

**CHAMBERS'S REPOSITORY  
OF INSTRUCTIVE  
AND AMUSING TRACTS,  
VOLUME X, NO. 73-80**

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**WILLIAM CHAMBERS & ROBERT CHAMBERS**

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**TRACTS**



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CHAMBERS'S  
REPOSITORY.



LAPLAND AND THE LAPPS.

**W**HILE the tide of human migration was flowing from Asia into Europe, extending its course further and further westward and northward, one wave obliterated the traces of the other as they followed each other in rapid succession; and when at length the fountain source was dammed up, and the influx subsided, and the light of history gradually dawned upon the nations of Europe settled in the localities which they now inhabit, but few vestiges remained to tell of the first wave that had broken over the various countries. As civilisation has advanced, these vestiges of the earliest occupants of the lands

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have become more and more overlaid, and even in those countries where the original race is considered as having continued to occupy the soil, its characteristics have been so much changed, that its past cannot be read by the light of its present. On one point of Europe only, waves of the first human flood are still coursing over the land, offering to the philosophical observer an opportunity of becoming acquainted with society in its most ancient and primitive form. This point is the northernmost tract of the Scandinavian peninsula, where a nomadic race, seemingly the first that ever occupied the soil, still roves in unimproved simplicity among the forests and the fells.

At what period the Gothic-Germanic race, which now inhabits Norway and Sweden, first entered those countries, still remains an unanswered question, as far as indubitable historic evidence is concerned; but whatever may have been the time at which the immigration took place, the archaeological monuments of the countries, and the traditions of the people, leave no doubt as to their having, on their arrival, found the country inhabited by another race, with whom they had to sustain a long and severe struggle for supremacy. These older occupants of the hyperborean north, were in all probability the Finns, a race still spread over part of north-eastern Europe and northern Asia, and whose name occurs for the first time in the *Annals* of Tacitus, who describes them as a poor and savage race, living by the chase alone, roaming about without settled homes, clad in the skins of wild animals, having no shelter but the trees of the forest, and making the bare earth their bed. But Tacitus speaks of the Finns of more southern countries; whether those of Scandinavia were in an equally barbarous state at the time of the arrival of the Gothic tribes, it is not possible to determine; but if the conflicts between the gods or Asar, and the Jotuns, Svartalfer, and other beings mentioned in Scandinavian myths and traditions, do indeed represent the struggles of the Goths with the earlier inhabitants of the country, it may be inferred from these, that there were varieties among the Finnish tribes; for while some of the opponents of the Asar are represented as powerful giants, others are described as contemptible dwarfs, dangerous only through their wiles and cunning.

However this may have been, when Scandinavia, in the ninth century of our era, first emerges into the dawning light of history, we find only scattered remnants of a Finnish occupation in the more southern divisions of the country; while in the north, from Halagoland, in Norway, extending eastward to the White Sea, and as far south on this side as Halagoland on the other, the whole of the country was still occupied by them, and bore in consequence the name of Finmark, or Land of the Finns, now applied to Norwegian Lapland only. From the early accounts of this ancient Finmark, given to King Alfred of England by two Norsemen, Ottar and Ulfsten, who had visited the country to levy tribute, it appears that the Finnish tribes on the Norwegian coast were

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then a pastoral people, and also supported themselves by fishing; whereas the more eastern tribes were greatly in advance of these, and practised agriculture and other arts. In the history of the heathen north, the Finns subsequently appear under the various denominations of Biarner, Carelians, Esthonians, Quæns, Kures, Trefnns or Terfinns, and Skridfinnar, the latter being converted by the monkish chroniclers of the middle ages into Scretefannæ, Scritifinni, Scricfinni, and several other modifications or corruptions of the Scandinavian name *Skridfinnar*, derived from the snow-skates (*Skridsko*) in use among them, and probably applied to the particular tribes who bore it to distinguish them from the eastern and south-easteru Finns, who seem not to have made use of these skates, although the nature of the country and climate they inhabited made these contrivances equally desirable.

It is with the Skridfinnar alone—supposed to be the branch of the Finnish family now bearing the name of Lapps—that we are concerned. This name of Lapp, which even at the present time is not recognised by the people themselves, does not appear in history before the end of the twelfth century, and its origin is enveloped in much obscurity; some deriving it from the Finnish word *Lappa*, signifying limit, extremity, and supposing it to have been applied to the Lapps because of their being a frontier tribe: others suggesting that it may be derived from *Lappa*, a word in the Lappic language denoting a mountain cleft or cavern, such having, in all probability, been the first habitations of the Lapps.\* That the name originated with the eastern Finns, may be concluded from the fact, that it was not known in Scandinavia until the period mentioned above, when the conquests of St Eric brought the Swedes into contact with the Finns of Finland. *Samek* is the name which the Lapps give themselves; and as even to this day they look upon the appellation of Lapp as an insult, it may very likely have been given to them in contempt by the kindred tribes, who, proud of their higher standing-point in the scale of civilisation, would not deign to confer on the savage 'cavern-dwellers' the name of *Samek*, so closely allied to their own name of *Suomi*; for that the Finns of Finland, or Quæns † as they are sometimes called in the Scandinavian Sagas, and are still called in Norway, had, at the

\* There are various other theories about the origin of this name, but their enumeration would hardly interest our readers; and to us none seem so well founded as those named in the text.

† This name of *Quæn*, so closely resembling the Scandinavian word *Qvinn* or *Qvinn* (woman), led Adam of Bremen, the oldest geographer of the north, into the strange mistake of locating in the north of Scandinavia a country inhabited by a race of Amazons; and to these Amazons, Scandinavian geographers of a later date, with less excuse for their error, applied all that is related by Greek writers of the Amazons of Scythia; until a very recent period, indeed, dreams of the land of Amazons haunted the imaginations of some Swedish scholars. At present, the name of *Quæn* is used in Norway only to distinguish the industrious and cultivated Finnish or Finland colonists who have settled there, from the Lapps, who, in Norway, bear the name of Finns exclusively. In Sweden, on the contrary, where the Finns proper alone bear this denomination, the name of *Quæn* has entirely disappeared.