

**A COMPENDIOUS  
GRAMMAR OF THE  
OLD NORTHERN OR  
ICELANDIC LANGUAGE**

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A Compendious Grammar of the Old Northern or Icelandic Language by George P. Marsh

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**GEORGE P. MARSH**

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A

**COMPENDIOUS GRAMMAR**

OF THE

**OLD-NORTHERN OR ICELANDIC**

**LANGUAGE:**

COMPILED AND TRANSLATED

FROM THE

**GRAMMARS OF RASK,**

BY

**GEORGE P. MARSH.**

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**BURLINGTON:**  
**HIRAM JOHNSON & Co.**

**1838.**

## PREFACE.

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**THE** following compend was prepared for the press some years since, under circumstances unfavorable to its careful or judicious execution. The want of proper characters and other obstacles had delayed the printing of the manuscript, until the Translator had almost abandoned the idea of publication, but the appearance of Prof. Rafn's great work, the *Antiquitates Americanæ*, recently published at Copenhagen, seemed to him likely to awaken the attention of American scholars to the remarkable language in which the ancient and curious memorials contained in that volume are embodied, and thereby to furnish a fit occasion for bringing out a manual designed to facilitate access to the literary treasures

of which the Old-Northern tongue is the vehicle.

A hasty revision has accordingly been given to the manuscript, and the first Icelandic Grammar in the English language is now offered to the Public, in such dress as the typographical facilities within the reach of the Translator afforded.

The work is compiled from the following sources :

Vejledning til det Islandske eller gamle Nordiske Sprog. Kjöb. 1811.

Anvisning till Isländskan eller Nordiska Fornspråket. Stockholm, 1818.

Kortfattat Vejledning til det oldnordiske eller gamle islandske Sprog. Kjöb. 1832 ; all by the late celebrated Erasmus Christian Rask.

The first of these is the earliest grammar of the language, which has any pretensions to completeness, and though inferior to the later grammars of the same author, is a very learned and philosophical work.

The second is an enlarged and greatly improved edition, in Swedish, of the first.

The third, which has been made the basis

of the present translation, is a 12mo. vol. of 75 pages, intended chiefly to exhibit the matured views of the author upon the ancient grammatical forms of the language, as gathered from its earliest written monuments.

The English, French, and German exemplifications of the sounds of the letters were kindly furnished to the Translator by Prof. Rafa and the late Mr. Mc Dougall of Copenhagen, and the type for the Runic characters, by the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries, of the same city.

The notes and other additions by the Translator are neither sufficiently numerous nor important to deserve special notice.

In the doctrine of Forms and Inflections (Formlære), the treatises of Rask leave nothing to be desired, but the Syntax in these, and indeed in all the other grammars of that great philologist, seems less happy in arrangement and execution, and less complete in detail. It is however to be remembered that Rask wrote for the Danes and Swedes, whose native languages, being the daughters of the Icelandic, so nearly resemble the parent stock in structure and grammatical character, that a



more systematic and detailed view of the syntax might well be dispensed with.

The Translator has made a copious collection of rules and examples in syntax, selected with special reference to the analogies and discrepancies between the Icelandic and English, which he purposes to publish, if the subject shall be found to excite sufficient interest to warrant the undertaking.

No attempt has been made to transfer to the English the new grammatical nomenclature, which Rask and other Northern philologists have introduced; for, however expressive and appropriate the newly framed terms may be in themselves, it is obvious that the structure of our language will not admit of similar or corresponding compounds and derivatives, though some of them, such as *B i n d e o r d*, *bindword* (conjunction), *H j æ l p e o r d*, *helpword* (auxiliary), and the like, might perhaps be allowable.

The deviation from the usual arrangement of the cases and genders in the substantives, adjectives, and pronouns will be new to many scholars, and by some may be thought an arbitrary innovation.

But the reasons assigned by the author for these changes appear sufficient. The usual arrangement of the cases, he remarks, seems to have been altogether an accidental one, as it is impossible to discover any principle on which it is founded, and it manifestly contravenes the obvious rule of proceeding from the primitive and simple to the derivative and artificial, as well as that of placing together the cases which most nearly resemble each other in form, or in use and signification.

The arrangement here followed, he considers generally applicable to all the European languages, whether ancient or modern, and gives the following exemplifications.

Nom.	$\pi\alpha\lambda\eta\eta$	fructus	}	der Band	vöxr
Voc.	$\pi\alpha\lambda\eta\eta$	fructus			
Acc.	$\pi\alpha\lambda\eta\eta\alpha$	fructum		den Band	vöxt
Dat.	$\pi\alpha\lambda\eta\eta\iota$	{ fructui }	}	dem Bande	vexti
(Abl.)					
Gen.	$\pi\alpha\lambda\eta\eta\sigma$	fructûs		des Bandes	vaxtar

In these examples, it will be readily observed that the cases follow each other in the probable order of their developement from the root, and that the analogous forms are classed together. Thus the nominative and vocative are both appellatives, and in most languages

are identical in form, and the accusative and dative are both objective forms. The ablative on the one hand has a close resemblance to the dative, and on the other, to the genitive, as appears from its use in Latin, where it often corresponds to the Greek genitive.

The genders seem to have been arranged according to the supposed dignity of the sexes. This would not be a very philosophical principle, even in languages, if there be any such, where the sex determines the gender, but in those where the gender is entirely independent of sex, and where *gender* is but another name for *ending*, such a principle can have no application. The neuter is generally the nearest to the root-form, and the feminine the most remote from it, and this suggests the obvious and natural principle of arrangement which the author has adopted.

In practice, it will be found that Rask's progressive order both of the genders and of the cases has great advantages, as a help to the memory, over the arbitrary system hitherto so generally received.

The reason assigned by the author for classing the numerals among the pronouns, name-