. 4, 5, 6; et I. Cor. III. 15, 16.
7. Qualis fuit status religionis in patria nostra ante Reformationem?
8. Cur Deus hominibus salutem æternam, tantum conditione vitæ emendandæ, pollicetur?

to this part of the coast to fish, or to dispose of their tallow and other commodities to the merchants. After a certain period of probation, and a personal examination by the Bishop on the doctrines and duties of their profession, the candidates are received into orders, and await the occurrence of vacancies, which may afford them a place of final settlement. It is not, however, a life of luxurious ease which they enjoy, when their abode is thus determined. From the scantiness of the provision which is made for them in their public situation, the toil of their own hands is necessary to the support of their families; and besides the labours of the little farm which is attached to his church, the priest may often be seen conducting a train of loaded horses from the fishing station to his distant home; a journey not unfrequently of many days; and through a country wild and desolate beyond description. Their habitations are constructed merely of wood and turf, like those of the farmers of the country, and are equally destitute of all internal comforts. A stove, or place for containing fire, is scarcely ever to be found in them: often there is only one apartment in the house to which the light of the sun has free access, or where there is any flooring but the naked earth; and the furniture of this room seldom comprehends more than a bed, a broken table, one or two chairs, and a few boxes, in which the clothes of the family are preserved. Such is the situation during life of the Icelandic priests; and amidst all this wretchedness and these privations, genius, learning, and moral excellence, are but too frequently entombed.

The ordinary service of the churches in Iceland consists of prayer, psalms, a sermon, and readings from the Scriptures. The prayers and readings are rather chaunted than spoken by the priest, who performs this part of the service at the

altar of the church. The sermons appear in general to be previously composed, and are delivered from notes. Of the style and character of these compositions we had not the means of forming an accurate judgment; but in those instances where we attended the public worship of the country, it seemed, from the warm and empassioned manner of their delivery, and from the frequent use of the figure of interrogation, that a powerful appeal was made to the feelings, as well as to the understanding, of the audience. In the conduct of the religious service, considerable decorum is maintained.

The moral and religious habits of the people at large may be spoken of in terms of much commendation. In his domestic capacity, the Icelander performs all the duties which his situation requires, or renders possible; and while by the labour of his hands, he obtains a provision of food for his children, it is not less his care to convey to their minds the inheritance of knowledge and virtue. In his intercourse with those around him, his character displays the stamp of honour and integrity. His religious duties are performed with cheerfulness and punctuality; and this even amidst the numerous obstacles, which are afforded by the nature of the country, and the climate under which he lives. The Sabbath scene at an Icelandic church is indeed one of the most singular and interesting kind. The little edifice, constructed of wood and turf, is situated perhaps amid the rugged ruins of a stream of lava, or beneath mountains which are covered with never melting snows; in a spot where the mind almost sinks under the silence and desolation of surrounding nature. Here the Icelanders assemble to perform the duties of their religion. A group of male and female peasants may be seen gathered about the church, waiting the arrival of their pastor; all

habited in their best attire, after the manner of the country; their children with them; and the horses, which brought them from their respective homes, grazing quietly around the little assembly. The arrival of a new-comer is welcomed by every one with the kiss of salutation; and the pleasures of social intercourse, so rarely enjoyed by the Icelanders, are happily connected with the occasion which summons them to the discharge of their religious duties. The priest makes his appearance among them as a friend: he salutes individually each member of his flock, and stoops down to give his almost parental kiss to the little ones, who are to grow up under his pastoral charge. These offices of kindness performed, they all go together into the house of prayer.

There are two translations of the Bible into the Icelandic language; the first by Gudbrand Thorlakson, Bishop of Hoolum, from the German Bible of Martin Luther, and published in 1584; the second was executed chiefly by Bishop Skulasson, in conformity with the Danish version of Resenius, and appeared about sixty years afterwards, under the more immediate patronage of the King of Denmark. The latter of these versions is preferable to the former, merely from the division of the text into verses; which division the edition of Bishop Thorlakson did not supply. At present, owing to the length of time which has elapsed since any edition appeared, there is a great deficiency of Bibles in every part of Iceland; an evil which, from the depressed state of the printing establishment of the island, it is scarcely possible that the unaided efforts of the people should be enabled to remove.

PRESENT STATE OF EDUCATION AND LITERATURE.

CHAP. VII.

In the Dissertation prefixed to this volume, an attempt has been made to explain the circumstances in which the literature of the Icelanders originated, and to trace its progress through the successive periods of the history of the island. It will be the object of this chapter to complete the view of Icelandic literature, by exhibiting the present state of mental cultivation among the people; their institutions for the promotion of learning; and the modes of education among different classes of the community. From the more minute description to which they lead, these circumstances could not with propriety form a part in the general history of the country; though, as a sequel to it, they may possibly be interesting to the reader.

The picture of the present state of literature in Iceland is much less imposing than that of its early condition and growth. The changes, however, which the lapse of time has effected, are rather relative than absolute in their nature; and though the glory of the Icelanders is now for ever sunk, and their

name almost lost among nations, yet in their own island they still keep alive much of that spirit of literary pursuit by which the character of their ancestors was so greatly distinguished. A few of the names which adorn the modern history of the country have already been mentioned. At the present time, there are many individuals, living on this remote spot, and from their situation exposed to innumerable privations, whose talents and acquirements would grace the most refined circles of civilized society. The business of education is systematically carried on among all ranks of the inhabitants; and the degree of information existing, even among the lower classes, is probably greater than in almost any part of continental Europe.

This state of mental culture will appear more wonderful, when it is considered that the circumstances of the country do not allow of any extended scheme of public education, and that the transmission of knowledge can take place only through the private and domestic habits of the people. In the existence among the Icelanders of habits which are fitted to this end, we contemplate a feature which is justly entitled to admiration and esteem.

At the present time, the school of Bessestad is in fact the only establishment for education in Iceland. About the middle of the 16th century, when the reformation of religion took place in the island, two schools were founded; one at Skalholt, the other at Hoolum in the northern province; and a landed property was attached to these institutions, sufficient for the support of between twenty and thirty scholars at each place. Towards the close of the last century, the two schools were united into one, and transferred to Reikiavik; while in lieu of the school lands, which were appropriated by the crown, an annual sum from the public money was allotted to

the support of the establishment. A few years ago, the school was again transferred to its present situation at Bessestad; the building being vacant which was formerly the abode of the Governors of Iceland. This edifice, though by no means in good repair, is from its size better adapted than any other in the country for the purposes to which it is now applied; and, but for the intervention of the war between England and Denmark, would have been further improved by the completion of some additional buildings, which are yet in an unfinished state.

The establishment at Bessestad consists at present of three masters, and twenty-three or twenty-four scholars; the funds of the school not allowing the reception of a greater number. The head master, or Lector Theologiæ, has an annual salary of 600 rixdollars. It is his office to superintend the general concerns of the school, and to conduct more especially the theological department, and the study of the Hebrew language. At the time of our arrival in Iceland, the person who held this situation was Mr Steingrim Jonson; a man apparently not more than thirty-five years of age, but possessed of talents and learning which well fitted him for the discharge of its important duties. For several years he was the pupil and secretary of the late bishop Finsson at Skalholt, after whose death he studied some time at Copenhagen; where, as a classical scholar, he acquired very great credit. His knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew languages is said to be accurate and extensive; and to theological studies he has given a very minute attention, being intimately acquainted with the writings of the most eminent of the German theologians. This gentleman, during our stay in Iceland, was removed from Bessestad to the church of Oddè, in Rangaavallè Syssel, one of the most valuable livings in the island. He was suc-

ceeded by another person, of the same name, who is likewise reputed to be a man of learning and acquirements.

The two inferior masters of the school have salaries of 300 rixdollars each. The office of the second master comprehends the instruction of the scholars in Latin, history, geography, and arithmetic; while the third is occupied in teaching the Greek, Danish, and Icelandic languages. It is a singular circumstance in the regulations of the school, that each scholar, whether intended for the pastoral office or not, is obliged to study the elements of Hebrew, and to undergo some examination in this language. By far the greater number, however, of those who attend the school, are preparing themselves for this future situation in life; and in the admission of scholars, a preference is always given to the children of priests. A youth is not allowed to enter until he has been confirmed; and a certificate of his talents and disposition is required from the minister of the parish in which he has resided. The period of annual study extends from the beginning of October to the end of May; the summer being made the season of vacation, to accommodate the rural occupations, in which all ranks among the Icelanders are obliged to partake. It is a part of the office of the Bishop to visit the school at the commencement and close of each session; and at the latter time, to superintend the examinations of the scholars, which then take place. These examinations continue during several days with a prescribed form of proceeding, of which a sketch has already been given in the narrative.

After a certain degree of progress in the studies allotted to him, each scholar becomes what is termed a *demissus:* leaving the school, and pursuing his future studies at home. No particular period is fixed for a *demission.* This is determined solely by the proficiency of the student, as ascertained

by an examination; for which it is required that he should be able to read and write Latin with accuracy; that he should have some knowledge of Greek and Hebrew; and of the rules for interpreting the Old and new Testaments; and that he should be acquainted with the Danish language, with history, arithmetic, and geography. The knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, though officially required, is, however, in the practice of these examinations, by no means very rigorously exacted. Where the students are preparing for the priesthood, as is generally the case, they are farther questioned upon the Bible and ecclesiastical history, upon the doctrines of the Lutheran church, &c. If a youth has continued seven years without attaining the qualifications which entitle him to become a *demissus*, the Lector writes to his family, representing the matter to them, and he is not allowed to remain longer at the school.

A library is attached to the establishment at Bessestad, containing probably twelve or fourteen hundred volumes; among which are a few good editions of the classics. The greater part of the library consists of Icelandic and Danish works; beside which there are a considerable number of volumes in the German language, and a few in the English and French. The number of manuscripts is very considerable, and they appear to be of little value. The private library of the Lector Theologiæ, though smaller, is more select; and contains the works of Mosheim, Heinzius, Reinhard, Lowth, Griesbach, Michaelis, and numerous other authors of minor note, on ecclesiastical history and doctrine. It is the best theological collection in the island.

Among the young men educated at this school, there are some who afterwards go to Copenhagen, with the view of prosecuting their studies at the university there; this advan-

tage being occasionally afforded to the children of those who hold civil offices, or possess landed property, and to the sons of some of the wealthier among the clergy of the country. The number of students, however, who enjoy such opportunities is very limited; and the remainder, oppressed by poverty and the necessities of their situation, are generally compelled to take up their abode for life in solitary spots, where their intercourse, even with each other, is almost wholly suspended, and where any future progress in knowledge can only be effected by their independent and unaided exertions. This is the condition of all the country priests in the island, and of many of the more respectable of the proprietors and farmers. Deprived, as they thus appear to be, both of the means and motives for mental cultivation, it could scarcely be expected that instances should occur, where the ardour of literary pursuit is still maintained, and the acquisitions of former study not only preserved but even increased and improved. The occurrence, however, and even the frequency of examples of this kind, may render necessary some explanation of a fact so extraordinary. Among the more obvious of the causes which present themselves, is the long period of leisure which the Icelanders enjoy, during the protracted winters of their northern region. This leisure, those who have acquired in their youth the habits of literary pursuit, will naturally devote to a continuance in occupations, which are so well adapted to relieve the weariness of the passing time. Their means of study are indeed very limited, and the enjoyments of participation almost wholly denied; but these comparative disadvantages are in some measure overcome by the habits of perseverance, which necessity creates, and which are maintained from an experimental sense of their value. Nor is the great name of their ancestors without its influence

upon the present generation of Icelanders. There are few amongst them who cannot refer back to the times, when those, born on the same soil with themselves, were raised to honours and renown in foreign lands: and never is this appeal made without an animated feeling of patriotic pride and satisfaction.

Among the class of priests, another motive to mental cultivation is the desire of maintaining in their office, an influence, which cannot be derived from any difference of external circumstances. The pastor must undergo the same labours and hardships as the meanest of his flock: he enjoys few additional comforts or refinements of life; and but for the superiority of his intellectual attainments, would speedily lose that station in society, which it is so necessary he should retain. It forms, too, an important part of his duty, to superintend the business of domestic education in the families placed under his pastoral care. This office is not, indeed, strictly required by the ecclesiastical statutes of the country; but it is founded upon usage, and ultimately upon a sense of the necessity for such a superintendance, where the public means of education are so greatly limited by the poverty of the people, and the dispersion of their numbers. An interesting example of the attention with which this duty is sometimes exercised, has been given in the Journal, (p. 141); and the instance of the parish priest of Saurbar is by no means singular among the ministers of religion in Iceland. Their poverty, indeed, rather increases than lessens the influence of these exertions, by associating them more intimately with their parishioners, and promoting that free and unreserved communication, which a more refined state of society has so much tendency to preclude.

By this superintendance of the priests, and the long established habits of the people, a regular system of domestic education is maintained, in the benefits of which even the lowest ranks of the community partake. With the exception of those who inhabit the coast, in the vicinity of the great fishing stations, it is a rare thing to meet with an Icelander who is unable to read and write, or who does not possess considerable intelligence on all subjects to which his situation allows him access. The instruction of his children forms one of his stated occupations, and while the little earthen hut which he inhabits is almost buried by the snows of winter, and darkness and desolation are spread universally around, the light of an oil lamp illuminates the page, from which he reads to his family the lessons of knowledge, religion, and virtue. The importance of these domestic habits has been well understood by the Icelanders themselves. In the ecclesiastical code of the country, an article is extant, singular perhaps in its nature, but admirable in its design, which gives to the Bishop, or even the inferior clergy, the power of preventing any marriage where the female is unable to read. This law, which provides so powerful a pledge for the instruction of the rising generation, is still occasionally acted upon, though probably not with so much strictness as in former times. The books in the possession of the lower classes are chiefly of a religious nature; a great number of these works having been printed in Iceland during the last two or three centuries, and very generally circulated through the country. In many parishes, there is a small collection of books belonging to the church; from which, under the superintendance of the priest, each family in the district may derive some little addition to its means of instruction and improvement.

The historical and poetical writings which the early literature of Iceland produced, are by no means generally known among the Icelanders of the present time; such studies being principally confined to the priests, and to those of the higher classes. The calamities which oppressed the island during the 15th century, and which entirely extinguished the celebrity, and almost even the name of the people, interposed a sort of barrier between the ancient Icelanders and their posterity. Learning was restored under an altered form; the works of former genius were only partially revived; and these circumstances, together with the changes progressively taking place in the language of the country, have removed from the possession of the present race of people, all the more striking evidences of the ancient condition of their community. A great number of manuscripts are still to be found in the churches, and in the houses of the priests and principal inhabitants; but, with few exceptions, they are all of modern date, and are merely the representatives of works which were intended for publication, but which the poverty of their writers, or other circumstances, have unavoidably suppressed. The greater proportion of the Icelandic manuscripts which derive value from their antiquity, have been gradually transferred to Copenhagen, and deposited in the public or private libraries of that metropolis.* Here they have been carefully collated, with a view to the publication of those which were found most remarkable or important; and it is principally through this channel that the earlier writings of the Icelanders are known to the present inhabitants of the country. The

* The library of Professor Thorkelin, which contained a valuable collection of Icelandic works, is said to have been destroyed during the late bombardment of Copenhagen.

valuable editions of these writings printed at Copenhagen, have come into the possession of all who bear a literary character among the Icelanders; and a few editions of the works of this period, which have been printed in the island, have given a further diffusion to this branch of knowledge among the people. It is, however, by no means general; the tales and traditions which now prevail in the country, relating for the most part to more recent times, and being in few instances derived from the Sagas and poems, in which the events of antiquity are described.

Among those individuals of the present day who have made the early literature of Iceland an object of study, the name of Finnur Magnuson may particularly be mentioned. This young man, who holds the situation of public pleader in the courts of law at Reikiavik, and is distinguished by his classical acquirements, has bestowed very great attention upon the early writings, and especially upon the ancient poetry of his country; and is considered to have a more intimate knowledge of them than any other person in the island. He has likewise been enabled, from his residence on the spot, and from his family connections with several eminent Icelanders, to collect some manuscripts of considerable value from their age and rarity. The industry and success of Professor Thorkelin in the same pursuits are more generally known; but the long absence of this gentleman from Iceland has lessened, in some degree, his connection with the modern literature of the country.

In describing the state of knowledge among the present race of Icelanders, their attainments in languages and in classical literature must particularly be noticed. This is one of the first of those circumstances which engage the attention and admiration of the stranger, in visiting the island.

He sees men whose habitations bespeak a condition little removed from the savage state; who suffer an almost entire privation of every comfort or refinement of life; and who, amid the storms of the surrounding sea, seek, in their little boats, the provision upon which alone their families can securely depend. Among these very men, he finds an intimate knowledge of the classical writings of antiquity; a taste formed upon the purest models of Greece and Rome; and a susceptibility to all the beauties which these models disclose. While traversing the country, he is often attended by guides who can communicate with him in Latin; and, arriving at his place of nightly rest, he not unfrequently draws forth from the labours of his little smithy, a man who addresses him in [illegible] with the utmost fluency and elegance. This [illegible]guages has been common among [illegible]eriod in their history; and it [illegible]y Dissertation, that many of [illegible]istinguish their literature, and [illegible]orical kind, have been composed [illegible]t time, this language forms a part of [illegible]priests, and of all the principal inhabit- [illegible] It is still very frequently the vehicle of their writings; and a great number of inedited Latin books, both in poetry and prose, may be found throughout the country, destined for ever to remain in the obscurity which gave them birth. Epigrams and short descriptive poems in the same language are exceedingly common; and, through this medium, the Icelanders often indulge that tendency to personal satire, which it formerly required even the operation of laws to restrain.

The study of Greek, as might be expected, is by no means equally general; but there are, notwithstanding, several very

excellent Grecian scholars, who now do credit to the literature of the island. In the first place among these is the present Bishop, Geir Vidalin; a man whose acquirements in every department of literary pursuit, would do honour to any country, or condition of society. To classical studies, he has devoted peculiar attention; and, in his colloquial Latin, he displays a facility and correctness of style, and a richness and propriety of quotation, which evince the most intimate acquaintance with the writers of the best ages of Rome. In Grecian literature, his reading has been almost equally extensive; and he is said to be a very good Hebrew scholar. Among the other Icelanders of the present time who have distinguished themselves in classical literature, are, Steingrim Jonson of Bessestad; the Rector Hialmarson, who formerly conducted the school at Hoolum; and Arnas Helgeson, the priest of Vatnsfiord, at the most northerly extremity of the island. Few translations from the classics have been published in the Icelandic language, though it is probable that many manuscripts of this kind exist in the country. The Transactions of the Icelandic Society, a work afterwards to be mentioned, contain translations of the Idylls of Theocritus, which possess very great merit; and, in the same work, there is a translation of Plutarch's Paidagogia by the Assessor Einarson. The fables of Æsop, and many of the odes of Horace, have likewise been given to the Icelanders in their native verse.

It may be proper to notice here the great attention to the studies of philology and criticism, which has existed among the learned men of Iceland during the last two centuries. Many valuable works, connected with this department of literature, have been already published, either in the island or at Copenhagen; and numerous writings of the same kind are still

to be found in manuscript, in different parts of Iceland. A catalogue of a few of these works is given in the subjoined note.*

In the study of the modern languages, the proficiency of the Icelanders is as great as can be expected from their limited intercourse with the continental nations. With the Danish language all the higher class of inhabitants are perfectly familiar; the German is understood by many; and of late years the English has been cultivated by a few individuals with much success. All these languages, as is well known, originate from the same root; and the resemblance still retained between the Icelandic and Danish, or still more the Norwegian, is such, that the natives of each country can, without much difficulty, make themselves mutually understood. Through these different channels, the Icelanders have acquired considerable information respecting the modern literature of Europe, particularly that of Germany and Denmark; and they possess not

* Lexicon Runicum *Magni Olavii.* Havniæ, 1650.
Lexicon Islandicum *Gudmundi Andreæ.* Havniæ, 1683.
Monosyllabica Islandica *Johannis Rugmanni.* 1676.
Præcepta Grammatica et Syntactica *Theodori Thorlacii.*
Linguæ Septentrionalis Elementa, per *Runolphum Jonæ.* Havniæ, 1652. Republished at Oxford, 1689; and in Hickes's Thesaurus, 1705.
Gustus ad Isocratem *Argrimi Vidalini.* Havniæ, 1698.
Dissertatio Philologica *Arngrimi Vidalini*, de vocis באדו (Psalm xx. v. 17.) genuina lectione et significatione. 1689.
Lexicon Juridicum *Pauli Vidalini.*
Exposito Alphabeti Hebraici *Gunnlaugi Snorronis.* Havniæ, 1775.
Tractatus de Orthographia Islandica *Eggerti Olavii.*
Claves Metricæ *Thorsteini Magni, Gudmundi Olavii, Thorlaci Gudbrandi*, &c.

NOT PUBLISHED.

Lexicon Islandico-Latinum *Johan. Arnæi, Episcopi Skalholtensis.*
Lexicon Islandicum *Gudmundi Olavii.*
Lexicon Islandicum *Johan. Olavii*, &c. &c.

only the originals, but translations of many of the works, which have acquired reputation in these countries in later times. Their knowledge of English literature is obtained chiefly through the medium of the Danish and German; in which languages the works of Addison, Pope, Richardson, and Young, are known and admired by many individuals in the island. They possess likewise a few translations of English works into their native language. Twenty or thirty years ago, the whole of Milton's Paradise Lost was translated into Icelandic verse by Jonas Thorlakson, a priest at Backa, in the northern part of the island; of which translation two books were published in the Acts of the Icelandic Society: the remainder are yet in manuscript. The merits of the poetry in this translation are spoken of in terms of high eulogium by the Bishop; who is, however, unacquainted with the original. The same Jonas Thorlakson has also translated Pope's Essay on Man, of which a considerable edition was printed at Leira in 1798, in a duodecimo form.

The cultivation of poetry in Iceland, though by no means so general as in ancient times, still forms a striking feature in the literature of the country. Among those of the natives who enjoy the reputation of talents or learning, there are few who have not occasionally tempted the Muse; and where such efforts have been seconded by the true inspiration of genius, the poet still receives his reward in the applause and admiration of his fellow-citizens. The days indeed are past, when the bard 'poured forth his unpremeditated lay' to the assembled and admiring multitude; but in exchange for these irregular effusions of fancy, a more classical style has been acquired, and greater selection and taste are exercised in poetical compositions. A few only can be mentioned of those individuals who still adorn this branch

of Icelandic literature. One of the most eminent is the Assessor Benedict Grondal, a judge in the higher court of justice, and a man of an elegant and cultivated mind. His published poems, which are regarded as the best modern specimens of the Icelandic language, are not, however, either very numerous or considerable in length; consisting chiefly of odes, epitaphs, and other detached pieces; among which are many excellent translations from Theocritus, Anacreon, and Horace. A translation of Pope's Temple of Fame, which was published some years ago, is greatly esteemed by the best judges of Icelandic poetry. He has composed also several poetical satires; in which, according to the information of the Bishop, there is much successful ridicule, after the manner of Horace, of the follies and vices of his countrymen; but these satires, in consequence of the express prohibitory article in the laws of the island, he has not ventured to publish. The general style of his poetry is described to be terse, pointed, and elegant. Finnur Magnuson is another of the Icelandic writers of the present day, who has acquired much credit from the facility with which he composes in the Latin and Danish languages, and for the extreme accuracy of his Icelandic style. He has translated into Danish verse, the poem of his uncle Eggert Olafson, on the rustic life of the Icelander, and published also several smaller pieces. Jonas Thorlakson, the venerable translator of Milton, is still living in a remote part of the island, and has composed many original poems of great merit; of which, however, nearly all are unpublished. Another individual, possessing some reputation, is Sigurdar Peturson of Reikiavik, who has written among other works a poem in six books, called Stella; in which, under a fictitious form, the manners and habits of the Icelanders are minutely described. This poem is likewise unpublished, and will pro-

bably ever remain in obscurity. The poverty and other circumstances of the Icelanders, offer indeed such multiplied obstacles to their literary progress, that it is impossible not to admire the ardour and industry which, in pursuits of this nature, they continue to display. In the department of poetry, more especially, the number of manuscript works, doomed, from the situation of their authors, to perpetual oblivion, is exceedingly great; yet the muse is still invoked; and the taste and feeling for such compositions are still awake in the minds of the people, though so little cherished by opportunity, or by the aspect of surrounding nature.

The religious character of the Icelanders has strongly disposed them to the cultivation of sacred poetry; and a great number of writings of this kind have appeared in the island during the last two centuries. Besides numerous collections of psalms and hymns, various parts of the Old and New Testament, as the books of the Pentateuch, the history of David, and the life of the Apostle Paul, have been published in the form of poetical paraphrase; and a few of these works may be found in the possession of almost every family in the country.

With the scanty materials for history which the Icelanders possess, it is scarcely wonderful that this branch of literature should be less cultivated now than it was in former times. Among those of the natives who have received patronage and support at Copenhagen, many, during the last century, have well maintained, by their historical writings, the reputation of their country; but in Iceland itself, few considerable works of this kind have lately appeared; and the greater number of these relate merely to the events of the passing age. The Chief Justice Stephenson is undoubtedly entitled to the first place among the present historical writers of the island. This gen-

tleman, whose zeal in the pursuit of knowledge has been seconded by better opportunities than most of his countrymen enjoy, has held, during the last twenty years, the most conspicuous place among the literary characters of Iceland; a situation to which his acquirements and influence would seem to justify his claim. The attainments he has made are various and extensive; a residence of several years at Copenhagen having afforded him access, not only to the literature, but also to some part of the science of modern times. To the English language he has paid particular attention; and besides speaking and writing it with facility, he is familiar with all the more eminent of our writers in the department of the belles-lettres. Mr Stephenson is himself a very voluminous author. As President of one of the Literary Societies of Iceland, he has published many books for the use of the Society; and from the catalogue of his writings, which is given in the note, it will be seen that his labours have comprehended a singular extent and variety of subjects.* The most important

* 1. Treatise on Meteors, 1783.

2. Description of the eruption of a new volcano in Skaptaa-fell Syssel, with engravings, 8vo. 1785.

3. Mournful Thoughts, and a Funeral Song, at the tomb of the celebrated and beloved Bishop Finsson, 8vo. 1796.

4. A Panegyric on Bishop Finsson, read to a meeting of the Icelandic Society, 8vo. 1797.

5. Amusements for Friends; containing useful pieces in prose and poetry, on natural history, physic, astronomy, history, morals, and divinity, 8vo. 1797.

6. A Biographical Memoir of the Lady of the late Bishop Teitson, 8vo. 1797.

7. *Minnisverd Tidindi*, or Memorable News, containing the most remarkable historical events from 1795 to 1801; in five vols. 8vo.

8. Jest and Earnest; or a collection of pieces in poetry and prose; on jurisprudence, morals, theology, medicine, and the belles-lettres, 8vo. 1798.

9. A Defence for the injured Icelandic Magistrate, 8vo. 1798.

among his writings, is the History of Iceland in the 18th century; a work which abounds in valuable information respecting the civil condition, the natural history, and the literature of the island during this period. In the style of the book, by a singular example of the *prosopopeia*, Iceland is made occasionally to tell her own tale, and to speak in a personal form of the various events which have befallen her; a mode of narrative which, though sometimes verging towards the ludicrous, has nevertheless a simplicity congenial to the subject, and capable even of rising into the pathetic and sublime. Another historical work, edited and chiefly written by Mr Stephenson, is a sort of political register, of which, in the period between 1795 and 1802, a volume was published annually at the Leira printing-office, under an octavo form. This contained a narrative of the political events which had occurred in Europe during the preceding year; a separate article being allotted to the affairs of every state. The narratives appear to be drawn up with much care and considerable minuteness. Under the article of England, as an example, not only are the more

10. A select collection of Hymns and Psalms for the Churches, 8vo. 1801.
11. Translations from the Danish of select Royal Edicts; published by the Court General of Iceland at different periods since 1801.
12. A speech made at the establishment of the Royal Court General, 8vo. 1801.
13. Iceland in the 18th century, 8vo. 1806.
14. The same book translated into Danish, with additions, 8vo. 1808.
15. A Treatise on the Fuci; published by the Royal Society of Denmark, 1809.
16. A Treatise on the Sheep, Cows, and Horses of Iceland; published by the Copenhagen Veterinarian Society, 1809.
17. Encouragement to the good people of Iceland during these times of war. Written and published by the King's order, 8vo. 1808.
18. Instructions for the Officers of the Police, 8vo. 1809.
19. Commentary on these Instructions, 8vo. 1810.
20. Help in Distress; or Instructions to the Icelandic Farmers in their Husbandry, 8vo. 1810.

important national events described; but the state of parties is accurately detailed; extracts are given from the Parliamentary debates; and notice is taken of many provincial occurrences. The information necessary to this work was almost entirely obtained through the medium of Denmark. The greater number of the volumes were written by Mr Stephenson; one by his brother the Amtmand Stephenson; and the last which was published, by Finnur Magnuson of Reikiavik.

The vast number of works of divinity, which have appeared in Iceland since the period of the Reformation, testify the diligence with which such studies have been pursued by the learned men of the country; and from catalogues which are extant, it would appear that the writings on this subject yet inedited, are much more numerous than those already published. Many of these works are translations from the German and Danish; with a few also from the Danish language. Among the latter, may be mentioned the translation of the 'Whole Duty of Man' by John Vidalin, a Bishop of Skalholt at the beginning of the last century, very eminent for his piety and learning. The original writings of the natives are for the most part either commentaries on particular parts of scripture, or collections of prayers, homilies, and sermons; the doctrinal parts of theology being less frequently the subjects of discussion. At the present time, the works of the Bishop, whose name has just been mentioned, possess great reputation in the country; and of the collections of sermons which he published, some are to be found in almost every habitation. In all departments of literature, there is a strong disposition among the Icelanders to critical severity; and in theological writings more especially, this severity has occasionally assumed a very rigorous form. A curious instance of this kind occurred about a hundred years ago, when an

unfortunate man was publicly whipped, as a punishment for the errors he had committed in a translation of the book of Genesis.

Metaphysical studies do not engage much attention among the learned men of Iceland. A few individuals, from their residence at Copenhagen, have become intimately acquainted with the metaphysics of the German schools, and have themselves published treatises connected with the subject; but these writings are by no means numerous, nor does it appear that they possess any peculiar value.* Publications connected with practical morality are, however, very common in Iceland; and several excellent books of this kind have lately appeared in the island, adapted chiefly to the use of the farmers, or those of the middle class; in which moral instruction is judiciously blended with amusing information in various branches of knowledge. The most valuable of these writings is a work, called 'Evening Hours,' which was published by the late Bishop Finsson, a few years before his death.

While the studies of literature are thus cherished among the Icelanders of the present time, science, strictly so called, engages but few votaries; and these follow with feeble and tardy steps the rapid progress which has been made among the European nations. Even in the department of natural

* The following are some of the metaphysical writings of the Icelanders:
Dissertatio de Essentia Consecutiva; by Stephen Biornson, 1757.
Dissertatio de Ente; by Finnur Thoralfson, 1770.
Examen facultatis cognoscitivæ superioris et inferioris; by the same author, 1772.
Dissertatio de Infinito; by Skule Thorlacius, 1762.
Disputatio de Nihilo; by John Olafson. 1758, &c.
The Dialectics of Aristotle, and the Logic of Peter Ramus, have been translated into the Icelandic language.

history, where the situation of the people does not oppose the same obstacles as in other scientific pursuits, there are few individuals who have acquired more than a superficial knowledge of the subject, and few works have been published, which possess value either from the extent or accuracy of their information. Most of the writings of the Icelanders upon the natural history of their own country, display indeed a singular vagueness of description, and more of superstitious belief than is consistent with the other habits and attainments of the people. When considered, however, the latter circumstance will scarcely be thought surprising. In forming the scenes which surround them, nature seems to have deserted all her ordinary operations, and to have worked only in combining the most terrific extremes which her powers can command. Nor is it merely a passive and silent desolation which marks this tremendous influence. After the lapse of ages, the fire of the volcano still bursts out among regions of eternal snow, the earthquake shakes the foundations of the island, and the impetuous thundering of the Geyser continues to disturb the stillness of the surrounding solitude. Living amidst so many wonders of nature, and ignorant of natural causes, the Icelanders are readily infected by superstition relating to these objects; and this influence is observable in most of the descriptions they have given of their country. In later times, however, such superstitions have greatly declined; and during the last century, several works have appeared, descriptive of the natural history of the island, in which accurate observation is conjoined with some degree of scientific knowledge. The author of most reputation in this department is Eggert Olafson, who in 1749 printed his '*Enarrationes Historicæ de Islandiæ Naturâ et Constitutione;*' and afterwards in conjunction with Paulson, another naturalist, pub-

lished a larger work, under the title of 'Travels in Iceland;' in which the various objects in its natural history are carefully and minutely described. The mineralogical details in this book are very ample; but owing to the want of arrangement, and of suitable nomenclature, they are not easily intelligible to the reader. In 1780, a work by Olaf Olafson, entitled, 'Economical Travels through the northern parts of Iceland,' was published in two volumes quarto; containing much valuable information upon the natural history of this district. Two smaller treatises are subjoined to the work; one on the Surturbrand, the other on the Sulphur beds of Iceland. Several descriptions have been published of the different volcanic eruptions during the last century; among which may be mentioned, the treatises of John Sæmundson on the eruptions around the lake of Myvatn, in 1724, 1725, 1727, and 1728; the treatise of Bishop Finsson on the eruption from Hecla in 1766; and that of Mr Stephenson on the great eruptions in 1783, at Cape Reikianes, and from the mountains of the Skaptaa Jokul. The person said at present to be the best naturalist in Iceland, and particularly intimate with botanical science, is Swein Paulson, one of the medical practitioners of the country, whose abode is near the volcano of Kattlagiau Jokul on the southern coast. His principal original work is on the diseases of Iceland; but he has written also several treatises on the natural history of the island, and on the rural economy of the people, which are said to possess great merit. Mr Stephenson has distinguished himself in the same department; and in many of his writings, has laboured to make his countrymen avail themselves of all the means of improving their condition, which are rendered possible by the nature of their soil and climate.

The sciences of mathematics and astronomy are by no

means generally cultivated among the Icelanders; though there are some individuals who have pursued these studies, either in the island itself, or with the better opportunities which were afforded by a residence in the Danish metropolis. A few of the astronomical treatises published during the last century are noticed below.* The study of the mathematics, though prescribed by the regulations of the school at Bessestad, receives but little attention there; nor does it in general form a part of the private occupation of those, who enjoy a literary character in the island. No purely mathematical work is extant in the Icelandic language; but in a book of arithmetic, which was written some time ago by the elder Mr Stephenson, trigonometry and equations are briefly included. Stephen Biornson, formerly the master of the school at Hoolum, published in the acts of the Icelandic Society a treatise on statics, which is well spoken of. This man, whose acquirements in various branches of science were very considerable, died at Copenhagen about the beginning of the present century.

After all that has been said in the preceding pages of the poverty of the Icelanders, and of the nature of the country upon which their destiny is cast, it will not be thought wonderful that the fine arts should desert a clime so little congenial to their growth. Painting exists here only in its rudest

* Dissertations on the Zones of the Terrestrial Globe, and on the Phases of the Moon; by Magnus Areson. 1710.

Dissertations on the Astronomy of the Chaldeans; on the Sphere of the Fixed Stars; on the Pythagorean Harmony, &c.; by Thorleif Haltorson; 1706, 1707, 1708.

Dissertation on the Solar Year of the Ancients; by Jonas David Gam. 1783.

Dissertation on the effects of Comets; by Stephen Biornson. 1758.

Dissertation on Celestial Physics; by the same. 1760.

Introduction to Tetragonometry; by the same. 1780.

forms; the native music of the island is inharmonious and uncouth; while the art of sculpture is almost entirely unknown. In proof, however, that these deficiencies must be ascribed to the situation of the people, and not to a defect in original genius, it may be mentioned that Thorvaldson, the son of an Icelander, dwelling on the classic ground of Rome, is at the present moment second only to Canova among the statuaries of Europe.

Before closing this sketch of the literature of Iceland, it will be necessary to say something of the Icelandic Societies, to which a reference has already more than once been made. The first of these was instituted at Copenhagen in 1779, with the professed object of aiding the literature of the island, and bettering the condition of the inhabitants, by the suggestion of improvements in their rural economy. The Society, at its first establishment, was composed of only twelve members; but the number was afterwards extended to about a hundred and thirty; comprising all the most learned and intelligent men in Iceland; and, as extraordinary members, many individuals of much eminence on the continent of Europe. Fourteen volumes of transactions have been published by the Society; the contents of which are various, comprehending many valuable papers upon the fishery, agriculture, and natural history of Iceland; poetry; historical essays, &c. The principal writers were Bishop Finsson; the elder Mr Stephenson, then Governor of the island; Mr Ericson; Mr Paulson; Mr Ketilson, Sysselman of Dalè; and many others of the literary Icelanders, whose names have before been mentioned. These transactions were entirely composed in the Icelandic language, and great attention was paid to the preservation of its purity; two censors being appointed to judge of the style of every essay which was presented for publica-

tion. In 1790, considerable dissensions arose in the Society, in consequence of a project for transferring it to Iceland; and this circumstance, with other concurring events, had the effect of suspending all the proceedings of the institution. Though still nominally in existence, it has now for a long period been entirely dormant.

The second Icelandic Society was established in the island in 1794; chiefly under the auspices of the Chief Justice Stephenson, who had been a strenuous advocate for the removal of the former Society from Copenhagen. The original number of members was not less than twelve hundred; most of the farmers, as well as the priests and civil officers of the country, being included. The object of the institution was the promotion of knowledge and improvement among the people; and with this view, a fund was provided by the annual contribution of a dollar from each member, and devoted to the publication of books, to be distributed among the subscribers. The printing establishment at Hoolum, which had fallen into decline, and another which in 1773 was instituted at Hrappsey, an island in the Breidè Fiord, were purchased by the Society; and a printing-office, under their management, established at Leira, in the Borgar-Fiord Syssel. From this press have issued, for the use of the Society, fifty or sixty different works; some of them translated, but the greater number original, and comprising a very great variety of subjects; history, poetry, divinity, law, medicine, natural history, and rural economy. In his situation of President, Mr Stephenson has had the superintendance of the funds of the Society, the entire direction of their various publications, and the management of a small, but well chosen collection of books, which was presented to them by some literary characters of the Danish metropolis. Though his exertions,

however, for the support of the institution have been incessant, it has notwithstanding greatly declined during the last few years; and, at present, the number of members does not exceed thirty or forty. The successive occurrence of several unfavourable seasons, and the evils entailed upon the Icelanders by the war between England and Denmark, have contributed in some degree to produce this decline. It was found, too, that there was much difficulty in accomplishing the scheme for the distribution of books, among a people dispersed over so vast an extent of country, and during a great part of the year so entirely separated from each other by the barriers of nature. Some little fault has, perhaps, also existed in the general management of the institution. The office of censorship of the press, vested in one individual, has had the effect of disgusting or deterring many, whose connection would have done credit to the Society; while, by giving too much to this single judgment, it has been the means of bringing forth many works, little adapted to the comprehension of those for whose use they were designed. In the present state of the Society, it is particularly unfortunate that the only printing establishment in Iceland should be thus exclusively appropriated; and as a matter of general policy, it may be doubted whether, under any circumstances, such a corporate institution ought thus to monopolize the literary growth of the country. As guides and protectors to the progress of knowledge, institutions are good;—when they become arbitrary rulers, their influence but retards the course of mental improvement, and proves baneful to the very energies which gave them birth.

Such is the present state of mental cultivation among this singular people. The disparity of their physical and moral circumstances forms an interesting fact equally in the his-

tory of literature, and in that of the human species. While the calamities of internal warfare, and the oppression of tyrannical governments, have clouded with ignorance and barbarity countries on which the sun of nature sheds its brightest beams,—the possession of peace, of political liberty, and well ordered laws, has given both intellectual and moral exaltation to a community, which has its abode at the very confines of the habitable world.

ZOOLOGY AND BOTANY.

CHAP. VIII.

In a general outline of the zoological productions of Iceland, it is by no means necessary to be minute; nor, indeed, would the few observations we were enabled to make, authorise such an undertaking.

Iceland does not present many of those species of animals which are strictly confined to the land; but of those which require land only as a resting place, while the sea supplies their other wants, many have found in this country every requisite for support. We will proceed, however, to take a cursory survey of all the tribes of animated nature which exist there under any circumstances.

The catalogue of mammiferous animals inhabiting Iceland, is nearly confined to the following:—The dog, the fox, the cat, the rat, the mouse, the rein-deer, the goat, the sheep, the ox, and the horse; together with seals and whales, and a few Polar bears which annually make their appearance. Bears cannot be considered as inhabitants; they are merely visitors, brought on detached masses of ice. They are chiefly landed

on the north coast; and twelve or thirteen appears to be the greatest number ever seen in one year. They are not suffered long to enjoy themselves on land; for, hungry and voracious after their voyage, they commit great devastations among the flocks. The people take the alarm; and, with whatever weapons they can command, generally with musquets, they attack, and soon destroy them.

The dogs which are generally seen in Iceland, bear a strong resemblance to those of Greenland. Like them they are covered with long hair, forming about their necks a kind of ruff. Their noses are sharp, their ears pointed, and their tails bushy, and curled over their backs. Their predominant colour is white; yet they vary considerably; and some are entirely brown or black. Very few of them can be induced to go into the water; and though some are of service in guarding the cottages and flocks, and preventing the horses from eating the grass intended for hay, yet the greater number appear very useless. Scarcely any family, however, is without one or two of them.

Two distinct varieties of the fox present themselves in Iceland: the arctic, or white fox, (Canis Lagopus), and one which is termed the blue fox, (Canis Fuliginosus), and varies considerably in the shades of its fur, from a light brownish or blueish grey, to a colour nearly approaching to black. It is a more gracefully formed animal than the white fox; has longer legs, and a more pointed nose. Horrebow mentions a dark red coloured fox, in the existence of which we had no reason to believe. He likewise says, that the black fox is sometimes brought over on the ice. Frequently at night, in travelling through the country, you hear the discordant cries of the two former varieties. But if we may judge from the quantity of skins exported, the number of foxes in Iceland, though con-

siderable, cannot be great. The inhabitants do their utmost to destroy them; being induced not only to prevent the great devastation which they commit among the young lambs, but to obtain the reward given by government, and to profit by the furs, which is an advantageous article of traffic. There is no particular ingenuity, however, displayed in the methods by which they are taken; they are shot, caught in gins, or forced from their holes by smoke.

Rats in considerable numbers, and mice, are met with, particularly at the Danish factories; but, as far as our observation went, there was nothing to render them particularly worthy of attention.

The hog, which has from time to time been imported from Denmark, has, from the scarcity of proper food, been found so expensive to keep, that it has never been much propagated; and it is doubtful whether, independently of two or three sows and pigs which were taken from England during the last summer, a single animal of the species exists in the country.

The rein-deer has been introduced into the island, and has increased rapidly. Out of thirteen which were exported from Norway in 1770, three only reached Iceland. They were sent into the mountains of the Guldbringè Syssel; and they have since multiplied so considerably, that it is now no uncommon thing for those who pass often through the mountains in various part of the island, to meet with herds, consisting of from forty to sixty, or a hundred. They are very little molested, the Icelanders satisfying themselves with complaining that the deer eat their lichen; and though, sometimes, for the sake of amusement, the Danes go out in pursuit of them, very few are destroyed. They live almost entirely among the mountains, and are very shy; but sometimes, in the depth of

winter, come down into the plains, particularly about Thingvalla, to feed on the moss which abounds in that quarter.

Goats were at one time more numerous in Iceland than they now are. At present, they seem to have been completely expelled from the southern part, because vegetation being very scanty, they were constantly injuring the roofs of the houses by climbing on them in search of food. There are still a few in the north, where farmers keep flocks of thirty or forty.

The cow, the horse, and the sheep, afford the principal source of wealth, comfort, and subsistence to the Icelanders. Milk is almost their only summer beverage. Whey becomes a wholesome, and to them a pleasant drink in winter. Even fish itself, their primary article of food, is scarcely palatable to an Icelander without butter; and curds, eaten fresh in summer, and kept through the winter, yield the most precious change of diet, both for health and pleasure, which he enjoys. A cow on the farm of the Amtmand Stephenson, we were assured, gave regularly every day twenty-one quarts of milk. The value of their cattle is well known and appreciated by the Icelanders, who take the greatest care of them through the winter, and seem to shake off their habitual listlessness, while employed in gathering in the hay that is to support them through the inclemencies of that season.

If the horse be less useful in Iceland than the cow, the care which is devoted to him is proportionally less: still, however, the assistance which he affords is by no means to be overlooked. But it will be unnecessary, after what has been stated respecting the frequent intercourse between different parts of the island, and the extreme roughness of the country, to say any thing farther of the utility of this animal. The Iceland horse is about thirteen hands in height, stoutly made,

and frequently evincing much spirit. These animals are in very considerable numbers throughout all the inhabited parts of the island; no farmer being able to carry on the necessary affairs of life without their assistance; and many of the Icelanders, particularly those who, from their avocations as judges or magistrates, are obliged to take long journies, are at great pains in the breeding and rearing of them. But by the inhabitants in general, they are let loose to provide themselves with food and shelter: in consequence of which, a great number are annually carried off by the severity of the winter.

The sheep furnish much milk and butter; and besides affording, when smoked or salted, a part of the winter food of the inhabitants, form a considerable article of export. Almost every part of the Icelandic dress is manufactured from wool: and of the sheep-skins, without much preparation, they make their fishing-dresses, which they smear repeatedly with oil, for the purpose of rendering them impervious to water.

Of the seal, three or four species (Phoca vitulina, Leporrina, Barbata, and Grœnlandica) frequent the shores. Their number is considerable. A few are taken for the oil which they afford; and their skins are applied to various useful purposes, being formed into shoes and thongs, and particularly into a kind of travelling bag, in which the Icelanders carry their sour butter, fish, and other little supplies, when passing from place to place.

Very few of the great northern whales (Balæna Mysticetus) approach Iceland. The fin-fish (Balæna Physalus) is more common. A species of dolphin, the bottle-nose, (Delphinus Bidens?) is sometimes driven on shore in very considerable shoals. During the winter 1809-10, eleven hundred came towards the shore in the Hvalfiord, and were captured.