

GENERAL LITERATURE.

RELIGION IN LAPLAND.

(From the Church of England Magazine.)

The inhabitants of Lapland are nominally all Protestants, great pains having been taken for their religious improvement by Swedes and Danes; still superstition exists to a fearful extent among them, though there is good ground to hope that it is on the decline.—They have so far well escaped the corruptions of the Romish see. Among their superstitions is the divining drum, which is supposed to tell fortunes, to reveal secrets, or to detect criminals. This is simply a drum with a needle, somewhat like the handle of a clock, placed on its uppermost skin, acting in a magical manner in the estimation of the people, who do not perceive that the whole business is managed by the means of a piece of magnetised iron, which could guide the needle as the wizard chose; the people's own alarm, or their simplicity, soon betraying to the "cunning man" which way to shape its course. But indeed the magnet itself would have been to them as much an object of superstitious awe, could they have ascertained its share in the business.

Superstitious notions of a very similar character are not unknown in our own country, where certain supposed wizards or cunning men are consulted by the weak and credulous, under the silly notion that they can give information as to lost property, those who have been guilty of theft, &c.

There are many relics of heathen idolatry in Lapland—the deities of which are represented as of much the same character as those of the northern nations in general—which they imagine to be extraordinary charms in many of the diseases; and they held in strange and fearful veneration the places where ancient sacrifices had been offered.—These places are still marked by heaps of decayed rein-deer's horns; and still, when they pass that way, the natives shrink with horror.

The worship of many of the Teutonic deities is still retained among them. They frequently worship the trunk of a tree, which they cut into the rude resemblance of a human face. They believe in the transmigration of souls, and set apart certain festivals for the worship of aerial spirits, and to invoke the dead.

It was once believed that there were necromancers in Lapland who had power to sell fortunate winds; and, what was worse, to send adverse ones after those who gave them offence. So late as 1653, a French traveller in that country gives an account of going on shore with the captain of a Danish vessel to purchase a wind, in compliance with the wishes of his crew. A wizard was easily met with; for of course, as they found it a profitable business, there were always a sufficient number who pretended to this supernatural skill. They managed, as in the affair of the drum, to keep up their credit by diligently studying natural effects; in the wind case by attention to the signs of the sky, by which they could, with tolerable certainty, promise from what quarter the wind should blow for the next few hours after they had sold their charm, or muttered their curse. Meanwhile their fellow countrymen were as much gulled as their customers.—Thus in the old adage:—

"In Iceland and in Denmark both
Witches for gold will sell a man a wind,
Which, in the corner of a napkin wrapped,
Shall blow him to what coast he will."

Even in the reign of Queen Elizabeth witches and wizards were accused of dominion not only over the destinies of men and cattle, but over the elements themselves. If

the wind or a storm arose, the cry was "Ring the bells and burn the witches."

The places of worship are generally very rude buildings of logs of wood, laid transversely together, and often in very bad repair. The following is an interesting account of that part of Lapland which belongs to Norway. The clergyman was a Norwegian.—His dwelling was not very much more comfortable than a common tent; it was built, like the church, of logs of wood, and consisted of two rooms, and a small closet with a bed in it. The furniture merely a stove, a few wooden tables and benches, and a very scanty supply of other necessary articles. He had a couple of tame pigs; but these were kept more as curiosities than as a part of his stock of provisions. No poultry is to be found throughout the country, but in its stead they have an astonishing quantity of game. The black cock, the ptarmigan, wild ducks, teal, becassines, and fish of various kinds, were always to be had. Potatoes could not be preserved through the winter; and it was with great difficulty that even a few were saved for planting. In the summer the clergyman, in whose garden they were cultivated as a luxury, not only ate the root, but boiled the tops of the plants, which, for want I should suppose of better, he considered a very delicate vegetable. These potato-tops, and also nettles, helped to make out a soup, with the addition of rein-deer's tongues.

He had, besides, rye-biscuit for bread; but this was obtained from Sweden. A little barley is generally the only species of grain sown. Sometimes the crop does not ripen at all; at others, according to the favourableness of the season, it is housed in seven or eight weeks from the time the seed is committed to the ground.

As a Lapland parish often extends some hundred miles, it may be imagined the clergyman's life is subject to much fatigue and hardship. In the depth of winter he is usually settled near his church; and here his parishioners assemble from their distant homes every Sunday, some arriving the day before if they have a very long way to travel, and taking up their quarters for the night in the church, or in one of the few log-houses close by.

Here, too, their marriages take place. On one occasion a son of one of Niel's old friends took unto himself a wife, and Karin was delighted to see the grand presents that were bestowed as bridal offerings. There were rings, and silver spoons, and a cup of silver gilt; a silver girdle for the lady's waist; one silk and two cotton kerchiefs for her neck. All her friends gave some slight token of good will. The bridegroom himself made ready a great feast of rein-deer flesh, brandy, and a brewing of malt for the occasion, with plenty of tobacco for smoking. The desire for ardent spirits is almost insatiable in Lapland.

After the wedding-dinner a collection in money was made for the new married pair from all the guests. The father bestowed on his son, to begin the world with, some of his precious silver cups and dollars, and a fine herd of eighty rein-deer. The guests also, many of them, promised to contribute a few more to his stock, on condition that he would come to demand them, and bring with him a present of brandy in exchange.

Round the clergyman's hut there were several others of the same kind, inhabited by the merchants who came to deal with the Laplanders for the furs they got in hunting.

A Laplander's funeral is conducted somewhat in the following manner, and is on the authority of an eye-witness:—"Coming to

the house of the deceased, we saw the corpse taken from the bear skins on which it lay, and removed into a wooden coffin by six of his most intimate friends, after being first wrapped in linen, the face and hands alone being bare. In one hand they put a purse with some money to pay the fee of the porter at the gate of paradise; in the other a certificate, signed by the priest, directed to St. Peter, to witness that the defunct was a good Christian, and deserved admission into heaven. At the head of the coffin was placed a picture of St. Nicholas, a saint greatly revered in all parts of Russia on account of his supposed friendship for the dead. They also put into the coffin some brandy, dried fish, and venison, that he might not starve on the road. This being done, they lighted some fir-tree roots, piled up at a convenient distance from the coffin, and then wept, howled, and exhibited a variety of strange gestures and contortions, expressive of the violence of their grief. When they were fatigued with gesticulations they made several processions round the corps, asked the deceased why he died? whether he was angry with his wife? whether he was in want of food or raiment? if he had been unsuccessful in hunting and fishing? After these interrogatories they renewed their howling. One of the priests frequently sprinkled holy water on the corps, as well as the mourners. The sepulchre is no other than an old sledge, which is turned bottom upwards over the spot where the body lies buried. Before their conversion to Christianity they used to place an axe, with a tinder box, by the side of the corpse if it was a man; and if a woman's, her scissors and needles, supposing that these implements might be of use to them in the other world. With the axe the deceased is supposed to hew down the bushes or houghs that may obstruct his passage to the other world; the tinder box is for the purpose of striking a light, should he find himself in the dark at the day of judgment. For the first three years after the decease of a friend or relation, they were accustomed from time to time to dig holes by the side of the grave, and to deposit in them either a small quantity of tobacco or something that the deceased was fondest of when living. They suppose that the felicity of a future state would consist in smoking, drinking brandy, &c.; and that the rein-deer and other animals would be equal partakers of their joys."

Dr. Clarke relates in effect the following extraordinary scene in a Lapland church of Enontakis:—"The whole church," he says, "was crowded, and even the gallery full; many of the wild Nomade Laplanders being present in their strange dresses. The sermon appeared to us the most remarkable part of the ceremony. According to the custom of the country, it was an extemporaneous harangue; that is, preached without being previously written down. It was delivered in a tone of voice so elevated that the worthy pastor seemed to labour as if he would burst a blood-vessel. He continued exerting his lungs in this manner during one hour and twenty minutes, as if his audience had been stationed on the top of a distant mountain.—Afterwards he was so hoarse he could hardly articulate another syllable.

"One would have thought it impossible to dose during a discourse that made our ears ring; yet some of the Lapps were fast asleep, and would have snored, but that a sexton, habited like themselves, walked about with a long stout pole, with which he continued to strike the floor; and if this did not rouse them, he drove it forcibly against their ribs, or suffered it to fall with all its weight upon their skulls.