SOME ASPECTS OF LIFE AND WORK IN COLD REGIONS.

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AFTER the majestic ice mountains to which we have recently directed the attention of the reader, the next most interesting feature of Arctic phenomena is the Aurora; and of all, the most beautiful, restless, brilliant, many-hued, mysterious; it fascinates the ardent, weather-beaten explorer who, after long exposure on his voyage thitherward, when anchored in some calm cove within the Arctic Circle, gazes for the first time upon its tremulous glory which hovers like the Heavenly benison over his frail bark. Although "the moon soars through the skies, and constellations unknown to dwellers in higher latitudes, sparkle in the northern sky," yet were it not for the brilliant Aurora, whose beneficent rays gild the snow by night and day continuously, the gloomy night of Arctic regions would be intoler able alike to man and beast. The Auroral light is almost as familiar a sight to the inhabitants of the North Temperate as to those of the North Frigid zone, and, as may therefore be expected, it is variously named. By the British it is known as the "Northern Lights," by the Danes "*Nord Lys*," and the Shetlanders "Merry Dancers." Wherever seen Aurora is "a thing of beauty," but her beauty is not everywhere equal or the same; her phenomena is as varied as it is lovely, and equally inexplicable. In the British Islands, as far as the writer has been able to observe, Auroral colors are deeper and richer than, for example in Canada; and, if his memory serves him aright he never remembers to have seen the Merry Dancers at home but they suffused the sky with a deep crimson glow which was intensified by bars of a still deeper red. In Labrador or Newfoundland and Canada generally, although crimson sometimes preponderates in the prodigal wealth of coloring exhibited, yet generally speaking it is much more delicate, if more fantastic and exquisitely soft.

It is said that historical references to the Aurora are comparatively scanty and averred by some one, somewhere, to be no earlier than the fourteenth or fifteenth century. Whether or no, if they were more abundant, it is unlikely that any theory which the ancients might have advanced in relation to its origin and nature could have helped to solve a problem which, with all its boasted wealth and extent of scientific resource, is insoluble by nineteenth century wiseacres. Theory after theory has been formulated as to the exact nature and cause of the Aurora, and as soon as formulated launched forth to the world of science for approval or condemnation, but her beauty still dazzles and defies, and Aurora is a fair mystery, coquettish as a maiden. Faraday's explanation is at once the most ingenious which has yet been given and by far the most widely accepted by men of science. "That eminent physicist demonstrated that the electrical currents which circulate in the globe necessarily tend from the equator to the poles, and has suggested that the Aurora may possibly arise from an upward current in the atmosphere flowing back from the poles to the equator. The fact that Sir Leopold McClintock discovered that the Aurora appeared to come, not from the fields of ice, but from the surface of open water, favors the idea that it is caused by electrical discharges between the earth and the air, and that these are interrupted by the fields of non-conducting ice."* This then, may be, at least, as correct as any other, but it is not sufficient to explain fully or at all satisfactorily the varied phenomena of the Aurora. It is truly refreshing to know that there is yet something—some feature of the beneficent Creator's handiwork which baffles the keen wit and laborious research of man, and that he is forced to acknowledge the insufficiency of his mental powers to demonstrate or understand it. As witnessed in Canada generally the Aurora is very beautiful, nay the perfection of beauty. Long streamers of pale hues succeed, or rather more correctly shoot from the mass of nebulous light which first appears in the northern heavens. They gradually shine with a richer glow—are constant, no, not for a second, but, with a restlessness and uncertainty unknown even to a will-o'-the-wisp, they rush fantastically across the heavens occasionally accompanied by a noise like the rustling of silk, or the whizzing of bullets through the air. The spectator is at once awed, and bewildered, and fascinated, as he gazes upon the grandeur and loveliness of the kaleidoscopic glory which lies, as on a page, before him. The form of the Arctic Auroral display is different from that witnessed in higher latitudes generally speaking. In consequence of nearer proximity to the Pole it frequently presents a complete circle of light whose beauty is ensconced by the almost perfect cross which appears within, similar, one might almost conjecture, to that which once appeared to the astonished eyes of Constantine and his army many centuries ago. In consequence, too, of the greatly increased rarity of the atmosphere in the distant north, the light of the Merry Dancers is much clearer and the line of their gorgeous coloring more sharply defined than is usual with us. The height of the Aurora has been variously estimated, but, we are told that there is good ground for believing that at times it is very near the earth and even within the region of the clouds; and may even occur during the daylight, though rendered invisible by the brightness of the sun.

Winter having set in, the Greenland Eskimos who are, with all their failings, a very hospitable little people, flit about from one settlement to another upon sleighs drawn by their splendid dogs, which literally fly across the frozen bays or the snow, covered earth guided by their own powerful instinct, and their path lightened by the gleams of fair Aurora. Hospitality implying sociability, it is

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