

CHAPTER IV.

NORSE REMAINS IN AMERICA.

The records concerning the Icelandic colony in Greenland are meager, uncertain and fragmentary. What finally became of the colony is unknown. Communication ceased with Greenland some time during the fifteenth century. However, it was not wholly forgotten. Many expeditions set out to undertake its rediscovery, which was not effected until 1721, when Hans Egede succeeded in re-opening communication; but he found no descendants of the Norsemen there.

Ancient ruins in Greenland do not appear to be either numerous or extensive. It is probable the colony never was a large one. Near Igaliko, which is situated on an isthmus formed by two fjords, there can be traced the walls of about seventeen dwellings, and opposite the Moravian settlement of Frederiksdal there have been found tombs containing wooden coffins, with skeletons wrapped in hairy cloth, and both pagan and Christian tomb-stones, with runic inscriptions.

With these evidences before them the Copenhagen antiquarians felt assured that remains of the Norsemen could also be found in the eastern part of the United States, and in order to establish their conclusions they sent out letters of inquiry to societies and individuals for information. Thus having been put on the trail the evidence was forthcoming. The Historical Society of Rhode Island was quick to respond, and procured such data as must have not only delighted but astonished the Copenhagen sages. The Dighton Rock Inscription, the Old Stone Mill at Newport and the Skeleton in Armor constitute the array of evidence. That these purported evidences had much to do with giving the exact location of the so-called Norse settlements there can be no question. The Icelandic manuscripts at once pointed to the exact spot where the Dighton Rock is placed. The inscription on the rock was carefully studied by the Danish antiquarians, from the lines and figures carefully drawn by the authority of the Rhode Island Society. The result of the labors of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Copenhagen was published in 1837, in a book entitled "Antiquitates Americanae," to which a supplement was added in 1841. This work, with the American array of purported facts, gave zest to the subject of the Norse discovery. With confidence the route of the Norsemen along the shore of New Eng-