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978-1-108-04972-6 - An American in Iceland: An Account of its Scenery, People, and History, With a Description of its Millennial Celebration in August 1874; With Notes on the Orkney, Shetland and Faroe Islands, and the Great Eruption of 1875

Samuel Kneeland

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OUR PARTY. — ABERDEEN. — THE START. — THE NORTHERN ISLANDS. — EARLY HISTORY. — KIRKWALL. — CATHEDRAL OF ST. MAGNUS. — OLD PALACES. — MOUND OF MAESHOWE. — STONES OF STENNESS. — FINSTOWN AND ITS BIGOTRY. — CIRCLE OF BROGAR. — STROMNESS. — HUGH MILLER. — WALTER SCOTT. — SCENERY.

“ But I remember when we sailed
 From out that dreary Forth,
 And in the dull of morning hailed
 The headlands of the North ;
 The hills of Caithness, wrapped in rain ;
 The reach of Stroma’s isle ;
 The Pentland, where the furious main
 Roars white for many a mile, —
 Until we steered by Shapinsay,
 And moored our bark in Kirkwall Bay.”

THE considerations mentioned in the preface impelled me to recross the Atlantic; encounter the rough seas, chilly fogs, and dangerous navigation of the Northern Ocean; and submit to the cold rains, scanty food, miserable shelter, and toilsome travelling which I had reason, from travellers’ tales, to expect in Iceland.

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Our party consisted originally of five Americans: Mr. C. W. Field, of Atlantic cable fame; Dr. Hayes, the Arctic explorer; Bayard Taylor, the traveller-poet; Mr. Halstead, of the "Cincinnati Commercial;" while I represented New England and some of her scientific and educational institutions. Not being a correspondent of any newspaper, and having no business interests to serve, I went solely to see the country and become acquainted with the characteristics of the people. When we met in the north of Scotland, we were joined by a younger son of Mr. Gladstone, ex-Premier of England, and by a native Icelander, Mr. Eric Magnusson, sub-librarian at Cambridge University, England, and professor of the Scandinavian languages in that university, who was invited to go with us, and who rendered us invaluable services, both in our intercourse with the people and the authorities, and in making the necessary arrangements for our trip into the interior, to witness the millennial festivities.

We fitted up, manned, and provisioned a small but staunch screw steamer of about 200 tons, the "Albion," at Edinburgh. She was commanded by Captain A. Howling, of Leith, a fine specimen of the British seaman, whose ideas had been enlarged by acquaintance with other countries than his own, and to whose knowledge of the northern islands and of Icelandic