

ror, the tumult of storms, or the explosive thunders of earthquakes and volcanoes. It is thought that much of the descriptive part of the northern mythology owes its origin to these sublime scenes. The inhabitants dwell only in sequestered valleys, having communication with the sea, or in those narrow slips of cultivated land which are found either at the base of the precipitous shores, or in the calm shelter of those long and contracted fiords, or deep indentures, which occur here and there in the else unbroken coast. These fiords, which sometimes run far up into the interior, are supposed by geographers to have been at first dents or chasms produced by the original upheaving of the island: they extend in general from twenty to thirty miles into the country, and are continued still farther by narrow vales down which the mountain rivers find their way into the sea. They are separated from each other by lofty ridges running out into the ocean, and ending in precipitous headlands. These ridges vary in elevation from two thousand feet to twice that height, and rise for the most part abruptly from their base. Thus the fiords are shut in on both sides by perpendicular walls of rock towering up to an inconceivable height, their summits veiled in clouds and darkness. Amid such scenes man and his works vanish: all seems infinite and everlasting. Yea, even here, does the Icelander choose his dwelling, unappalled by the rocks that impend over him, and threaten to crush him by their fall. For these friths possess many advantages. On their shores are the finest pastures for the cattle, while their waters are a favorite retreat of the most esteemed fish. In them, also, the sea is calm and less exposed to storms, so that the fishermen carry on their employment with greater safety and convenience; and by entering deeply into the land, and connecting the interior with the coast, they serve the purpose of canals, and greatly facilitate communication. It has been observed, that the depth of water in some of the fiords has of late greatly diminished, so that many harbours formerly frequented are now altogether inaccessible. This is doubtless owing, in great part, to the *débris* washed down from the interior.

And thus, in this secluded and solitary island there grew up a community, peaceful, social, and industrious. Their fishing season was soon over, their hay-harvest soon collected, and through their long winter nights they had ample leisure to indulge their taste for poetic and historic composition. The skalds, or bards, were the dispensers of fame: the saga-men, or historians, chronicled all deeds and events worthy of remembrance. The glowing and animated effusions of these northern rhapsodists were the glory of ev-

ery entertainment. No feast was complete without them. A sacred character was attached to the vocation of these minstrels. They were generally of noble birth, and acted, not unfrequently, as heralds and ambassadors. The most important commissions were entrusted to their care. The most celebrated of their number was Semund, who, from his vigour of mind and the extent of his travels, has been called the Scandinavian Homer. He collected and arranged the ancient mythological records, and issued them under the form of the older Edda, a production not without a certain sublimity of conception and pathos of narrative. It embraces various classes of poems. Of these the *Voluspa*, or oracle of Vola, is the most remarkable. In it the Northern Cosmogony is described in a dark and mystic style, resembling that of the Sybilline verses. It opens thus impressively:

In the era of the ages where Ymer was dwelling,
There was no sand nor sea,
Nor winds on a vast ocean,
Earth yet was not; nor the heaven above,
Only the Abyss of Chaos.

Before Bur had raised up the meadows,
And had enlarged Midgard,
The sun shone round the south,
And the ground produced its green fruits.

The sun from his noon, threw out the moon
With his right hand, over the steeds of heaven;
The sun knew not where should be his palaces;
The moon knew not where should be her home:
The stars knew not where would be their station.

Then all the Deities moved to their royal stools.
The stupendously-holy God considered these things;
They gave names to the night, and to the twilight,
They called the morning and mid-day so;
And bade the rise and the course of the year to begin.

Towards the end, the destruction of the world by fire is briefly and nobly enunciated:—

The sun darkens,
The sea overwhelms the earth:
The peaceful stars
Vanish from the sky,
Fire rages
To the end of the age
The ascending flame
Consumes the heavens.

There is a parallel description in the "*Hercules in Oeta*," of Seneca; ("*Jam Jam legibus obrutis* &c.,") and in holy writ itself is found nearly similar language, for we are told that "the sun shall be turned into darkness: * * * the heavens shall pass away with a great noise: * * * the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."