

times the common usage in Iceland, as we have already observed, was to count by the weeks of each of the "misseri" instead of referring to months. According to Prof. Munch, the Northmen originally divided the week into five days, the so-called *Fimt* (Fifth), the later hebdominal week having been borrowed, like the names of the days, from the south. The latter, in spite of their apparent northern character, are in point of fact mere adaptations of the names of the Roman deities Mars, Mercury, Jove, and Venus, which reappeared in the old northern calendar as Ty, Odin, Thor, and Freja. Saturn alone failed to find a representative in this system of nomenclature, for to the genuine Northman it would seem that the last day of the week could have no other designation than that of "Laugar-dæg," or "Thvott-dæg," washing or bathing day. And this name has been retained through the intervening ages, being the only one that escaped the ban of the Church, when a century after the establishment of Christianity an episcopal ordinance interdicted the application of the names of heathen gods to the several days of the week, which were thenceforth known in accordance with their order of sequence, although *Sunnudæg* and *Mánadæg* in course of time replaced the older designations of "First Day" and "Second Day."

The new style was introduced into Iceland at the same time as in the foster- and mother-lands of Denmark and Norway, and in accordance with a royal edict, the day after February 18 in the year 1700 was reckoned as March 1. From that period to the present time the Icelandic calendars have given double tables based on the Gregorian, and the locally modified Julian system. A few modifications have, however, been made in modern times in the older national methods of intercalation, "summer day" falling on the Thursday between April 19 and 25, while in strict accordance with the past methods of computation it should fall on the Thursday between April 21 and 27. The intercalated week of the old "Sumar-auke" has also been shifted from midsummer to the close of the summer measure, and thus falls partly in September, "Haustmánadr," and partly in October, "Gormánadr."

#### THE ORFE, A FISH RECENTLY ACCLIMATISED IN ENGLAND

THE fine specimens of the "Orfe" presented by his Grace the Duke of Bedford to the International Fisheries Exhibition, and exhibited in one of the tanks of the Aquarium, fully deserve the notice of all interested in the culture of our freshwater fishes. They are some of a number which Lord Arthur Russell succeeded in importing from Wiesbaden in March, 1874, and which were placed in a pond at Woburn Abbey in Bedfordshire. Owing to the succession of cold summers these "Orfes" did not breed until last year, and we may hope that this season will also prove favourable. This species may now be considered as acclimatised, and will become a permanent acquisition to our ornamental waters.

The Orfe, whose bright yellow or golden colours resemble those of the Goldfish or Golden Tench, is, like these two latter fish, a permanent variety of a wild and much less brightly coloured race, belonging to the same genus as, but specifically distinct from, the Chub, with which it was confounded by some writers. Its systematic name is *Leuciscus idus*; of vernacular names those of "Aland" and "Nerfling" are those most generally used in Germany, whilst the Swedes know it by the name of "Id." The name "Orfe" refers to the golden-coloured variety only, which has been cultivated for centuries in inclosed waters in Bavaria. Willughby knew it well; he says in his "Historia Piscium" (Oxon, fol. 1686), p. 253:—"At Augsburg we saw a most beautiful fish, which they call the 'Root oerve,' from its vermilion colour, like that of a pippin apple, with which the whole

body is covered, except the lower side, which is white." As in the Golden Tench, individuals of pure golden-yellow tints are scarce, the majority retaining marks of their origin from a plain-coloured ancestry in brownish spots or blotches on some part of their body. The ordinary size of this species is ten or twelve inches (and this is about the size of those at the Exhibition); but it is known to have attained to double that size and to a weight of six pounds.

The Orfe will thrive in all inclosed waters suitable to Roach and Goldfish; as an ornamental fish it is preferable to the latter on account of its larger size, livelier habits, and rapid reproduction; it takes the bait, and is eaten in Bavaria. As an ornamental domestic fish the Goldfish will always hold its own, but for waters of any extent and free from Pike and Perch we know of no more ornamental fish than the Orfe, a worthy rival of the Golden Tench, which has been so successfully acclimatised by Lord Walsingham; and we trust that his Grace will soon rear a sufficient number to secure to the Orfe a home in many different parts of the country. A. G.

#### SNOW AND ICE FLORA<sup>1</sup>

THIS work, which is included in Baron Nordenskjöld's studies and investigations arising out of his travels in the extreme north, is quite as interesting and important as regards the snow and ice flora of the Alps and Arctic regions, as the great traveller had led us to expect (see NATURE, vol. xxviii. p. 39). It is, as far as the materials on hand permit, an exhaustive account of the subject of which it treats.

As might be expected, the first pages of the work are devoted to "red snow," than which there are few subjects that have more engaged the attention of scientific travellers in the Arctic districts. This little plant has been found in the Arctic regions of Europe and America, thereby suggesting, as Prof. Wittrock observes, the former union of the two continents. It also appears in the north of Scandinavia, on the high Alps, the Pyrenees, and the Carpathians. Various were the opinions as to whether it belonged to the animal or vegetable world, and many the names by which it was designated. The prettiest of these names is certainly that given to it by C. Agardh—"the snow-flower." While, however, "red snow" will probably continue to be its trivial name, Prof. Wittrock has restored to it the scientific name of *Sphærella nivalis*, bestowed on it by Sommerfelt in 1882.

Until Nordenskjöld's expedition to Greenland in 1870, this alga was thought to be the only living plant on the ice and snow; but during their wandering on the inland ice, Nordenskjöld and Berggren discovered several algæ, among which was one new to science, namely, *Ancylonema Nordenskjöldii*, which was seen in such abundance, that it gave to the adjacent ground a peculiar purple-brown colour. Other algæ seemed to be mixed up with the fine sand (ice-dust, *kryokonit*), which here and there spreads a thin covering on the ice, or lies in a thick layer at the bottom of the funnel-shaped holes which are formed in it. Baron Nordenskjöld lays great stress on the important part which these algæ, and especially *Ancylonema*, play in the melting of ice. "The dark mass (algæ)," he says, "absorbs a larger portion of the sun's rays than the white ice, and therefore produces deep holes in the ice, which in a great degree conduce to its melting." He even thinks that this *Ancylonema* once performed the same office in Scandinavia, adding, "We have, perhaps, to thank this plant that the ice deserts which formerly covered Europe and America with a coating of ice, now give place to shady woods and undulating fields of corn."

<sup>1</sup> "Om Snöns och Isens Flora. Särskildt i de Arktiska Trakterna." Af Veit Brecher Wittrock. Ur "A. E. Nordenskjöld, Studier och forskningar föranledda af mina resor i höga Norden." (Stockholm, 1883.)