

round the southern end of the eastern Skaptá lava stream, and a few miles west of Kirkjubæur we reached the eastern limit of the western stream. The two together formed the most enormous molten flood that ever devastated peopled lands, within the period of historic record. About the end of May, 1783, a thin blue smoke was seen to rise behind the Skaptárfells; by the 8th of June it changed into an awful, wall-like mass of smoke and ashes, from whence proceeded showers of cinders, and of hair-like filaments of lava, while earthquake shocks and peals of thunder, with violent subterranean detonations and reports, occurred in quick and dread succession. On the 10th lurid gleams of pillars as of fire appeared within the dense black mass; next day the Skaptá suddenly dried up, and like a foaming sea there burst upon the lowlands a frightful lava stream, while over all a dense mephitic vapour brooded, through which the sun could only now and then be seen like a blood-red globe. The valley of the Skaptá was in places six hundred feet in depth, but the glowing torrent filled it to the brim.

On the 18th, so vast a flood appeared that by its waves great glowing rocks were rolled along above the earlier streams, while the waters of the



BASALTIC PILLARS AT KIRKJUBÆUR.

river came down as well, in hissing, seething, bubbling fountains. And these continued until July the 2nd. Meanwhile another wall of smoke and ashes rose in the valley of the Hverfisfjót, whose waters also ceased, and on the 9th of August the eastern stream enacted there the havoc of its predecessor. Nor did the valleys only suffer, for the ashes and the pumice, the sulphurous and other noxious vapours spread far and wide. The grass was covered, calcined, or destroyed, and the starved and poisoned animals died by thousands, or ate the very hair and flesh from one another. A new disease appeared, for sheep and cattle, and even men, were seized with loathsome swellings, their jaws became inflamed, their teeth were loosened and became dislodged. Magnus Stevensen, in whose 'account' the full particulars are given, asserts that 9336 human beings, 28,000 horses, 11,461 cattle, and 190,488 sheep, perished within two years;