

**NOTES OF A TRIP
TO
ICELAND IN 1862**

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Notes of a trip to Iceland in 1862 by Alexander Bryson

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BY
ALEXANDER BRYSON,
F.R.S.E. F.G.S.

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NOTES
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CHAPTER I

THE VOYAGE.

TWO taps on the engine-room roof by the captain—a stentorian shout, “Let go your bow-rope!”—and we are off for Iceland.

To one who, like myself, never suffers from the *mal de mer*—with a good ship, a good captain, and an attentive steward with his lockers well filled—a voyage is very agreeable. All these we found on board the *Aroturus*, commanded by Captain Andriessen. We sailed from Grangemouth on the 17th July 1862, and were glad to leave the slimy beds and get into

clean water. Some of us, however, that night, would rather we had stuck in the mud, as a storm came away from the north-east—a well-remembered one by many; and we had to lay-to at St Margaret's Hope until daylight broke.

"Morn, wi' bonny purple smiles,
Kissed the air-cock o' St Giles,"

as we steamed down the Forth. But Boreas had not done with us—he had more in his bellows; and we had to succumb under shelter of Peterhead. Here, in smooth water, appeared many a face from berths fore and aft that we had not seen before, and all seemed determined to be happy during the calm. My party consisted of five gentlemen—three friends from Glasgow, an artistic lawyer from London, and myself. We were fortunate in finding also on board an M.P.; an editor of the 'Times' and knight of Denmark, famous for his Scandinavian lore; also a gentleman well known for his knowledge of Celtic antiquities. As they had before paid visits to Iceland, they contributed much information which we found useful in the island. Another gentleman, who was deaf and dumb, afforded us all much amusement by his pantomimic powers;—everything and every one he could describe by their manner. He was on a very curious mission, being sent by the Government of Switzerland to travel through Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, to inquire into the condition of

the deaf and dumb in those countries. How he was to get on in Iceland—travelling without a companion, unable to speak, and only writing in French—was a matter of astonishment to us. But we were soon undeceived, as we found that he could make himself better understood by two Icelandic ladies who were on board than any other of our fellow-travellers. He had a familiar title for us all. Young Lord N——y, a handsome scion of the nobility, he called Adonis; one of my party, Mars; myself he denominated Bacchus, from the amount of beer and claret which I was enabled to consume from my immunity from sea-sickness. But the more ostensible reason for my title of Bacchus was simply that, as I was captain of the party, and the number of my berth 20, every bottle of wine which was called for was marked down 20; and although five were at the consumption of it, poor Monsieur Griollet de Geer supposed that all was for my own use (certainly not *benefit*, if his supposition had been true). It may give you some idea of the moderate charges on board the *Arcturus*, when I say that five gentlemen were entertained for eight days with the best viands and wines, including steward and stewardess's fees, and also the purchase of eight bottles of whisky for our journey inland, for the sum of £10, 10s., being only £2, 2s. per man for the voyage.

The severity of the storm being abated, after a delay of six hours we left Peterhead for the north; and