

penalties for infraction of the new code of laws, while the king broke the Christian Sabbath and went scatheless.

FIRST VOYAGE TO AMERICA.

In the year 999, the gallant Captain Byron, who had made himself famous on the shores of the Baltic, was ordered to quit his native Iceland forever, on the charge that he was still a follower of the Lady Thurid, the love of his early life, and that he had spoken with her, she nothing loth to listen, at the fair of Breidvik, in July of that year. He sailed from the island in the year following, A.D. 1000; and his voyage, intended to be for Greenland, only two hundred miles distant, but which reached to Massachusetts, is an event in the dim old time never to be omitted again in any faithful and full history of American discovery, if the authenticity of the Icelandic Sagas be accepted as beyond doubt; of which, presently.

Before following the voyagers to the shores of the Great Western land, since called America, let the Republic of Iceland rise before us in the year 1000. The Parliament, called Althing (to think and speak) was in session in Thingvalla, a place thirty-six miles inland from the seaport capital, Reykyathik. After travelling half that distance through uneven pasture land, the modern visitor refreshes at the gushing spring a few hours, while the diminutive horses, his pony cavalcade, are set free to graze. Then he reloads them, mounts into the saddle and ascends a rugged ravine for some miles, and going out over an open plain sees nothing around but desolation; nothing in the distance but purple tinted mountain tops. The desolate relics of lava stretch away like a great stony sea; and innumerable boulders encumber the track. But suddenly, on glancing ahead of the rest, the more impatient traveller is arrested by a chasm; beyond which lies a valley ten miles wide, sunlit and intensely green, beginning on the edge of the chasm at a level one hundred feet lower than the upper level of lava. There, on the brink the stranger stands, surprised by the suddenness of the scene, charmed by its loveliness. That is Thingvalla. The platform of rock deep below, and those stupendous walls overshadowing it, reared to position by earthquakes in

ages long gone by, are the floor and walls of the Althing, the Icelandic Parliament. If it be an evening in July, nine o'clock or thereabout, the sky is still a burnished dome lighted by a brilliant golden sun.

In times far, far, remote that lower plain was a red hot, hissing, molten mass, thrown out by far distant burning mountains, and after retaining its fearful heat for many years, it cooled, contracted and sunk down to its present level, and cracked into twenty thousand pieces. Near the bottom of the great precipice, an irregular oval area of about two hundred feet by fifty, was left almost surrounded by a crevice, so deep and broad as to be utterly impassable. At one extremity alone a scanty causeway connected it with the adjoining level and allowed access to its interior. At one point the circling chasm becomes so narrow as to be within the possibility of a man's leap; and an ancient member of Parliament, Mr. Flosi, pursued by an enraged opponent, did actually take it at a fly; but as leaping an inch short would have entailed certain drowning in the bright green, deep, deep, waters that sleep forty feet below, it may be conceived there was never much danger of that spot being made a thoroughfare.

This place, by nature almost a fortress, was selected for the sittings of the legislature by the founders of the Icelandic constitution; a free people, nearly all noble, illustrious in lineage, and addicted to peaceful pursuits and intellectual studies, who came from Norway in 864, and a few years after, to escape the thralldom imposed on them by Harold Fairhair, first sole King and feudal Lord Paramount. To this day may be seen at the upper end of the oval rock, the three hummocks of stone and earthwork on which sat in state the chiefs and judges of the land. But those grand old times have passed away. The Republic lasted nearly four hundred years, a period of intellectual vigor unparalleled elsewhere in Europe in those centuries; for to Iceland appertains the glory of constructing a literature in the native vernacular, treating of almost every topic which could engage philosophic thought (of which outlines are seen elsewhere in these preliminary chapters). But the day of doom came on. In 1251, the island became an appendage to the Norwegian crown. Yet, even then, the deed