

A
GENERAL VIEW
OF THE
MANNERS, CUSTOMS,
AND
CURIOSITIES OF NATIONS;

INCLUDING
A GEOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE EARTH.

THE WHOLE ILLUSTRATED BY FIFTY-FOUR MAPS,
AND OTHER ENGRAVINGS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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NOVA ZEMBLA.

Of the Character, Manners, and Customs of the Inhabitants of Nova Zembla.

NOVA ZEMBLA is separated from the province of Samoieda by the narrow strait of Weygats; but whether it be an island, or part of a great continent, has not yet been determined by navigators. So little is known respecting this place, that at present it is uncertain whether there be any constant inhabitants residing there or not; its climate has however been described very poetically by Mr. Pope :

Zembla's cold rocks, the beauteous work of frost,
Rise white in air, and glitter o'er the coast ;
Pale suns, unfelt, at distance roll away,
And on th' impassive ice the lightnings play :
Eternal snows the growing mass supply,
Till the bright mountains prop th' incumbent sky :
As Atlas fix'd each hoary pile appears,
And gather'd winter of a thousand years.

The Samoiedes resort thither when the straits are frozen over, for the purpose of hunting elks and rein-deer. The best account we can find respecting this place, and of those who inhabit it, whether as a fixed residence or only occasionally, we shall extract from the travels of persons through the northern countries of Europe, who were employed by the North-sea Company of Copenhagen.

“ As his Danish majesty was solicitous to have an accurate account of the produce and climate of Zembla, and, for the better obtaining this information, had commanded the officers to bring off some of the natives, for this purpose, thirty persons were ordered to land in the long-boat, and soon after we descried a Zemblian in his boat, who, seeing us approach, rowed so fast that

it was impossible to overtake him; and no sooner had he set his foot on shore, than he threw his boat over his shoulder, and fled with as much swiftness, as if he felt no incumbrance. We pursued him up the hill, but he quickly got out of our sight.

“ In returning to the ships, we perceived two Zemblians farther out at sea, who immediately made to the rocks and promontories, in order to conceal themselves; but we plied our oars so briskly, that we surrounded them before they could reach the shore, when, seeing no possibility of escape, they set up a most hideous howl.

“ They happened to be a male and female, dressed in the skins of the sea-calf, with the hair outwards. Their waistcoats were composed of two skins joined together, with the tails dangling, the one behind and the other before, down to their knees. Their drawers were very straight. The man seemed to be about fifty years of age, and had no hair on his head, but a chesnut coloured beard shaded his mouth. The woman, who seemed to be about twenty years younger than the man, had her ears and nose bored, and pendants of blue stones hanging from them: and, to increase her charms, she had drawn blue streaks across her forehead and chin. Her hair was twisted and hung on her shoulders. The features of both were extremely disagreeable. Their voices were squeaking; and their breath very offensive.

“ We took them from their boat, which was constructed of the rib-bones of fish, very artificially joined, and neatly covered with fish-skins sewed together. It was sixteen feet long, and about two feet and a half wide. The rowers were shut up in it as high as their waists, by having a fish-skin drawn over it, and two apertures to fit their shapes, so that it was proof against the admission of water.

“ We attempted, by friendly signs, to make them dis-

cover where their habitations lay, but we either could not gain their confidence, or could not understand them.

“ Soon after we caught two other Zemblians, whose garments were made of penguins’ skins, with the feathers outwards. Their heads were covered with conical caps, and their stockings were made of seal-skin. Though there was no distinction in their dresses, we soon perceived that one was a man and the other a woman. The man, who was about twenty-four years of age, had no beard, nor hair on his head. At his back hung a quiver filled with arrows; on his shoulders was an axe, and in one hand he held his bow. The woman was somewhat younger, and carried a dart in her hand. Her dress and ornaments were like those of the female already described.

“ We used all means to prevail on them to shew us where they lived, but without effect. When we introduced them to their fellow prisoners, we found they were acquainted, though the difference in their dress indicated that they were of different tribes. These Zemblians were the most despicable of the human race I ever beheld. Their features were forbidding, and their manner of walking was a waddling kind of motion.

“ Habituated to the simple beverage of water, we could not prevail upon them to drink our beer; nor would they taste bread or salt meat. They were pleased with brandy, but could not endure the smell of tobacco.”