

ICELAND.

Our ideas of volcanic activity, in this snow-bound island are generally associated with Mount Hekla, long ranked as one of the three great European volcanoes; but, in truth, no less than twenty volcanic mountains are found therein, and of these, eight are in full activity. And, notwithstanding its celebrity, Hekla is neither the largest nor the most formidable. If any should bear the palm, it is that which lies near the south coast of the island, the region most frequented by voyagers. All Iceland, however, is a land of eruption, where, underneath a crust of ice and snow, the volcanic fires are incessantly seething.

There are four volcanoes in the northern part of the island—Krafla, Leirhnukur, Trolladyngur, and Skaptá; three in the southern—Hekla, Eyafiall, and Katlugia; and one in the eastern—Oeräfa. Our limits compel us to restrict our notices to the two best known,—Hekla and Skaptá-Jokul.*

No record occurs in history of any eruptions in Iceland previous to the ninth century. From the twelfth century they have been remarkably numerous; an interval of twenty years seldom passing without some eruption or violent shock. Frequently has Hekla maintained its terrible activity for six successive years. Such long-continued convulsions have had their effect in breaking up the mountains into the most rugged and violent outlines, diverting the courses of the rivers, and creating new lakes and valleys. All Iceland is furrowed with fissure and crevasse, and covered with masses of lava of dimensions which cannot be paralleled in any other country of the world.

The first eruption of Hekla of which history takes notice, occurred in 1004. Down to the present time, about twenty-two have been noticed, according to the Icelandic historians Olafsen and Paulsen. One of great violence broke out in 1766. Then, after a repose of seventy-nine years, the igneous forces again manifested their

* [*Jokul* is an Icelandic word, signifying a mountain covered with perpetual snow.]