

which burdened the mountain-sides being melted by the heat, descended in immense floods, swelling the rivers, and inundating the lower grounds. The whole scene was attended by so many circumstances of horror that the spectator might well have imagined the "foundations of the earth to be broken up." \*

The most terrible eruption, however, of which Icelandic history takes account was that of Skapta-Jokul, in 1783. This huge mountain, with its roots, its icy ridges and snowy slopes, its glaciers and its ravines, occupies an area of four hundred square miles untrodden by the foot of man. It is a region of desolation—a wilderness inaccessible and impassable—which seems to have been barred off by a Divine fiat from the remainder of the world, and which, had it been known to the ancient poets, would have furnished them with an appropriate theatre for their fabled contest between gods and Titans.

Various signs portended this awful catastrophe. Toward the end of May a light bluish haze hovered on the confines of the *regio incognita* of Skapta, followed early in June by a great tremor of the earth. On the 8th of that month pillars of smoke rose over the northern highlands, and, coming down in a southerly direction, wrapped the whole district of Sida in twilight gloom. Then over the startled island swept a torrent of ashes; and on the 10th spouts of fire were seen to leap and toss in wild fantastic play among the mountain's icy hollows, and the river Skapta, having first absorbed vast volumes of fetid sand, suddenly disappeared.

Two days later a flood of lava, issuing from sources unknown to man, rolled down the bed of the dried-up river; filled up its channel—a vast gorge of six hundred feet in breadth and two hundred feet in depth; and then, overflowing its banks, poured like a deluge of molten metal over the surrounding country, and gathered itself in a great deep lake, whose waters were summarily expelled by this formidable intruder. In a few days the basin of the lake was also filled up; and the lava then resumed its course, dividing into two streams, one of which continued to follow the channel of the Skapta river, while the other went headlong over the lofty cataract of Stapafoss.

On the 18th of June a second torrent of lava, proceeding, it is supposed, from a higher level than its predecessor, and taking a different direction, accumulated within the channel of the Hverfisflot, overflowed its banks, and rolled southward, scorching, withering, and devastating. Fresh quantities of lava were ejected on the 3rd of August, and, with occasional pauses, continued for two years; forming, on the whole, a mass which, if it could be collected in one spot, would equal in magnitude Mont Blanc. Of the two principal lava-floods, the Skapta measured some fifty miles in length by twelve or fifteen in breadth; that of the Hverfisflot forty miles in length by seven in breadth. Both currents in the deep gorges had a depth of six hundred feet; on the plains, of about one hundred feet. As late as 1794 they continued to exhale clouds of vapour, and the water in their fissured crust was hot.

\* [Compare Baring-Gould, "Iceland and its Sagas;" Dr. Henderson, "Residence in Iceland" (2 vols., 1819); Symington, Captain C. S. Forbes, Chambers, and others.]