

THE VALUE OF THE ICELANDIC SAGAS¹

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I

THE legal-minded Romans used to ask: *Cui bono?* — For whose benefit? Nowadays we say that all things are relative. When I speak of the value of the Icelandic sagas, it is only natural that I should be asked: From whose point of view? For important things are generally not equally important to all people.

In the following meditations I shall distinguish between three different points of view. They may be compared with three concentric circles. For all those within the outermost circle the Icelandic sagas have a general human value, while for those in the two inner circles they have an additional value, greatest of all for those in the innermost circle. And we shall deal with them first.

II

The value of the sagas for the Icelanders is so great and so complex that it is difficult to define it in all its aspects. We can safely say that without the classical literature, our cultural and political struggle in later times would have met with but little understanding abroad. It is true, of course, that translations of the old Icelandic literature have not found their way into everyman's book-case in other countries, much less the original texts, and it is also unlikely that the works of Konrad Maurer, W. P. Ker, James Bryce and Andreas Heusler, to mention just a few names out of many, have ever been best-sellers. But all this has nevertheless been sufficiently well known to penetrate the mind of the civilized world. Iceland is comparable to Greece insofar

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as its ancient civilization has made the modern world more willing to recognize the Icelanders' right to exist, their right to be free and independent.

I shall not discuss further this well-known and important fact. But our old literature, especially the sagas, has had an immense influence on the Icelanders themselves. First and foremost, the sagas relate the early history of the Icelandic people and present a memorable picture of their civilization. They have in consequence acted as a stimulus on the people, shown them the freedom and independence of the past. The old reality made our political and cultural leaders in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries take their national dreams and ambitions seriously. But, besides this, the spirit of the old literature has had a deep moral influence on the individual. When Andreas Heusler travelled in Iceland at the beginning of this century, he discovered that the Icelanders, after their 'dark ages', were what he called 'Aristodemokraten'. The ethics of the sagas, their ideals of human qualities, of honour and fair play, the great serenity that prevails in them — all this is bound to have left some traces behind. And the individualism.

I shall not enlarge upon the way in which the sagas, together with the eddic poems and their successors, the *rímur* and other poetry, have played no mean part in the remarkable preservation of the language, without which there would be no modern Icelandic culture. And it would be a long story if I tried to describe how the old literature has acted as an inspiration for Icelandic literature of later times: I mention it only in passing. But on the whole it may be said that the sagas and the old literature are the corner-stone of the Icelandic people's existence and the inspiration of all their achievements in modern times.

III

Icelandic influence on Scandinavia is an old story. Strange as it may seem, both Saxo Grammaticus, the

Danish historian, and Theodoricus, the Norwegian historian, in the late twelfth century quote the Icelanders as authorities. Later, sagas written in Iceland, especially the Sagas of the Kings and after them the *fornaldarsögur*, the mythical-heroic sagas, found their way to Norway, where they evidently enjoyed a great reputation. After the Norwegians had lost their old language, in the sixteenth century and later, Snorri's *Heimskringla* was translated into Danish, and this legacy of the past was read by the common people of Norway, who continued to find their history in it, the picture of their old civilization in times when Norway had been an independent kingdom. *Heimskringla* remained a constant stimulus to them. Many scholars maintain that it was one of the great factors in their fight for freedom.

Scholars in Denmark and Sweden in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries found in sagas written in Iceland stories about their kings in olden times. This added to their self-respect. But the Danes had their Saxo, and although the Icelandic interest of the Scandinavians of those days sprang partly from political motives, the importance of the sagas in Denmark and Sweden was in no way comparable to their importance in Norway. On the other hand, it is not advisable to minimize their importance in the cultural and literary field. In the late Middle Ages Denmark and to a less degree Sweden were subject to a very thorough-going Low German influence, and later, up to the middle of the nineteenth century, part of the kingdom of Denmark was German-speaking, and German was the language of many of the aristocracy. An Icelandic student meditating on Danish civilization in, say, the seventeenth or eighteenth century may be inclined to think of it as half Continental-European and only half Northern. There are many factors which helped the Danes to preserve Northern characteristics and the will to be a Northern nation — amongst them, no doubt, are the Icelandic sagas.

With the advent of Romanticism in the nineteenth century it can be seen that the sagas, their subject-matter and sometimes their form and their spirit, have exerted a profound influence on the literature of these countries. It is enough to mention such names as Oehlenschläger, Grundtvig, Tegnér, Bjørnson, Ibsen, Sigrid Undset. Of course, every period interpreted the old literature in its own way, and accepted from it what was to its liking. And it is only natural that an Icelander finds a wide gulf between the Scandinavian works of the nineteenth century and the sagas themselves. But of all the Scandinavian authors I think that Henrik Ibsen shows the closest affinity to the Icelandic sagas, and when I say this, I am not thinking specially of his historical plays but of his plays with modern themes.

IV

Now we leave the second circle. We are no longer discussing the value of the sagas for the Icelanders themselves, or for the Scandinavians who read about their early history and civilization in them. Now I wish to examine their more universal value.

Among all nations and at all times there has existed an abundance of story material, for the compass of story is comprehensive, it can comprise both the outer and the inner world, the world of reality as well as the world of imagination. The material for stories exists always in plenty. But there must be eyes to see and tongues to tell. The existence of such eyes and tongues may be periodic, centuries apart even. For the gifts of Fortune to mankind are often mere fragments — it happens but seldom that we are given anything whole and complete.

In their literature, and especially in the sagas, the Icelanders of the old Commonwealth succeeded in creating a living picture of their world, first and foremost of their own national life and that of neighbouring peoples. Although more is told about some countries than others,

the sagas have something to say about all the areas then inhabited by the Northern peoples. And their horizon is even wider, embracing all Europe and even going still further afield. The sagas have therefore much historical value: they display the civilization and ideas of the Northern peoples at that period, and some of them preserve the heroic literature of the Germanic peoples in better and more complete form than exists anywhere else. And if we include the Eddas, we have here the greatest part of our knowledge of the heathen religion of the Germanic peoples.

V

Nothing would be further from the truth than to call this literature merely a collection of sources for history and mythology, of an exclusively academic interest. They could be that even if they were imperfect in art. But they are so profound that they have a universal, human value: they reveal man, his life, his soul, his fate. When we consider this, the historical and geographical settings become a raiment lending the contents a particular hue: but the contents themselves are humanity, independent of time and place.

This picture which the sagas present is both comprehensive and profound.

Here we see people of all walks of life, the chief and the slave, the farmer and the tramp, the farmhand and the sailor. We meet people of all ages, from the child in its cradle to the blind old man. We see men and women. We meet these people under the most varied circumstances of life. We hear joyous speeches and lamentations, we feel hatred and love, hope and despair and most things that move the human heart.

In his *Poetics* Aristotle says that tragedy is an imitation, not of people, but of action and life. The Icelandic sagas begin by relating events — but, almost before we realize it, their main purpose turns out to be to describe people.

They never neglect the events, but people are described as they manifest themselves in the events, through their actions and words. People are described from without as if an intelligent witness were telling the story. The story-teller restrains himself, he takes care not to intrude or to relate too much the thoughts of his characters, he pretends not to have any hand in it at all, pretends to be objective, takes care not to point with his finger in order to draw the moral. He presents his work in such a way that the reader or listener can see the drama in his mind's eye. The famous words of Gustave Flaubert describe exactly the attitude of the saga-writer: 'L'artiste ne doit pas plus apparaître dans son œuvre que Dieu dans la sienne.' But then the saga-writer also expects much from his audience. The listener must concentrate, the story-teller does not shout at him like a newspaper-vendor in the street. The reader, or listener, must have sensitivity and a vivid imagination: and if he has, then all this human life in the sagas, with its force and diversity, its misery and glory, becomes clear to him.

The Norwegian writer, Hans E. Kinck, has somewhere said that an uncanny knowledge of the human mind is revealed in the sagas. This, I think, every reader will discover for himself if he studies them closely, even if the objectivity, the artistic illusion, may at first conceal the fact. But it is also evident that there is no attempt to describe the inner feelings: the diverse motives are not analysed, the nuances of emotions are not described nor the stream of consciousness. But a great deal of a person's mind can be revealed through his actions, his physical appearance or his words, which is exactly the method used in the sagas. Their point of view is dramatic, just as their movements and suspense are often dramatic also.

These strict rules were second nature to a whole group of saga-writers in a certain period: it seems to have been quite natural for them to abide by these rules, just as a

great composer creates his works of art in conformity with strict rules of which he may or may not be aware. And in this way the saga-writers created on vellum a great number of characters, many of whom are drawn with a masterly touch, impressive, true and profound. We can classify these characters according to the main types: some, for example, are intelligent, others impulsive, and so on, but we soon discover how diverse the characters are in each class. And if we wanted to classify them thoroughly according to their idiosyncrasies, the classes would be just as many as the characters themselves. This means, in other words, that the characters are individuals. Jakob Burckhart, in his famous work *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, says that with the Italian Renaissance a new understanding and appreciation of man as an individual emerged, a fresh appreciation of the idiosyncrasies which distinguish him from other people of the same class or type. In this respect, the Icelanders were ahead of the Italians, a fact of which this great scholar was not aware. If he had known the sagas, he would have been impressed by what is to be seen there.

The tendency to imitate reality by describing complex characters, by painting with mixed colours, can sometimes make the reader's sympathy balance as if on a knife's edge, as is the case when he is confronted by Egil Skalla-Grímsson and Víga-Glúm. At other times the personalities are so complex that we are faced with problem-characters — like Hamlet's; Skarpheðin is one of them. The realism of these descriptions of character is so great that the parts where they occur are not only impressive but are also often endowed with the mystery of the unknown. Here, in my opinion, we have methods of presenting character which are entirely different from those used by the Greeks or Romans. And the same applies to the few cases where development of character is portrayed, Saint Ólaf in Snorri's *Heimskringla*, Njál in the *Story of Burnt Njal*. In all these respects the sagas

are the forerunners of Western literature of later times.

As I mentioned earlier, however, the descriptions of human characters in the sagas never lead the author so far astray that he forgets to tell the story, to describe the events. Often we see a peculiar relationship, an interplay, between events and characters. This interplay clearly arouses the interest of the author — it is as if he often looks with wonder, and sometimes undoubtedly with horror, at human life. The sagas are an essay on man.

VI

In Iceland we call the era of the Commonwealth *fornöld* — ‘Ancient Times’ — and the following period *miðöld*, ‘Middle Ages’. In European history both periods belong to the Middle Ages, to their latter half, since Iceland’s history began when a third of the Middle Ages had already passed. By European terminology, therefore, our ancient literature is to be called medieval. This difference in definition shows two different ways of looking at things. We may say that the Icelandic phrase shows a narrower outlook, but even so it is not entirely wrong. It simply means that the clock in Iceland was not the same as in Europe at that time.

Iceland, of course, belonged to Europe, whose medieval Catholicism and learning were brought to Iceland and with them the art of writing. Some scholars want to ascribe as much as possible of our old civilization to foreign influences. I shall not try to solve that problem, nor to discuss the part played by the Church in the creation of Icelandic literature. Of the sagas I wish to say this: What is most remarkable in them is something that cannot be traced to medieval Europe. Perhaps my translation of *Le Roman de Tristan et Iseut* and a book called *Leit ég suður til landa* show some love of medieval literature and give me some justification for saying that the things I like best in the Icelandic sagas are those which

are *not* medieval. I take delight in the saga-writers' fondness for intelligence and common sense, their appreciation of lucidity, of cool, unprejudiced judgement and sound suspicion, and I often think of the credulity of the Middle Ages and their faith in authority. And secondly, I enjoy the purity of the sagas: the people they describe are hard without being cruel, a fact which, in my opinion, is far too often ignored; the characters of the sagas are natural people, very seldom sensual or lustful, whereas cruelty and sensuality spoil many a medieval work. I like the objective attitude in our sagas, their realism, their understanding of people as they are. It happens but rarely that saga-characters are presented as glazed pictures or dark shadows, they are not divided into angels and devils, as is so often the case in medieval literature.

Another feature I like about the Icelandic sagas is their social range. The admiration for manly deeds and valour is exactly the same in the romances of chivalry as in our sagas. Chivalry and *drengskapr* are two related ideas, and it is difficult to say which is more pronounced, chivalry in the romances or *drengskapr* in the sagas. But in the romances of chivalry the people are divided into two classes: the knights and the common people, or rather, the knights are people, while the socially inferior are despicable and ridiculous figures, hardly classed as human beings at all. The knights are the exclusive heroes of these romances, while the common people are for the most part not in view. When we compare the romances with the Icelandic sagas the difference is obvious. Any free person can be the hero of a saga, and even people in bondage are spoken of with dignity, provided they possess manly virtues, as may be seen from the anecdotes about Vífil, Ingólf's slave, or Atli, Geirmund's slave, or Bóthild, Ingjald's bondwoman. In the sagas we often come across people at work, the heroes no less than the others, even chieftains like Skalla-Grím and Arnkel *goði*. We

see the romantic lover, Björn Breiðvíkinga-kappi, at carpentry out in the field, and Kormak, the love-poet, was once on his way to the mountains to drive home the duncoloured sheep, only he preferred to remain at Gnúpsdal in Steingerð's company — and who could blame him for that? Scholars speak rightly of the aristocratic element in early Icelandic civilization, but we must not forget the democratic features which are so evident in politics, culture and literature. For this reason it often seems as if the society depicted in the sagas is a classless one, since the prevalent attitude in them is so utterly human. In this connection I shall refer only to the saga of Gísli the outlaw: how indifferent it is to the power and glory of the chieftain, yet at the same time how completely devoid of any plebeian sentiment. For here the indomitable human spirit is manifest in all its nobility and greatness. It is enough to remind you of the scene when Börk the Stout arrives with a band of men and orders the farmer at Hergilsey to deliver up the outlaw, the killer of Börk's brother, and receives the following reply: "My clothes are in tatters, and I won't be sorry if I wear them out no more, and I will sooner die than fail to give Gísli all the help I can and protect him from trouble." We should have to search far and wide to find a more magnanimous reply than this.

VII

As I mentioned earlier, particular rules dominated the way in which the sagas were told, and by observing these rules their authors achieve certain special results, weave a peculiar magic spell. The selecting of methods and of modes of expression is sometimes called 'style', in the wider sense of the word. All the different aspects of the form, however intricate they may be, must be in harmony. If we study the narrative method of the sagas and their formal tendencies, we are bound to notice that as a

literary *genre* they are original and clearly distinguishable from all other kinds of literature. Their form is unique, peculiar only to them, they present their picture of human life in their own particular way. What is unique need not necessarily be perfect, but the best sagas achieve some sort of perfection. There is an integral relationship between the saga-writers' attitude to life and the manner in which they represent life in their works. Both attitude and manner are original, and it is by virtue of their combination that the picture of human life presented in the sagas achieves its perfection. There are other *genres* of literature, with a different vision, different methods and forms, each of them having its own kind of virtue. But no literary *genre* is so comprehensive that it can embrace everything: there are always limitations, and limitations in vision and form can be partly responsible for the achievement of a certain perfection.

The term 'style' is not only used in this wide sense, but also in the narrow sense of 'diction'. The narrative method of the sagas enhances their artistic value, because of its uniqueness, and the same is true of the diction. In the Middle Ages three kinds of diction were distinguished: solemn, humble and medium. It is easy to fit the saga-style into this system. The saga-style is in a way a reflection of the national life, where the contrasts collaborate, as it were, where *goði* and *þingmaðr* take each other by the hand as two free partners, nobility and commons form a unity which is in fact 'medium', deriving its merits from both parties. The style is natural and refined at the same time, endowed with passion and yet restrained. It is just as if the authors of these sagas had consulted Prince Hamlet: "In the very torrent, tempest, and as I may say whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness".

One of the characteristics of this style is a clarity which is reminiscent of the mountains of Iceland on a bright day.

The air is clear, all outlines are well defined, but at the same time there is evident a sensitive feeling for nuances, within the limits dictated by the restrictions of discipline. A marvellous skill is displayed by the better authors in knowing what to say and when to say it, and when to make the reader or listener deduce things for himself. In this respect the reader is shown much trust and respect by the writer. Finally, we can truly say that here we have prose in its purity, devoid of anything appertaining to poetry, as the spoken language always is. The spoken language with its rhythm and vividness is an essential factor in the creation of this style, while the diction is condensed and purified of empty words according to the dictates of art. In this manner the diction of the sagas displays to every reader who understands their language an enchanting beauty, which is unique and cannot be recreated, being the fruits of a particular society and period, which was once and will never come again.

VIII

Once, when Árne Magnússon, the Icelandic scholar and rationalist, was defining the subject-matter of the Icelandic sagas, he said: "Farmers having a scrap". This statement is similar to those that can often be heard in club-conversation, when people amuse themselves by making things look oblique in order to see them from a new angle. The sagas, it is true, take place in a farming society and tell nothing of lords and ladies in their castles. And it is evident that if the warfare described in the Icelandic sagas is compared with warfare elsewhere then it becomes rather insignificant, and people are apt to exaggerate its importance. But it is certainly something more than 'having a scrap', because here human lives are always at stake, and the presence of death magnifies and deepens everything. It is easy to pick out descriptions of fights which are nothing but sheer barbarism — I may mention

the stories about Víga-Styr as an example — but on the whole human nature is disciplined and conforms to the ideal of honour, and it is precisely a characteristic of civilization that human conduct is disciplined by a moral code. In the sagas, revenge, which belongs in the same complex of ideas, often seems to be due to obligation rather than to innate vengefulness. Honour is the root of heroism, and honour was no more pronounced among the courtly knights than it was among these farmers. So delicate and sensitive are the stories of the old Icelandic idea of honour that they remind us of the descriptions of love in later literature.

It is not necessary to explain to the present audience that the complex of ideas that centred round the concept of honour also had its darker side in this early society. Of all this the sagas give a picture and, of course, in such a way that in one saga a certain aspect is more noticeable than in another — a picture which is comprehensive and inspired, where everything is understood from within even though it is described from without. And certainly something would be lacking in the picture of human life they present, if the current ideas of ethics were not the main strand, or indeed the vital nerve, of their presentation.

The sagas, of course, differ in quality, as is evident if they are carefully read. But in most cases we can notice, directly or indirectly, that whatever the subject-matter of a saga is, it is related with a certain ethical equipoise. The magnetic needle always points in the right direction, whatever happens; we can read between the lines the author's abhorrence of base deeds and pusillanimity and his admiration for magnanimity, nobleness, loyalty and *drengskapr*. Of all these it is perhaps the idea of *drengskapr* — fair play — which is most worthy of discussion. It is an Icelandic and Northern democratic parallel to chivalry, unassuming, strong and true — an ideal which has exerted a great influence on Icelanders of all times.

The heroism of the sagas originates in a certain conception of greatness which values certain things above life itself. But, even so, it is not in the clouds, it is in a peculiar way blended with realism. So that even here we can discern a harmony of contrasts.

IX

Earlier in this paper I called the sagas 'an essay on man'. Very few of the sagas, I think, are composed on the basis of a preconceived idea. But in the 'essay' people and events often arrange themselves in the author's vision into systems, where a single idea, or complex of ideas, prevails, as in the saga of Grettir the outlaw where the essence of the saga is summarized in the following sentence: "Happiness and accomplishments are two different things". In most cases the main ideas in the sagas have their origin in the observation of experience and, in fact, represent a kind of layman's philosophy. And because these ideas are only to a very slight extent of foreign origin, they differ from those of the Hebrew-Hellenist-Roman civilization and consequently people often fail to realize that there are thoughts of a philosophical kind in the sagas at all. It is so easy to find what is common and known everywhere that people are apt to miss what is different. And to this we may add the fact that the authors of the sagas very seldom draw any moral conclusion from their stories. The reader must himself draw the conclusion from the 'essay on man' by close observation of the work itself, and sometimes he will find himself left with a question rather than with a conclusion.

As an example of the way in which the ideas in the sagas are closely linked with experience, I shall mention the idea of *gipta*, good fortune, which is a kind of mental and physical vital force, a faculty for enjoying and succeeding in everything which falls to one's lot. And since this

idea is based on experience, it represents something more than a transient conception. Some American must undoubtedly have written on the 'psychology of success', which is a similar thing.

Before I leave this subject, I want to mention briefly one fact. In many of the sagas there is apparent a strong belief in fate. But this belief is derived from the impact made by life itself rather than from rational thought. The old Icelandic idea of fate implies influence on events, rather than on the human will and the human mind. The early Icelanders thus believed in the power of man, much in the same way as the Stoics did. Fate was often severe. It was hard to suffer sorrow, hard to have to die at a certain moment. But fate was not actively cruel. There was no Goddess of Destiny who would rejoice at the humiliations of man. Thus there prevails in this world a peculiar calm neutrality. To the early Icelanders fate could be something more than a burden, it could also be a challenge to the free mind not to give up and not to fail to accept with courage whatever falls to one's lot. This did not imply arrogance or self-deception: on the contrary, realism and a courageous acceptance of adversity are its chief characteristics. This faith in human freedom against fate made life an art, human behaviour was subject to certain aesthetic laws. This is most evident in the stories of how people accepted death. "They are fashionable now, the broad spears," said Atli, Grettir's brother, as he received the fatal wound. "Now I delayed, but you hurried," were Helgi Droplaugarson's last words. In this manner the moment of death became the most glorious moment in life, when man was exalted above his own fate, above life and death.

X

I have now tried to expound the value of the Icelandic sagas from various points of view, but this subject is so

vast that in a single lecture I can do no more than merely touch on some of the most important points. I have tried to describe the wide human range of the sagas, their presentation in their own independent way of a picture of human life and human fate, their peculiar vision and methods.

Art is diverse, and you may sometimes feel as if you were entering a new world when you go from one sphere of art to another, or even from one artist to another. It is rewarding to acquaint oneself with the various kinds of art: a wider outlook, a deeper understanding, is gained. No branch of literature is superfluous if it has reached any kind of perfection in its own class. This is like many different instruments in a mighty orchestra, where all the diversity is harmonized in a great symphony. The subject of this symphony is the 'essay on man'. It is composed on the themes of human happiness and suffering, human hopes and despair, the eternal and inextinguishable longings of the human heart. And I like to think that this symphony is played to the glory of eternity, as a holy gift, a divine offering.

PATTERN IN *NJÁLS SAGA*

By I. R. MAXWELL

IN his *Preface to Paradise Lost* C. S. Lewis says that if you want to judge anything, from a cathedral to a hencoop, the first thing is to know *what* it is. It is when confronted by a new form that we realize the truth of this half-forgotten truism. I remember, thirty or forty years ago, idly turning the pages of *Orkneyinga saga* to find out where the story began. Later, when I read a few sagas in English, I found that I had been looking for the wrong sort of story. These were different stories, with rules of their own; and, although some made complex and beautiful wholes, their form was not what I should have expected in epic or novel. My first crude error arose from not knowing what a saga was — and at what stage can one be quite sure that one has found this out? All of us must at least have observed others judging amiss because they were not looking for the excellences possible in this form and proper to it.

There is one excellence that sagas possess as a class. They all tell a story well enough to make even poor stuff tolerably lively. When I was ploughing my way through the riff-raff of *Íslendingasögur* I did find that the mind retired in time before a new tale of the young *kolbíttr* who trounces the berserk and breaks the spine of the king's negro wrestler. And yet, when the berserk actually swaggered up to the earl's high-seat — although, like Tiresias, I had foresuffered all — I always stayed to see what happened. And the reason was obvious. The sagas, like our ballads, have the art of casting their story into scenes presented with dramatic economy. This is how they galvanize even the stalest trollogy into some semblance of entertainment; this is how they give life to

the actions of men. And this they can all do. It is part of their traditional stock-in-trade.

Not so with their handling of the whole. They have their triumphs of form — the enigmatic circle of *Auðunar þáttir*, the imperturbable line of *Hrafnkels saga*, to take two famous small examples — and there are enough examples, great and small, to show what thirteenth-century writers could do, even if we had not guessed it from the intelligence shown in their work. Such excellence, of course, is always rare, yet one could imagine a northern Aristotle deducing from the most successful sagas the principles that should govern the genre. Or could one? He would have faced one perhaps insuperable difficulty. The sagas were not free to follow a purely artistic line of development. They were conceived as history, and their nature is governed by this fact.

Let there be no misunderstanding. I do not even ask how authentic their history is; I do not deny that it is history of a most personal kind; I am happy to indulge Nordal by calling the sagas historical novels in order to emphasise their considerable measure of imaginative freedom and put the home-grown fundamentalists in their place. But for anyone who tries to judge the sagas as literary narratives the obvious thing is that they were conceived and told as though they were histories, records of fact as well as artistic creations; it is as histories that they have been accepted; and one may add that their authors, unlike many historical novelists, are generally ready to admit gaps in the record and conflicts in tradition, and to relate their own work to a larger body of genealogical and historical belief. It is in the *form* of history that they choose to tell their more substantial stories.

This is one secret of their strength. In a novel we have generally an underlying awareness of the author's power to do what he will with his own creatures, or perhaps of his creatures' power to make their lives an

embodiment of their own inner being; and in either case the creation is superior to the event. But in a saga events move under their own power, seemingly independent of the author's will or the reader's pleasure or any intrusive demands of art or morals or any passionate claims of the dramatis personæ, with the casual inevitability of life itself. Again, the omniscient novelist has the key to the whole truth, and to withhold it is the calculated reticence of art; but the saga's silence may be the silence of history. Hence, in the sagas, as in life, persons are real in the impact of their acts and passions, often enigmatic in what lies behind; so that to explore the feelings of Kjartan for Guðrún in the light of the available evidence is like an enquiry about real people rather than characters in fiction, and curiously enough the lifelikeness of the feelings springs partly from our uncertainty about them. The saga canvas, too, is historical, giving one habitually the sense of a society and a time-span extending beyond the main events and characters, so that at their best these gain in dignity from their subordination to the larger movement of life. Unlike the romances, which characteristically seek intensity by focussing on individual passion, the sagas seem unwilling even to narrow their theme to what we should think a manageable and shapely story. In their own way they are extremely concise and selective, but they seldom select a plot that Aristotle would have approved.

Hence there are many partial failures. In *Ljósvetninga saga*, for example, the author seems to have had in mind a tale of the men of Ljósavatn, their dealings with powerful neighbours, the worth and destiny of some of their leaders — and his reward is a compliment from W. P. Ker that the character of Guðmundr ríki (their chief enemy) stands out well in "his own saga"! Of course it should have been Guðmund's saga — just as *Vatzdæla* should no doubt have belonged to Ingimundr gamli — and in a sense it is, but only by accident and in part. A plot

dictated by an interest in the facts is cracked clean across by the emergence, in the first half, of a powerful character and a situation well worth shaping into a whole. This is where an author with a classical sense of form would have looked for his story.

But suppose that, instead of isolating a tractable situation, an author were to open his arms wide, take in a century or so of time and a host of persons and passions, and somehow contrive to fashion these into one great edifice? That would be something worth seeing! One would be first moved to admiration, then curious to account for the miracle. And in the general effect of the whole there would be something to distinguish it from art not tied to facts. The march of events, seeming to be given in history, would be unlike the moulded plot that implies a human director. However patent the author's skill in selection and arrangement, passionate men would act and destiny decree and conflicts seek their issue in a certain massive independence of their interpreter. All this would appear in part the work of nature as well as art, perhaps with some marks of chance and unpruned profusion in it. Something like this may happen at times in the sagas.

Of the five *Íslendingasögur* that Vigfússon classifies as "major", *Eyrbyggja* does not pretend to this unity, and *Grettis saga* (even if what Ker calls its "imbecile continuation" were removed) would not, I think, attain it. But each of the others triumphs in its own measure over formidable obstacles. *Egils saga* has the given continuity of biography, yet it begins long before the hero's birth, expatiates more freely than *Grettla*, and divides into a first half of episodic adventure and a second of comparative calm. *Laxdæla saga* covers nearly a century and a half, and the main situation does not begin to emerge until a third of the story is told. *Njáls saga*, though its main actions fall within forty years, spreads its tentacles over all Iceland, is peculiarly

multiplex in themes, and so lavish with its dramatis personæ that not one of the original characters is left on the stage at the end. Yet each of these sagas — allowing perhaps for some dispensable things, as one should be ready to do with great and rich books — gives an impression of high imaginative unity. Certainly this is what one feels in putting the book down. Guðrún's answer to her son's question must (as Ker says) be read in relation to earlier lights on her character, but to more than that: it leaves one contemplating a whole in which the history of the settlement and the death of its great founder are relevant and enriching elements. As for *Egla* — the first saga I read in the original — I remember with what growing excitement I spelt my way through the second-last page, for of course the *last* few words are always as it were postultimate, not so much ending the story as resuming the course of life. The incident was stale enough. Long after Egil's death bones were dug up in the churchyard, and among them a skull, portentously heavy, and corrugated! The parson struck it one-handed with the hammer of an axe, and where the blow fell the skull whitened, but it did not break; and from this you may know that, when hide and hair went with it, it had not much to fear from the blows of common men. It was not the skull that enthralled me, but the dawning certainty that the author knew what he was doing with it. That terrible relic, coming up out of the earth in a Christian and comparatively civilized countryside, gathered into itself all that the saga had been saying about the grim world before the change of faith, and its power was in proportion to its commonplace-ness.

In the close of *Njála* unity is confirmed with deeper power. The reconciliation of Flosi and Kári is the end to which all that long struggle has been making, the solution of some unformulated problem; and when the sea takes Flosi we are left in awe, as though the embers

of the fire had been quenched at last. When we look back over the saga it seems massive and complete — even Vigfússon, who thought it a loose compilation, perceives a grand moral unity in it — and when we analyze it we find on every page evidence of precise shaping and subtle linking, so that its planned crescendos and calculated echoes and pointed crises might be even too formal if the work were not mighty enough to justify such supports. There is indeed something almost geometrical about much of it, from which some readers may turn with relief to the effortless mastery of *Egils saga* or the simpler line of *Laxdæla*. Einar Ól. Sveinsson quotes with approval the verdict of the Swedish writer A. U. Bååth: Such is this author's command of his materials that he may be said to have had the last line in mind when he wrote the first.¹

Why then does this impression of unity evaporate as soon as critics, even Bååth with his brief for the defence, examine it? Einar Ól. Sveinsson, in his monumental edition, plants himself so massively on both sides of the critical fence that simple readers may well feel bewildered. On the one hand he gives the highest general praise to the saga's architecture; on the other, he does not (in this preface) trace any real narrative unity, and he admits flaws considerable enough to give one pause. The preface to the Bayerschmidt-Hollander translation (1955) drastically summarizes some of these views, and the reader is reminded that "our more stringent conception of the unity of action and of perspective was foreign to the Middle Ages" — so we are to make allowances for this author! But really, he has only himself to blame, for the first thing the saga does on examination is to fall apart. No wonder that it was once thought a compilation, or that summarizers give us a list of headings, not a narrative argument.

¹ *Studier öfver Kompositionen i några isländska Ättsagor* (1885); cf. e.g. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Á Njálsbúð* (1943), 45.

A prologue of eighteen chapters leads into the first main story: how the hero Gunnarr and the counsellor Njáll maintain their friendship despite a feud between their households, and how Gunnarr falls at last to a confederacy of enemies. (All this is about three-fourths the length of the remainder and fills 81 out of 159 chapters.) The second story (commonly divided into two) is of the feuds that lead to the burning of Njáll, the consequent conflict, and final reconciliation. In this part there are two substantial sections that were once thought interpolations and whose relevance is still in question: the Conversion of Iceland in 1000, and Brian's Battle (Clontarf) in 1014.

It seems, first, that here are two stories, not one; and secondly, that the author lets his story sleep while he expatiates in history. He has indeed been charged with a "hunger for matter", an eye bigger than his stomach; and Einar Ól. Sveinsson sets out the four main counts in this charge and admits a partial agreement with them.² They include the Conversion and Brian's Battle, along with two others that I will glance at now.

One is the excessive and sometimes repetitive use of genealogies, partly justified by their ceremonial effect in reading. This surprised me. The genealogies are certainly lavish, but I had not felt them as clogs and had found them most useful in underlining new characters, especially when these are brought in a little before they begin to take an active part. This author admittedly excels in the art of introducing characters, and my untutored impression had been that he distributed the limelight (in all its forms) with almost mathematical precision. How well the relative importance and position in the story of Gizurr and Geirr (not Geirr and Gizurr, as in *Landnáma* and *Eyrbyggja*) is indicated in chapter 46; how fully the imposing ancestors of Guðmundr ríki and Snorri goði justify their appearance in chapters 113 and 114! Here, at the dramatic suit for Höskuldr

² *Á Njálsbúð*, 37-8.

Hvítanessgoði, we are to feel all Iceland involved. The South and East are already in our minds; now two chiefs from North and South are brought in to a roll of drums, and each is seen in relation to the whole country. Guðmundr (whose introduction is the most resplendent in the saga) is the ancestor of the Sturlungs and the Oddaverjar, the Hvammverjar and the Fljótamenn, indeed of all the most outstanding Icelanders; Snorri is the wisest of all Icelanders, of those that had not second sight. This emphasis is calculated and meaningful, and the author's practice is regular enough for the reader to draw firm inferences from it. If it needs a scholar to pick holes, they must surely be very little ones.

Then there are the legal technicalities, which are not always right, and which Einar Ólafur admits to be excessive. Perhaps my young days at the bar disable my judgment, but again my impression is different. How could anyone deny (and I am afraid Bååth does) the superbly dramatic use of legal formulæ in the last great suit, where the dry battle of forms reins in the passions of men, obscures the merits, and leads to the battle of arms? (This author knows what he is doing: Eyjólf's final objection is stated in the curtest summary.) If we are to have this scene, we must also have a graduated course of legal instruction earlier in the saga; and surely we must admire the judgment with which this material is gradually fed into a long succession of suits, partly for mounting tension, and partly (I think) because the concept of legal justice is one strand in the pattern of ideas. Neither of these charges is of much importance in itself, and I am not concerned to measure the quantity of genealogical or procedural detail that the average reader can tolerate. Only, I will not quite let these minor charges go by default, for each, on examination, bears out one's impression of this man as an organizer not at all likely to make crude mistakes.

I return now to the more important defects alleged:

the apparent break between Parts I and II, and the apparent digression of the Conversion. These will be enough, with no more than a glance at Brian's Battle, for our enquiry. But I wonder if you will agree with me that, at every moment of such an enquiry, there is one principle that it is quite imperative to remember?

Since I want it remembered, I shall label it "the principle of the integrity of episodes". Thus: in the opening of this saga Hrút's marriage fails, with far-reaching consequences, because of a spell laid on him by Queen Gunnhildr in Norway. A novelist would feel no need to send Hrútr to Norway; the spell could have been brought in by reference and might even have been more effective in the background. But this is not saga practice. Sagas prefer to deal with whole episodes, not pieces or aspects or reflections of them. If the spell laid on Hrútr is of vital importance, as it is, then we shall be told about the inheritance that called him from Iceland, about Gunnhild's patronage and regal impressment of him as her lover, about his place in the king's guard, his voyage and sea-battle, and the like. The account will be short, but round and whole. Einar Ólafur is a little apologetic about Hrút's adventures³ — exciting no doubt to the men of that time — but they are there, not only to build up Hrút's character and answer to later excursions, but also because the completeness of the episode demands them. Hence every saga is likely to contain elements that a novelist might reject as irrelevant; we may expect to find that each part, though it touches some main action, is not fully absorbed in it. In this resides the saga's peculiar power. Each part must seem to exist and be interesting in its own right, not simply as a term in some larger argument; and to say, for example, that the story of Víga-Hrapp is a partial digression, is surely a critical error. It is largely because they avoid the fallacy of the "well made" story that the sagas, for all their concise

³ *Brennu-Njáls Saga* (*Íslensk Fornrit* XII, 1954), Formáli, cxxvi.

and selective habit of narrative, are in broad effect as solid as life itself and free from the oppression of a purpose that saps each moment's independent reality. To see this seems to me a necessary first step towards any intelligent criticism of a great saga's organization.

If we grant this principle of the integrity of episodes with its corollary of their partial independence of the main theme, we must also grant the special need of an art to bring out the main structure. Dreams and the like of course serve this purpose, but we have heard a great deal about them and I confess a sneaking sympathy with Skarpheðin's "*Lítt rekju vér drauma til flestra hluta.*" Is there not also a rhetoric of narrative by which, without explicit comment, the author may keep his readers on the track?

The eighteen-chapter prologue illustrates this well. It is the story of two women: of Hrút's ex-wife Unnr, who has lost her dowry and needs a champion to get it back, and of Hrút's niece Hallgerðr, who has been the death of two husbands and is ready for a third. Chapter 19 begins, "There was a man called Gunnarr." He is to be Unn's champion and Hallgerð's husband; and from this point the saga tells, first how he got back Unn's money, then how he married Hallgerðr. Of course these chapters are rich in further incidents and implications, and of course Hrútr plays an important part and in certain ways foreshadows Gunnarr; but we know that this is the bold outline the author intended, for he has gone out of his way to make it clear. Especially in the first and last chapters.

The first may be summarized as follows: "There was a great lawyer who had a daughter, the best match in the south country. Now the story turns to the west. There, too, a magnate with a famous brother had a daughter; she was beautiful, but her uncle Hrútr saw thief's eyes in her." The two parallel groups with an unusual break between, the woman emerging from each, the prophecy about the

second making one note the silence as to the first -- surely this arrangement is significant? Yet I have never seen it pointed out, and much puzzled discussion of these chapters and of the propriety of "Nú víkr sögunni vestr" might have been saved if it had been. Chapter 18 drives the nail home. We have just finished the story of Hallgerðr and might have forgotten the earlier one of Unnr. The author therefore inserts here (not at the end of Unn's story) a chapter of less than half a dozen lines to say that after her father's death she wasted her property and was left in need and unmarried. Einar Ólafur treats chapter 18 as the beginning of the Unnr-Gunnarr story, but this begins in chapter 21 (with a reference to the information given in 18). All the prologue *prepares* for Gunnarr, but his story cannot begin until he has been introduced. The function of chapter 18 is to group the two women together at the end, as at the beginning: they are the two strands to be taken up in Gunnar's story.

If, in this small instance, one can demonstrate the author's structural intention, it may be possible to do so elsewhere, though the growing complexity of the saga is likely to make the task more difficult and the conclusions more debatable.

I turn, then, to the break between Parts I and II. In Part I Gunnarr is the leading figure; Njáll is his constant counsellor and helper, and his sons perform one momentous action and help to avenge Gunnarr. Still, Gunnarr is the protagonist, and with his death we seem to begin a new story leading circuitously to the burning. This is of course not the fact, and Einar Ólafur has summarised the essential connexions.⁴ But for the moment I shall ignore this, partly because I want to reach my own conclusions in my own way, and partly because it is instructive to see how often the pattern has been missed. Even Bååth, who holds a brief for the unity of the saga, finds that, despite many connecting filaments, it comes

⁴ Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Um Njálu* (1933), 35, 62-3, 234-5.

apart here, and the gap is merely screened. W. P. Ker justifies Part I as giving that deep impression of Njál's wisdom and Bergþóra's dignity without which Part II would lose its pith⁵ — but really! A competent author does not need 81 chapters (just over half the total number in the longest of the *Íslendingasögur*) to give such impressions; it is part of his competence to give them within the limits of the chosen action. E. V. Gordon says that the only real connexion between the two parts is the personality of Njáll⁶ — a good reason for not closing the book, but no reason for admiring its architecture.

Reading on, we note that the prologue really extends to chapter 34. Chapters 19-34 are complementary to the first eighteen; they tell how Gunnarr recovers Unn's dowry and marries Hallgerðr, and incidentally introduce in careful juxtaposition Valgarðr inn grái with his son Mörðr (the deadliest enemies of Njál's house) and Ásgrímr Elliðagrímsson (its steadfast stay). But all these things are preliminaries, pointing in complex ways to later events but as yet initiating no main conflict. We know from Njál's words that Hallgerðr is the root of evil to come, but we do not yet guess what it will be.

Then two memorable chapters (34, 35) are placed together, one ending the preliminaries, the other beginning a conflict traceable to the last page.

Chapter 34 is Gunnar's wedding. It begins, "There was a man called Þráinn, he was the son of Sigfúss"; he and his six brothers were kinsmen of Gunnarr and great champions. The wedding is thronged. Along with the bride, Hallgerðr, is her father Höskuldr, her uncle Hrútr, her brothers, and her fourteen-year-old daughter Þorgerðr, a beauty like her mother. Gunnarr sits in the middle of one bench. On one hand are Þráinn Sigfússon and his brothers with Valgarðr and his son Mörðr, who must have

⁵ *Epic and Romance* (1922), 190-91.

⁶ *Introduction to Old Norse* (1927), 70.

been brought from his cradle to brood over this wedding. On the other are Njáll with his sons, and the sons of Þórir of Holt with their father. The affiliations of Valgarð's brother Úlfr and his son Rúnólfr (with Þráinn) and Hafr inn spaki and Ingjaldr of Keldur (with Njáll) are not so clear; but the main impression is difficult to avoid. Gunnarr is sitting between the house of Njáll and its inveterate enemies to be. We are told that it is not said just how men sat on the bench with Höskuldr and Hrútr; but this author seems fully informed about what it suits him to know. He wishes, I think, to leave this other bench in shadow.

Then a dramatic thing happens. Þráinn has been staring at young Þorgerðr. His wife rebukes him in two stinging lines; he rises in rage, takes witness that he divorces her, and has her sent away. He then asks for Þorgerð's hand, and marries her — after Njáll (on request from Gunnarr) has briefly testified to his standing and accomplishments rather than his character. (This passage might be reread by those who blame Njáll for what follows.) Immediately after this (chapter 35) comes another feast with another dramatic incident, the quarrel between Bergþóra and Hallgerðr that begins the main action. Surely all this is plain enough? We are to mark the man who steals the limelight at Gunnar's wedding; indeed, the wedding is described for him. We note that he is at once closely connected with Hallgerðr, who will soon call on him to show himself a real son-in-law (chapter 41), and our unfavourable first impression of his character makes it natural to suspect that he may become her ally. Their actions at the two feasts — he sending his wife away, she forcing her husband to take her home — are significantly alike. These chapters have been patterned to make us keep our eye on Þráinn and associate him with Hallgerðr (the known cause of evil) as well as with his kinsman Gunnarr.

Þráin's next appearance is decisive. Hallgerðr

persuades him, along with Gunnar's kinsman Sigmundr and a Swede (Skjöldr), to waylay Þórðr Leysingjason, the foster-father of Njál's sons. Sigmundr and Skjöldr are enough for the job, and Þráinn sits by while Þórðr is killed; but he was "nær staddr", as Njáll tells his sons, and this will not be forgotten. Blood has been shed on both sides before now and the wrong made good between the two friends by peaceful settlement. But the death of Þórðr is another matter: now, it seems, Njál's dangerous sons must take personal vengeance. Njáll settles at once with Gunnarr, saying that his sons will respect the peace once made. But matters do not rest here. Sigmundr, to please Hallgerðr, lampoons Njáll and his sons, and the verses are repeated at Bergþórshvoll. Bergþóra eggs on her sons, who go out by night and kill Sigmundr and Skjöldr in the early morning. At these killings Höskuldr Njálsson sits by, just as Þráinn had done. It seems, indeed Njáll asserts, that now a money settlement is out of the question; but Gunnarr asks for no compensation, and at last Njáll himself offers to pay it. This is the last incident in this phase of the story, and we are told (chapter 45) that the settlement was well kept ever after. At this point four new characters are introduced and one realizes that something new is to begin.

The incident seems to be closed, but its force is not spent. It is the killing of Þórðr that divides the sons of Sigfúss and of Njáll, and later on this is to be the fundamental division. It is the sons of Sigfúss who make the core of the opposition to Njál's sons, and they and their hangers-on form a party that one soon comes to recognize familiarly. This, therefore, is the essential connexion between Parts I and II. The malice of Mörðr (operating in parallel ways in both parts) and the counsels of Njáll (which fight a losing battle with fate up to the burning) are the other two main strands that Einar Ólafur points to; but neither of these belongs to the same order of causation as Hallgerð's hate for Bergþóra

and her family. Mörðr takes advantage of openings created by others, Njáll seeks a way out of difficulties as they arise or are foreseen; but Hallgerðr creates the situation to which the others contribute, makes and fosters division, and may be regarded as the first and continuing impulse behind the main sequence of events.

There are now two obvious questions to be asked. The first is, whether this connexion is made clear enough; for the intention of a book should be clear to intelligent readers as well as to its specialist editor, and the fact that so many readers have missed it is disquieting. The second question is, whether the main stream of acts and motives, once understood, has the sort of continuity and significance that artistic unity requires.

It is at least certain that the author has taken pains to make his readers see the essential connexion between the feud initiated by Hallgerðr and the more complex feuds that lead to the burning. It is through Þráinn and his clan that Hallgerð's spite can become politically powerful after she has failed to make Gunnarr her instrument, and we have seen how closely and memorably the two are linked at the commencement of the main action. The act that commits Þráinn to Hallgerðr — his part in the killing of Þórðr — is then given peculiar emphasis. When the peaceful Þórðr kills his man, Njáll (chapter 40) has the story told him three times, and Þórð's death is the first to be preceded by an actual vision — two trifles that point to the author's intention. But of course it is Þórð's magnanimity, his connexion with Skarpheðinn (the last word in his mouth), the affection of Njál's sons, the gentle Njál's triumph over the vengeance for him, the greater scale and intensity of the episode, that make it stand out. Þráin's comment as onlooker — "This is a bad business, and Njál's sons won't like it when they hear of it" — is ominous enough at a first reading; and for anyone who knows the saga this event will take its place in a much larger pattern. For example, Þráinn is asked

to sit by at the killing of Þórðr, as Höskuldr Njálsson is at the killing of Sigmundr and Skjöldr; the scenes are so similar that one cannot help linking them, and when a long-delayed fate overtakes the two who were “*nær staddir*” the parallel becomes significant. Again, one of the tensest small scenes in the whole saga is the one where Bergþóra eggs on her sons, and Njáll, awakened by the ring of an axe, goes out to ask Skarpheðinn where they are going (chapter 44). In chapter 92, when the brothers go out to kill Þráinn, the axe rings again on the panel, the same question is asked and the same answer given; father and son recall the earlier scene, and Skarpheðin’s curt words to Kári remind us that Þórðr Leysingjason is not forgotten. (Skarpheðin’s grateful remembrance in chapter 78 of Gunnar’s forbearance after the vengeance for Þórðr is an earlier reminder.) The climax to the first phase of Part I — the only incident in which Njál’s sons play a full part — is therefore strikingly emphasised and clearly connected with its sequel in Part II. If we follow the author’s methods, we should have no difficulty in following his story.

Nor will anyone doubt that the motives involved are powerful enough for their work in a story of such majestic proportions. It is true that this cause of quarrel sleeps until Gunnar’s death; yet the destruction of Gunnarr is a move which in this long game must precede the destruction of Njáll, and it is so much the author’s practice to revive sleeping causes that this is felt to be a part of his comment on life. Nor are events the less impressive or significant because they are long in coming to birth. When the time comes, the sequel is firmly controlled. The sons of Sigfúss and of Njáll leave Iceland in the same summer not long before Gunnar’s death, so that, as Aristotle prescribed, the end of an episode will not seem to be the end of the story. At first their movements are independent, but Víga-Hrappr brings them into accidental collision, and Grím’s words in chapter 88 (“I

don't know if Þráinn will make us any good return"), remind us of the underlying ill feeling. In Iceland a point of surly pride grows to a serious difference; and in chapter 91, when the open clash comes, it is Hallgerðr who first steps in to fan the flame and later drags up Sigmund's scurrilous taunts, so that her part in this deep-seated enmity is again impressed on our imagination. The death of Þráinn confirms the division of parties which Mörðr now uses for his advantage, and so leads relentlessly though indirectly to the burning. I find this fully coherent and imaginatively effective. Events move at first as though uncertain of their direction and issue, yet the outlines are gradually seen to be bold and the impulsion steady. It is as though two groping tentacles reached out from the early part of the saga, touched, and slowly intertwined.

But it is partly by its significance that a major theme justifies its place. The evil of Hallgerðr (with Þráinn as its transmitter) and the evil of Valgarðr and Mörðr both go back to the prologue, for Mörðr is Unn's son by the marriage that Gunnar's recovery of her money enables her to make; and they operate each in its distinctive order and fashion in each part of the saga, Mörðr stepping in to exploit a dangerous situation created by others. But there is this essential difference between the two. Gunnarr is not responsible for Mörðr's birth or nature as he is responsible for his own match with Hallgerðr; and Mörðr himself is a somewhat uninteresting character whom the author at once plainly labels a villain (as he labels Skammkell a rascal) and sends about his nefarious business with not much apparent interest in anything but its results. Mörðr is treated primarily as an instrument; his vices are such as to cut him off from other men, and his acts are in the nature of intrusions on the more normal human conflict. Perhaps any other conscienceless knave would have served the purpose. But the bosom evil that spreads from Hallgerðr is of quite another nature, and it

derives its structural significance from a deep inner irony that is foreshadowed when Gunnarr sits in friendship between Njáll and Þráinn at his wedding. As Hallgerðr is Gunnar's wife, so Þráinn (always seen in relation to the family at Hlíðarendi) is Gunnar's kinsman and backer, who rides with him when there is trouble with Otkell, supports him (along with his own brothers and Njál's sons) in his suits, and is mentioned to represent the friends who were abroad at the time of his death. After Gunnar's death it is the sons of Sigfúss who come to Njáll to seek means of vengeance (chapter 78). While abroad, Þráinn is repeatedly identified (chapter 82) with Gunnarr as a kind of smaller copy, taking his kinsman's place at Hlaðir and living in the glow of his reputation with Earl Hákon. This is, I think, something more than a means of bridging a gap in the story; we are meant to feel the partial identification of Þráinn with Gunnarr, yet we also know that from the first Þráinn has been under Hallgerð's thumb and is perhaps more of her kind. It is to him that she turns after Gunnar's death, bringing with her Gunnar's bad son, Grani. The two sons are very firmly and summarily distinguished (chapters 59, 75), and it is surely significant that the good one, Högni, is declared out of the saga as soon as he has avenged his father, although when Gunnarr commended him to Njáll we expected to hear more of him and although he is in fact mentioned later. But he is pushed into the background, whereas Grani (whom Skarpheðinn spares for Högni's sake in chapter 92) remains very firmly in the saga along with the mother he takes after and the sons of Sigfúss, and seems to cherish an even deeper hate than others for Njál's sons (chapter 117). This is the irony, that what is left of the house of one friend breeds the destruction of the other; it is from Gunnar's hearth that the fire at Bergþórshvoll is kindled. Hallgerð's enmity, to which the shallow Þráinn is soon committed, gives rise to a conflict which, though checked for a time while Gunnarr

lives, is coterminous with the saga. To call it the saga's backbone would be too simple a metaphor. A seemingly small cause, the grudge of a socially slighted woman, is transmitted and transformed and combined in a complex pattern of causes until it has at last attained its end and disrupted a whole society in the process. It is a process that one can follow with unfaltering interest and contemplate with a sense of completeness.

But, however sound in the spine, the narrative may still be marred by protruberances such as the Conversion and Brian's Battle, and if this were so our general estimate of the saga would have to be slightly modified and our mode of interpreting it perhaps considerably altered. Einar Ól. Sveinsson says that the Conversion is the one section that seems loose in reading, mainly because of a huddle of unorganized circumstances; that the author was probably using a written source without adapting it much; but the important consequences of the Conversion may have turned the scale and decided him to give a full account of it.⁷ Ordinary readers will agree that this account is in part too much a summary of news-items;

⁷ See most recently his *Brennu-Njáls Saga*, Formáli, xliii-xlv. No doubt the author used a written source, but in the evidence for this there are one or two suggestions of careless transcription that may perhaps be questioned. Gizurr and Hjalti are said to have landed "á Eyrum" (near Stokkseyri), and it is suggested that this may be a mistranscription of "á Eyjum" (Vestmannaeyjar). This is possible; yet it would seem strange to maroon them on Vestmannaeyjar when nothing is said of their doings there, and there was no reason to land them east of Eyrar if the trouble with Rúnólfr Úlfsson's thingmen was not to be mentioned — we do not know enough, I suggest, to draw any inference here. It is suggested that the reference to Glúmr "who went to the burning with Flosi" is a gauche anticipation likely to be due to thoughtless copying. But is not this detail relevant in the saga rather than in the source, and is not the earlier reference (chap. 96) to Kolr Þorsteinsson "whom Kári kills in Wales" an anticipation of exactly the same kind? In particular, I should suggest a doubt as to the carelessness imputed in note 5, p. 255, of the edition. When we are told that Þangbrandr came out "that same autumn", the editor thinks it possible that the phrase refers to some incident mentioned in the source but dropped in the saga. The obvious reference is to the incident just mentioned, the receipt in Iceland of news that Norway had changed its king and faith. This interpretation is not suggested, presumably because Þangbrandr seems in fact to have come out a year later. But it is probably true that the news and the first missionary did arrive in the same year. The first missionary was the undistinguished Stefnir (mentioned in *Kristni saga* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, but not in *Íslendingabók*, *Heimskringla*, or any of the *Íslendinga sögur*), and it would be an easy error to telescope him and Þangbrandr. The sense of the text seems so clear that I cannot help leaning to this explanation.

yet if we can trace something of the shaping mind in it our findings may perhaps affect our final judgment.

The account falls into two linked parts: Þangbrand's mission (997-9?) and the acceptance of Christianity at the Alþingi (1000). Þangbrand's journeys, his conversions, his troubles with warlocks and other conservatives, make necessarily scrappy reading; yet all this gives a good picture of the feeling in the country and the attitudes of saga characters. The rest of the story is well told in summary style. The whole historical episode was to be deeply influential in the saga, but it is given only its natural prominence, without elaboration or dramatic heightening. Nor is there any reason to think that the author was here "hungry for matter". He must, for example, have known the highly "sögulegt" story of the enmity between two prominent persons in his own saga, the heathen Rúnólfr Úlfsson and the Christian leader Hjalti Skeggjason. This is mentioned in *Landnáma*, which he seems not to have known, and (with a memorable little scene) in *Laxdæla* (chapter 41), which he knew well; it is elaborated in the accounts in *Kristni saga* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. Our author knew it, then, from *Laxdæla* and would have been reminded of it in any fairly full account that he happened to be using. Yet, though he mentions Hjalti's conviction for blasphemy, he does not even tell us that Rúnólfr was his implacable prosecutor.

In some more positive ways one can trace his moulding of the materials. Þangbrand's mission is heralded by Njál's yearning for the new faith and his brooding apart, so that our first impression is inward to the saga. As the mission proceeds we learn of Njál's heartfelt acceptance, of the bitter hostility of Valgarðr and Mörðr, of Flosi's characteristically unprecipitate agreement to be prime-signed, and the like. Þangbrand's last convert, the wise Gestr Oddleifsson, is used to express an idea important in the saga — the need for the concurrence of the chiefs and

the sanction of law — and these words, not found elsewhere, are no doubt the author's invention. But what strikes one is that the narrative has been shaped to give special prominence to one man, Síðu-Hallr. He is the first man Þangbrandr meets, and he comes forward with a generous offer to take the boycotted missionary under his protection. (In *Kristni saga* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* it is Þangbrandr who asks for protection and backs his request with the king's bidding.) Hallr, as in other accounts, accompanies Þangbrandr on his journey west to the Alþingi, but *Njála* is careful to keep him in our minds by noting his kinsmen among the converts. Hallr was of course a leading figure in the Conversion — the man whom the Christians chose as their law-speaker and whose good heart and head may well have saved the day — and this is naturally brought out in the saga. But it adds (what is inconsistent with *Kristni saga* in *Hauksbók* and uncorroborated elsewhere) that Þangbrandr returned to Hallr before sailing to Norway. Clearly, everything has been done to make Hallr the frame as well as the centre of this episode — and not simply because the author was an easterner and well informed about the local magnates. Hall's prominence is, as we shall see, proportioned to his function in the saga as a whole.

The Conversion is woven in with a skill to which, I think, full justice has not been done. It comes after the establishment of the Fifth Court — an historical error that was once thought evidence of interpolation. This view has now been discarded and we may take the text as it stands. The Conversion is introduced for compelling reasons at a moment of pause. The feud between the sons of Njáll and of Sigfúss appears to have run its course; it has flared up again when Lýtingr (Þráin's brother-in-law) makes it a pretext for killing Njál's illegitimate son, but vengeance is swiftly taken on Lýting's brothers and a settlement made through the intervention of Höskuldr Hvítanessgoði, who, as Þráin's son and Njál's fosterling,

stands between the parties in a position of peculiar delicacy and danger. At this point the Conversion is introduced — just before the rapid and terrible development of events when Mörðr, who has taken no part since the Gunnarr story, steps in to renew the feud by inducing Njál's sons to kill Höskuldr Þráinnsson. This is clearly the right, indeed the only place for it, and I imagine that the author deliberately juggled with history in order to give it that place.

But before entering upon Mörð's plot he inserts a chapter that no one seems willing to defend — the story of Ámundi the Blind, who miraculously received his sight for a moment to take vengeance on Lýtingr, his father's slayer. This is the first Christian miracle, and it would be easy to cite evidence that it would have looked less odd to thirteenth-century readers than it does to most of us. It comes in naturally as a postscript to the Conversion, but critics have wondered why it should come in at all.

The author was here faced with a problem, at first glance insoluble. He had done with one story, of Þráinn's fall and its aftermath; he was to begin another, of Mörð's plot and the revival of old enmities. As so often in this saga, one action was to sink into quietness, another connected action to stir and gather power. A meaningful pause was required — not a luncheon-break. Yet precisely at this point it was necessary to introduce six chapters on the conversion of Iceland! How insert this wedge without splitting the narrative? The problem is solved with some ingenuity. An incident is introduced which seems a postscript to the Conversion but is in fact the end of the preceding story (the feud after Þráinn). Our sympathies are with Ámundi, whose act is one of natural justice and sanctioned by God; yet in the form of the narrative he is the counterpart of the repulsive Lýtingr, for both slayer and slain have advanced claims of dubious legal validity and contrary to legal settlements.

The symmetry of poetic justice links Lýting's killing of Njál's son with Ámundi's vengeance on Lýtingr, and the Conversion is firmly enclosed between them. A few words from Njáll make us feel the need of something more than settlements to limit the consequences of violence — a reflection intimate to the saga's thought, looking to the past yet foreboding the future. How effective this is each reader must judge for himself. I feel fairly sure that the author's conscious or intuitive intention was to achieve the sort of significant transition he desired, and that this transition is felt by most readers, although analytical critics have not seen how it was managed. "Men rode home from the assembly," chapter 106 ends, "and now things remain long quiet." We have heard this before. The main narrative has renewed its course and we await what is to come.

"Valgarðr the Gray came out; he was then heathen" — so chapter 107 opens. Valgarðr, the husband of Unnr and father of Mörðr, never lifts his hand in the saga and spends much of his time abroad; but his rare appearances are worth watching. He has already been marked, as machiavellian, and firmly associated with Mörð's envy and with the pagan faith. It cannot be an accident that his paganism is emphasised just after the Conversion and just before his malice hatches out. He appears in this chapter as Mörð's prompter (cf. chapter 65), lays down a devilish plot for him, refuses his request to take the faith (a request designed to indicate the father's recalcitrancy rather than the son's piety or prudence), breaks crosses and holy tokens, and dies in an odour of brimstone, his last act being to plan Njál's destruction. This is a pretty tall order for one short chapter! One might call it crude, but no one will deny that it is plain. This pagan evil is being deliberately set against the new light.

This is surely a hint that the six-chapter foundation has not been laid for nothing. True, the author's

moulding is unobtrusive and betrays no obvious ulterior purpose, so that the integrity of the historical episode is preserved; yet its consequences are admittedly great, and my own impression as a reader had been (like Bååth's) that it was central to the saga and pervaded its thought. But how?

The next great incident is the killing of Höskuldr Þráinsson, Njál's fosterson, at the hands of Njál's sons and by Mörð's instigation, the first step being taken at Valgarð's funeral feast. In Höskuldr there is a distinctively Christian elevation, easily distinguishable (for example) from the pagan generosity of spirit shown in Ingimundr Þorsteinsson of *Vatzdæla saga*; his death (as clearly as that of Earl Magnús of Orkney) is a Christian sacrifice — all the more unmistakable because his widow, Hildigunnr, is so darkly bent on the ancient debt of vengeance that he himself has put away. Njáll has adopted him to confirm the peace with Þráin's kinsmen, and his relation to Njáll is significant. Before adopting him (chapter 94), Njáll asks the necessary but painful question, "Do you know how your father met his death?" Yes, the boy knows well Skarpheðinn killed him, but there is no need to bring that up now that a fair settlement has been made. "It is answered better than I asked," says Njáll, as if rebuked, "and you will be a good man." The devotion of the two is a sign of their spiritual kinship and one of the ways in which Njal's deepening piety can be shown in dramatic terms. His saintly firmness at the burning makes his death, like Höskuld's, a sacrifice, of which the brightness of his body after death is a token to thirteenth-century readers.

This strand of saintliness may be contrasted both with the wickedness of Mörðr and with the tragic dilemma of Flosi, pinned as fast between opposed duties as Skarpheðinn between the gable and the fallen roof. The weight of Flosi's burden may be suggested by that provision in the Gulapíng law (as surviving in Christian

Norway about the twelfth century) that no man shall thrice seek compensation for injuries without taking vengeance between.⁸ The valkyrie-like Hildigunnr, who lays his duty upon him, conjuring him by the power of his Christ as well as by his manhood, and the horseman appearing in vision at Reykir and crying as he hurls a flaming brand into the east,

svá er um Flosa ráð
sem fari kefli,

both suggest to the imagination the dark and ancient world in which this duty is rooted. Yet Flosi holds a service early on that Sunday morning when he and his men ride from Svínafell; it is with his responsibilities as a Christian man on his lips that he calls for fire; and these things we may believe. He did what it was laid on him to do, carried out every consequent duty, held his judgment intact, and made his pilgrimage to Rome. But absolution did not wash this away. The rotten ship in which he made his last voyage was good enough, he said, for an old man bound for death, and this is the last we know of him. In him the conflict of old and new is most deeply felt.

But it is most clearly seen in the suits for the killing of Höskuldr and the burning of Njáll. These great public occasions recall the Conversion, with a striking echo between chapters 104 and 137,⁹ for peace or war is again the question, and in the second the civil battle threatened

⁸ L. M. Larson, *The Earliest Norwegian Laws* (1935), 140. On the question of date, see Introduction, 26 ff.

⁹ Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Um Njálu*, 49, sets out the two passages, italicising the most similar phrases. Chap. 104: "En þá er *þeir kómu* í Vellandkötlu . . . þá kom Hjalti . . . Riðu nú margir kristnir menn í *móti* þeim — ok *riðu þeir* með *fylkðu liði* á þing. Heiðnir menn höfðu ok fylkt fyrir. Ok var þá *svá nær*, at allr þingheimr *myndi berjask*; en þó varð þat eigi." Chap. 137: "Riðu þeir allt þar til, er *þeir kómu* á Beitivöllu. Kom þar til *móts* við þá Gizurr inn hvíti með allmikit fjölmenni . . . *Riðu þeir* þá á völlu ina efri, ok *fylkðu þeir* þar öllu *liði* sínu ok *riðu* svá á þing ofan. Flosi ok menn hans hljópu til vápna allir, ok var þá við *sjálft*, at *þeir myndi berjask*. En þeir Ásgrímr ok þeira sveit gerðusk ekki til þess ok riðu til búða sinna." It is of course the parallel between the incidents rather than between the words that strikes the reader and is intended to do so.

in the year 1000 actually breaks out. In the first Njáll speaks with biblical overtones of his love for Höskuldr, seeking as it were to revive the pledge of peace that had failed in the living man; and he addresses his plea to two of his supporters and three of his more moderate opponents, of which last Síðu-Hallr is one. Flosi is reluctant, but the Christian Hallr now asks him to repay a personal debt and grant him a request. Flosi, though I think he knows well what the request will be, agrees, saying that Hallr will ask nothing that is not to his honour. Hallr asks for peace, and arbitrators are appointed who lay a threefold fine for Höskuldr but contribute to it generously themselves; and Hallr, announcing the decision, calls on all to contribute "for God's sake" (chapter 123). One cannot resist the impression that a new spirit is abroad, though it now struggles in vain against rooted evil and ill luck. A quarrel arises; Flosi refuses to settle, calls his men into Almannagjá, and determines to go up against Njáll with steel and fire. The burning, the law-suit and the battle that follows are unregenerate enough; but their darkness sets off the light that shines afterwards. Síðu-Hallr and his son Ljótr are engaged in parting the fighters when Ljótr is killed by a random spear. Next day (chapter 145) all go to the Law Hill. Hallr now declares that he will show himself "lítilmenni" and ask his opponent Ásgrímr to make peace. Kári stands out, is reprovved by Skapti, replies in stinging verses; Snorri mutters a verse, at which a great laughter arises. As the laughter dies away, Hallr offers to lay down his son unatoned for the sake of peace. This would, I think, have been impossible under the old dispensation — contrast Gunnar's care (chapters 38, 45) to show that his settlement with Njáll is not over-generous — yet all men now respond to this act of humility and good will. What verdicts and settlements and common sense and friendship and public spirit had not done is now prompted by an act of Christian self-

abnegation; and, although Kári has still a long account to settle with the burners, the assembly of the people is at one.

In this Síðu-Hallr is the main mover, so that his prominence in the whole account of the Conversion is now seen to be fully justified. But he has, I think, a more special significance. His character and standing are confirmed on his last appearance (chapter 147) when he rides to Holt to make peace with Flosi's stubborn opponent Þorgeirr Þórisson, and if possible with Kári. Hallr is of Flosi's party, yet when they see him riding to Holt the neighbours say that he must have a good errand, and on his arrival Þorgeirr and Kári go out to meet him, kiss him, and lead him to the high-seat. Hallr is in a sense the leading representative of the Christian spirit; but it is noteworthy that his positive goodness, though it stands out above the more personal motives of others, yet seems to command their recognition and win their will to his, which is not his own. Perhaps we should call him saintly, yet I believe we should all hesitate to use that word. The interesting thing about him is that he can be so fully good without losing his standing as a chief and citizen. From the time he opens his doors to Þangbrandr and cannily stipulates that the archangel Michael shall have a special care of his convert, we see him as a man of firm judgment, practical as well as foresighted, speaking with the weight of rectitude, yet fully in touch with the standards of his own society, as his dealings with Flosi show. His goodness is of this world, whatever its allegiance to another. In him Christianity takes root in Iceland.

Others have said that the Conversion has important consequences.¹⁰ I have simply tried to trace some of these in order to show how important they are, and also to suggest that, although never abstracted from the full

¹⁰ A. U. Bååth, *op. cit.*, 145-6; Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Um Njálu*, 44; *Brennu-Njáls Saga*, Formáli, cxxv; Þorkell Jóhannesson, *Skírnir* CXVI (1942), 100. I have not found more than a general statement on this topic.

tide of life, they have a significant place in the total pattern. It seems clear at least that the author must have felt he had ample reason to devote six chapters to this event, which, in accordance with his common practice, he shows existing in its own right before relating it to his story. I should go further and say that he was right to make this event stand out as it does, for it seems to me to mark a most important division in the saga. The conflict of good and evil that Einar Ólafur notes in *Njála* is deeply changed with the coming of Christianity, and this change affects the action itself as well as men's attitudes to it. In the earlier part, the forces of friendship and kindness, justice legal and humane, good sense, moderation, and social conscience oppose the envy, animosity, vanity, and self-interest of human kind. The alignment of forces is of course not as simple as this, but certainly the conflict is of the secular world. When Gunnarr is at last cut down in his house and Gizurr pronounces that noble sentence on his defence, we feel that the dead and the living are both satisfied, even though vengeance is still to be taken. Gunnarr sings in his barrow. It is a very different matter when Höskuldr falls on his infield, forgiving his enemies. This sacrifice of innocence is a sin to be expiated in fire. Flosi's duty is terrible, as Gizur's was not; and the powers of good that are now called out go beyond those of pre-Christian days. May we not also trace to Christian influence a certain warm expansiveness that shows itself from time to time in the latter part of the saga — sometimes in small things such as Hjalti's offer of help in chapter 118 — and that seems to mark a significant change from the sobriety of paganism? Old things have not been swept away, but a new leaven has come in; good and evil touch deeper chords in men's minds and the human condition is seen under a new aspect. In this sense one may fairly see chapters 100-105 as the centre of the saga, and their emergence from its main course as an effective part of the design.

It seems clear that Brian's Battle — a decisive battle between the old faith and the new — is in some way linked with the ideas just discussed. The author has certainly planned the episode well in advance, before the account of the Conversion. In chapter 89, where he brings Njál's sons back to the Orkneys to winter with Earl Sigurðr and very summarily records their raids as far as Man, his purpose as an artist is probably to fix this region (the jumping-off-place for Ireland) firmly in our imagination; and certainly he records Earl Gilli's marriage to prepare us for the part he is to play 240 pages later (chapter 154) in sending his brother-in-law to Ireland against King Brjánn. It is said that Brian's Battle is linked with the main narrative only because fifteen anonymous burners fell there; but if the author felt that they were his excuse — and clearly they are not more than an excuse — for this elaborate episode, one might have expected him to make rather more of them. We are told that they went, that they fell, and that Hrafn inn rauði reported their fall as an afterthought when Flosi asked after them — "Þar fellu þeir allir", he says, and proceeds to more personal news of Þorsteinn Hallsson and Halldórr Guðmundarson. The impact of this scene (at the end of chapter 157) is in Flosi's response as he turns to Earl Gilli and says that they must be going for they have a pilgrimage on their hands. In the account of the battle — with the extravagant wonders (many known from no other source) that precede and follow it — what is emphasised is the moral and supernatural conflict; and in detail the light falls, not on anyone closely connected with the rest of the saga, but on such things as the enchanted raven banner of the Orkney earl and Hrafn's narrow escape from hell fire. To me all this appears as a kind of Brocken spectre, projecting the conflict of faiths already existing in the saga; and the well-known story of Þiðrandi Hallsson whom the *dísir* slew, retiring afterwards to north and south like the singers of the Darraðarljóð

in *Njála*, would give this interpretation some support by way of analogy. But perhaps it is enough to agree with Einar Ólafur that Brian's Battle is essential to the artistic economy of the saga, lifting it above Kári's episodical pursuit of vengeance, and clearing the air, as by a portentous thunder-storm, for his reconciliation with Flosi. Its imaginative effect is enough to justify its place, however we interpret it; and the simple experiment of removing it would show how sound the author's artistic intuition was.

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This re-examination of the saga at a couple of key-points is something of which I am not sure that I fully approve. After all, no one denies that *Njála* makes a very impressive whole, and those who are wisely content to reread it without consulting its anatomists may well wonder what this storm in a tea-cup has been about. Great books should not be worried or over-driven, and the question whether this one is a little more or a little less closely-knit than has generally been supposed should perhaps be left to each reader to settle for himself. For my part, I am half sorry to have formulated opinions which may make it difficult for me to reread the book with a free mind.

My excuse must be that I have been prompted to formulate them by what seemed to me fairly widespread misunderstandings, and that my limited argument has at least been intended to throw some light on the character of the saga. If my findings have on the whole been right, it follows that we may read it with a firmer trust in what I have called its narrative rhetoric — a term that should include the larger moulding of the story as well as the author's more detailed indications of intention — than its commentators have always shown. Much, however, will depend on what they are looking for. To come to the sagas with preconceptions derived either from different forms of literature or from untutored logic is to court

error; and I have been uneasy lest my own blunt and summary analysis should err in this way, for it is in the nature of analysis to abstract, and this is just what the sagas do not do. As Ker puts it,¹¹ they are "immersed in matter", and the best of them "have found a way of saving the particulars of the family and local histories, without injury to the imaginative and poetical order of their narratives".

¹¹ *Epic and Romance*, 184-6.

ICELANDIC TRADITIONS OF THE SCYLDINGS¹

BY JAKOB BENEDIKTSSON

EVERY student of *Beowulf* knows the intricate problems posed by the numerous and conflicting traditions about the ancient Danish kings, the Scyldings. In these problems the Norse or Icelandic traditions play a considerable part, and they have been studied and discussed with great learning by many distinguished scholars. I am not going to try to offer any new solutions of the old problems; what I am going to discuss are the Icelandic traditions, seen from an Icelandic point of view, especially some characteristics of the Icelandic sources and some aspects of their relationship.

Roughly, the Icelandic traditions about the Scyldings, as we know them, can be divided into two groups: the historical or learned versions and the more popular forms found in the *fornaldarsögur* (the heroic sagas) and the folk-tales. Outstanding examples of the two main groups are *Skjöldunga saga* and *Hrólfs saga kraka*. This distinction must not, however, be taken too literally, because behind both groups lies the same main body of traditions; the difference consists mainly in the presentation, and the spirit of the writing. The historical works are concerned with what Andreas Heusler called 'die gelehrte Urgeschichte', the learned prehistory, of the Northern peoples. Their aim is to establish an uninterrupted chronological and genealogical sequence of the Danish kings from Óðinn to the beginnings of Icelandic history. In order to construct a coherent narrative of this sort, it was of course necessary to combine various traditions of single kings and separate episodes, because we may take it for granted that such traditions

¹ This paper was delivered as a lecture in the Universities of London and Oxford in May 1959.

did not exist as a chronological history or unified narrative covering a long series of kings.

The oldest and most important work of the historical group is, or rather was, *Skjöldunga saga*, the Saga of the Scyldings. This saga furnishes not only the starting-point, but also the chief problem in every discussion of the Icelandic traditions of the Scyldings. Many of the later Icelandic sources are wholly or partly derived from this saga, and all of them must be evaluated by comparison with it. Now, the difficulty of such a comparison lies in the peculiar textual history of *Skjöldunga saga*. In fact, the saga does not exist at all in the same sense as the better known kings' sagas. *Skjöldunga saga* must have been written about 1200, but of its original text only a comparatively small fragment is preserved — six vellum leaves of a fourteenth-century manuscript.² Besides that, we have some direct and indirect quotations from the saga in other works, but we cannot be sure that any of these quotations is verbally correct. The general outline of the saga is, however, tolerably well known through a Latin abstract of the text, written in the last years of the sixteenth century by the Icelandic humanist, Arngrímur Jónsson the Learned.³ He used a vellum manuscript — since lost — of *Skjöldunga saga* as his main source for the first part of a Latin work, *Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta*⁴ which he wrote at the instigation of Danish historians. These historians had, just about that time, become aware of the existence of the old Icelandic historical literature, and were anxious to get more information about it and translations or excerpts from it for possible use in their own works about Danish and Scandinavian history. The work I mentioned, *Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta*, was, in spite of its title, a reasonably well-connected history of Denmark, because

² AM 1 e β I fol., edited by C. af Petersens and E. Olson in *Sögur Danakonunga* (1919-25), 3-25.

³ See *Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana* XII (1957), Introduction, especially pp. 39-61, 107-117.

⁴ Edited in *Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana* IX (1950), 331-474.

Arngrímur Jónsson based it essentially on two Icelandic historical works, *Skjöldunga saga* and *Knýtlinga saga*, additions from other sources consisting only of minor episodes and details. But Arngrímur Jónsson did not translate the saga, he only made an abstract of it, and, as we can see from comparison with other sources, this abstract is in some places very much abridged. Even the name of the saga is never mentioned in Arngrímur Jónsson's work — he does not as a rule give us any exact information about his sources — but we know it from Snorri Sturluson's *Ynglinga saga* in *Heimskringla*. Snorri used *Skjöldunga saga* in several places both in the *Edda* and in *Ynglinga saga*, and in one instance he expressly refers to the saga by its name. In addition, we have another proof of its existence as an independent work, in a notice written in an Icelandic vellum about 1300, where *Skjöldunga bók* — the book of the Scyldings — is mentioned in a list of saga-manuscripts.⁵

Arngrímur Jónsson's abstract from *Skjöldunga saga* remained little known for almost 300 years. His work on the history of Denmark was never intended to be printed, but was only written for the use of his Danish friends as source-material. The recipient of the work, the Danish Royal Historiographer Niels Krag, did not, however, live long enough to make any use of it in his writings, and although some other contemporary historians had it copied, the use they made of it was negligible.⁶ Arngrímur Jónsson's original and all the known copies came, in the end, to the University Library of Copenhagen, where they were destroyed in the fire of 1728. By a lucky chance, a Danish scholar had it copied late in the seventeenth century, and this copy is still preserved in the Royal Library of Copenhagen.⁷ But it was not till 1894 that the text became known, when Axel Olrik

⁵ In the manuscript Perg. 4to no. 2 in the Royal Library, Stockholm, fol. 79r ('skiavldunga .b.'), see *Den store saga om Olav den hellige*, utg. av O. A. Johnsen og Jón Helgason, (1941), 886.

⁶ See *Bibl. Arnam.* XII, 71-2.

⁷ Don. var. 1. fol. Barth. XXV.

printed most of the abstract from *Skjoldunga saga* with a scholarly discussion of the text and its implications.⁸ In this article and in his subsequent studies in Saxo and the old traditions of Danish history, Olrik laid the foundations of the study of *Skjoldunga saga* and its relationship to other sources, Scandinavian and Icelandic as well as Old English. His pioneer labours in this field have in fact been the basis for everything that has been written about *Skjoldunga saga* since his day.

The full text of Arngrímur Jónsson's abstract of *Skjoldunga saga* was printed for the first time in its context in my edition of Arngrímur Jónsson's Latin works.⁹ In the commentary to the edition, I undertook a new survey of the material and tried to assess the validity of some of Olrik's conclusions. I shall not go into details of this discussion, but only mention one point where I was led to a different result from Olrik's.¹⁰

By comparing them with Arngrímur Jónsson's text, Olrik discovered the traces of *Skjoldunga saga* which are to be found in old Icelandic literature, not only the preserved vellum fragment that had been published as *Sögubrot af fornkonungum* (a fragment about ancient kings), but also the material from *Skjoldunga saga* found in other texts. Olrik concluded that this material represented two versions of *Skjoldunga saga*, "a shorter and a longer version . . . the more elaborate presentation is the older of the two, the other, with more of the character of a chronicle, is the younger".¹¹ According to Olrik, Arngrímur Jónsson's version belonged to the shorter redaction. I shall not repeat my arguments on this matter, but my conclusion was, in brief, that Olrik's theory could not be proved, and that there are no valid reasons for assuming that more than one redaction of the saga ever existed.

⁸ In *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* 1894, pp. 83-164.

⁹ *Bibl. Arnam.* IX, 333-49, 354-9, 458-66.

¹⁰ See *Bibl. Arnam.* XII, 107-17.

¹¹ *Aarbøger* 1894, p. 153.

According to this theory, we must try to reconstruct *Skjöldunga saga* on the basis of the Latin abstract and the literary sources that are derived from the saga, without supposing a possible source of error in the form of an abbreviated version of the original text, made some time in the thirteenth century. This means that all the abbreviations and omissions we undoubtedly find in Arngrímur Jónsson's text must be due to him; and the problem is to try to understand his way of working, what he chiefly wished to preserve and what he supposed to be of less interest to his Danish readers and therefore to be abridged or omitted altogether.

There is no doubt about the chief aim of his work. It was to establish a complete and continuous sequence of the Danish kings, both chronologically and genealogically, and to give an account of the chief events of importance for the royal succession. Consequently, he is not so much interested in the exploits of the kings in other countries or in the story of the kingdoms they may have ruled outside Denmark. Only so far as these events affected their kingdom in Denmark can we expect Arngrímur Jónsson to relate them in any greater detail. As an example we may take his rendering of the story of the battle between King Aðils of Uppsala and King Áli, on the ice of Lake Vänern; as is well known, these persons are the same as Eadgils and Onela in *Beowulf*. Snorri Sturluson refers to this battle in the words: "Concerning this battle there is much said in the *Skjöldunga saga*";¹² this is just the quotation I mentioned before. Now, in Arngrímur Jónsson's abstract there are only a few lines about the battle.¹³ But this is quite in keeping with his manner of working, for the battle was a Swedish affair, and its only connection with the history of Denmark was that Hrólfr kraki sent King Aðils some troops to help him against his foe.

¹² *Heimskringla*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, (1893-1900), I 56.

¹³ *Bibl. Arnam.* IX, 346.

Besides the writings of Snorri Sturluson the most important historical work that has borrowed material from *Skjöldunga saga* is the expanded saga of Óláfr Tryggvason,¹⁴ but as these borrowings come from the last part of the saga they do not concern us here.¹⁵ But other sources too of the *fornaldarsögur*-type have preserved material derived from *Skjöldunga saga*. A fragment commonly called *Upphaf allra frásagna* ('the beginning of all stories')¹⁶ depends largely upon the beginning of *Skjöldunga saga*, the *þáttr af Ragnars sonum* ('the tale of the sons of Ragnarr loðbrók')¹⁷ has borrowed some material from it, and the *Bjarka rímur*¹⁸, an epic cycle from the beginning of the fifteenth century, is to a great extent derived from the saga, but presumably indirectly, as most scholars agree that the immediate source of the *rímur* was a lost saga, which in its turn must have depended upon *Skjöldunga saga*, at least in part.¹⁹

On the other hand, the preserved saga of Hrólfr kraki seems to have made no direct use of *Skjöldunga saga*. This saga is now extant only in seventeenth-century paper manuscripts that apparently go back to a rather late redaction, perhaps from about 1400.²⁰ In many respects it differs considerably from *Skjöldunga saga*, as I shall show later. Finally, the saga of Ragnarr loðbrók seems to have been, at least in part, independent of *Skjöldunga saga*, but it is difficult to tell how much *Skjöldunga saga* told about Ragnarr loðbrók, since Arngrímur Jónsson used the *Ragnars saga* itself in his abstract, as well as *Skjöldunga saga*.²¹

¹⁴ Edited in *Fornmanna sögur* I-III (1825-27); a new critical edition is in progress (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, udg. af Ó. Halldórsson, 1. bind, 1958).

¹⁵ See *Bibl. Arnam.* XII, 114-5, 119-20, 126-8.

¹⁶ *Fornmanna sögur* XI, 412-4; cf. *Bibl. Arnam.* XII, 110-11.

¹⁷ *Hauksbók* (1892-96), 458-67; cf. *Bibl. Arnam.* XII, 113.

¹⁸ Published by F. Jónsson in *Hrólfs saga kraka og Bjarkarímur*, (1904); see also B. K. Þórólfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, (1934), 345-51.

¹⁹ Cf. *Bibl. Arnam.* XII, 233-7.

²⁰ See the edition of Finnur Jónsson, cited above.

²¹ See *Bibl. Arnam.* XII, 113, 260-62.

With this material at our disposal we are able to get a somewhat clearer picture of *Skjöldunga saga* and Arngrímur Jónsson's treatment of his source. We can affirm that, even if it is as a rule too meagre for our liking, his abstract has often preserved details that are lacking in the works derived from the saga. On the other hand the secondary sources can very often be used to supplement Arngrímur Jónsson's omissions and abbreviations, and thus help us to reconstruct the character of *Skjöldunga saga*.

To summarize very briefly, *Skjöldunga saga* must have contained a sequence of the Danish kings from Skjöldr, the son of Óðinn, to Gorm the Old. About many of the kings the saga seems to have been very brief, about others it has offered longer tales, or, to put it in other terms, the saga consisted of episodes, connected with genealogical sequences. The chief episodes were the tales of King Fróði, of Hrólfr kraki and his family, of Haraldr hilditǫnn and the battle of Brávellir, of Ragnarr loðbrók and of Gorm the Old.

The sources of these episodes were oral traditions, sometimes combined with separate lays or *þulur* (mnemonic verses). Some poems of this sort are preserved; the existence of others can be inferred from a number of sources. Thus, we have in *Snorra Edda* the *Grottasǫngr*, which treats part of the story of Fróði. The prologue to the lay in the *Edda* is evidently derived from *Skjöldunga saga*, but there is no reason to suppose that *Grottasǫngr* itself was a part of the saga, even if the author knew and used the lay and the traditions accompanying it.²²

A part of the story of Hrólfr kraki was treated in the old lay of *Bjarkamál*, preserved only in Saxo's Latin hexameters and in some small fragments in Icelandic sources. About the battle of Brávellir there existed a *þula*, a metrical list of the participating warriors, which

²² Cf. *Bibl. Arnam.* XII, 110-11.

has been used both by Saxo and the author of *Skjöldunga saga*, as can be seen in the preserved fragment, *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*.²³ Finally, we can mention the rather late lay, *Krákumál*, which may have been one of *Skjöldunga saga*'s sources for the story of Ragnarr loðbrók.

Now, what I have said does not mean that *Skjöldunga saga* did not use other sources than the lays I mentioned. The author of the saga undoubtedly knew numerous traditions and possibly also lays or verses that have since disappeared without leaving any trace. It is quite certain that many and different traditions of the Danish kings were widespread in Iceland in the twelfth century. Some of these traditions may originally have belonged to different cycles, because we often see that the Icelandic sources combine stories which in older traditions, especially in Old English poetry, are told about quite different persons and events. Similarly Saxo, in many of the accounts which he most probably got from Icelandic sources, often has a version that differs considerably from the Icelandic tales. Finally, some later Icelandic sources disagree with *Skjöldunga saga* in many respects. In some instances it can be proved, by comparison with Old English poetry, that the later Icelandic sources have preserved old traditions in a more original form than *Skjöldunga saga*. The opposite is of course often the case, that *Skjöldunga saga* has the more original version or has preserved traditions that are forgotten or altered in later sources.

This is especially clear when we compare *Skjöldunga saga* with the story of Hrólfr kraki. The preserved *Hrólfs saga* is not, as I have already said, derived from *Skjöldunga saga*, but has, at least in part, used parallel sources, at any rate *Bjarkamál*. On account of its linguistic and stylistic form, the preserved version of

²³ Cf. Bjarni Guðnason, 'Um Brávallapulu', in *Skírnir* CXXXII (1958), 82-128, and literature cited there. In this paper the author tries to show that the *pula* is of Icelandic origin, and probably from the twelfth century.

Hrólfs saga can hardly be older than from about 1400, but many old elements in the story make it probable that at least some parts of the saga existed in an older version.

Be that as it may, it is at any rate certain that *Hrólfs saga* contains some very old traditions that differ from *Skjöldunga saga*, but the context of these traditions has often been forgotten or altered. One of the most important examples is the story of Bjarki — the most celebrated of King Hrólfr's warriors — or Bǫðvarr Bjarki as the Icelanders call him. In Saxo he is always called Bjarki, and the name of the lay *Bjarkamál* also suggests that this was his real name. The Icelandic name Bǫðvarr bjarki is commonly explained as a misunderstanding of the composite name Bǫðvar-Bjarki, that is battle-Bjarki, a sort of nickname of the same type as for instance Víga-Styrr, Víga-Glúmr. The first part of the name (properly a genitive of *bǫð* = battle) would then have been identified with the personal name Bǫðvarr. If this is true, this misunderstanding must be older than *Skjöldunga saga*, because in the Latin abstract the name Bodvarus is used, and the name Bjarki does not occur at all.

Hrólfs saga kraka has, on the other hand, undoubtedly preserved some very old traits from the traditions about Bjarki, and in some cases the account of the saga can explain details in Saxo that otherwise would be quite unintelligible. In addition the saga tells a long tale about his origin, that he was a son of a Norwegian prince who was turned into a bear by a wicked stepmother, and that his mother was a girl named Bera, which means a she-bear. This tallies with the name of Bjarki which in itself must mean "Little bear". We have here the well-known folk-tale motif of the Bear's son in which many scholars have seen a parallel to the Beowulf-story, and this supposition is strengthened by the fact that there are several other points in the story of Bjarki that show parallelisms to Beowulf.²⁴

²⁴ See R. W. Chambers, *Beowulf* (second edition, 1932), 54-61, 365-81.

When we now turn to *Skjoldunga saga*, it is difficult to tell how much of the tale of Bjarki was included in its account of King Hrólfr and his warriors. In Arngrímur Jónsson's abstract Bjarki is only mentioned in the brief account of King Hrólfr's warriors and of the slaying of Agnarr. His origins and his other exploits, both before and after he entered the King's services, are not mentioned at all in the abstract. We must, however, not be so rash as to conclude anything *ex silentio* from the abstract on such a matter, because it belongs to the category of material that Arngrímur Jónsson would be especially prone to abbreviate or omit altogether. And in the *Bjarka rímur*, which depend largely on *Skjoldunga saga*, there is a detailed account of Bjarki's origins and exploits, and this account differs considerably from the tale in *Hrólfs saga*. As R. W. Chambers has pointed out, only the *rímur* tell us that Bjarki was a member of the auxiliary force that Hrólfr kraki sent to King Aðils of Uppsala against King Áli in the warfare that ended with the battle on the ice of Lake Vänér.²⁵ This tale is evidently a parallel to the account in *Beowulf* where it is said that Beowulf became a friend of Eadgils and assisted him in his expedition against King Onela. Taking the equation Eadgils — Aðils and Onela — Áli for granted, this point leads to an almost certain parallelism between Beowulf and Bjarki. This element in the story must therefore be very old and may well have stood in *Skjoldunga saga*. In the story of Bjarki in the later sources other elements have been combined with this matter, some of them from folk-tales, such as the Bear's-son motif. These parts of the tale are not likely to have been included in *Skjoldunga saga*; there are no traces of them in the abstract nor in Saxo. The *Bjarka rímur* must have got this material either from a now lost version of *Hrólfs saga* or from a separate tale of Bjarki, which may also have been used in the preserved *Hrólfs saga*.

²⁵ R. W. Chambers, *op. cit.* 60.

Herleifus

Havardus hinn handramme Leifus cogn. hinn frekne

Frodo Herleifus Hunleifus Aleifus Oddleifus Geirleifus Gunnleifus

Vermundus hinn vitri 3: sapiens

Olufa, filia, nupta Dan II.

²⁸ Cf. R. W. Chambers, *op. cit.* 252 n. 2.

genealogical table of the Scyldings we do not know. Olrik suggested that Arngrímur Jónsson had misunderstood his source, and it is evident that Aleifus, one of the six brothers, is the same person as Áleifr lítilláti, who is listed in the Icelandic genealogies as the successor of Vermundr, and the last king before Danr. Unfortunately we shall never know what stood in Arngrímur Jónsson's source, but his account shows that some traces of a tradition of the three brothers, whose names are associated in Old English poetry, must have survived in twelfth-century Iceland. The original context has been forgotten, only the names of the Danish princes remained.

These examples are by no means the only ones from which we can see that traditions of the Scyldings in several versions must have abounded in twelfth-century Iceland. More or less convincing parallels to *Beowulf* have been adduced from numerous Icelandic stories, for instance the much discussed episode in *Grettis saga* about Grettir's fight with the giantess and his diving under the waterfall to slay the giant in the cave behind.²⁹ This story and many others have never been part of the Scylding-traditions proper in Iceland. They have lived on as separate tales or motifs and have, in later works, been attached to various heroes, foreign as well as Icelandic.

Variant traditions concerning the latter parts of *Skjöldunga saga* have also been known in Iceland. As examples we can cite the traditions about Ragnarr loðbrók, known from his separate saga, and from the story of Gorm the Old and his family, where the original version of the *Jómsvíkinga saga* — composed at approximately the same time as *Skjöldunga saga* — has a genealogy quite different from *Skjöldunga saga*.³⁰

In addition to all this material from oral tradition, we may assume that the author of *Skjöldunga saga* had one

²⁹ See Chambers, *op. cit.* 48-52, 146-82, 451-85.

³⁰ See *Bibl. Arnam.* XII, 114-15, 119-20, 126-28.

more source: a genealogical list of the Danish kings. This assumption is based on very sound reasons. First, we know that some of the most prominent chieftains in Iceland traced their pedigree back to the Danish kings, and second, we know that Ari Þorgilsson the Wise wrote both an *ættartala* ('genealogical list') and *konunga ævi* ('lives of kings') in his older *Íslendingabók* ('Book of the Icelanders'), since lost. The character of the older *Íslendingabók* is admittedly in many respects a controversial subject, but it seems probable that some part at any rate of the royal Danish genealogy was included in Ari's work, possibly only of the same character as the family-tree of the Ynglingar at the end of the preserved *Íslendingabók*. It has been assumed, with a great degree of probability, that a tale about the settler Ketilbjörn the Old was included in the older *Íslendingabók*,³¹ but in other Icelandic sources his family is traced back to Ragnarr loðbrók. Such a genealogy or others of a similar kind may very well have been written by Ari.

This is not to say that the author of *Skjöldunga saga* found a complete genealogy of the Danish kings in Ari's work. I shall return to another possible explanation later. In fact, we can see that *Skjöldunga saga* differs markedly from Ari in a genealogical point, namely in the question of the eponyms of the royal houses of Denmark and Norway. *Skjöldunga saga* makes Skjöldr, the first Danish king, a son of Óðinn and a brother of Yngvi, the eponym of the Ynglingar. Ari, on the other hand, makes Yngvi a king of the Turks, and does not say anything at all about his descent from Óðinn.

This innovation may be older than the composition of *Skjöldunga saga*, and it has the character of a learned speculation. In this way we get three sons of Óðinn, Skjöldr, Yngvi and Sæmingr, as heads of three famous families, the Skjöldungar, the Ynglingar and the Háleygir,

³¹ See Björn Sigfússon, *Um Íslendingabók* (1944), 65 ff.; G. Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic Literature* (1953), 97-8.

the dynasty of the Norwegian earls. About the two last-named families there already existed two genealogical poems, the *Ynglingatal* and the *Háleygjatal*. The latter was a younger imitation of the former, but this of course did not necessarily hinder later writers from taking its genealogy at face value. However, from these two poems it could only be gathered that Sæmingr was a son of Óðinn but decidedly not that he was Yngvi's brother.

We must therefore suppose that an Icelander with antiquarian interests — not necessarily the author of *Skjöldunga saga* — made Skjöldr a son of Óðinn, and in order to equate the three families he gave Yngvi, too, the same position.

We have here a clear example of a trend that is very much in evidence in the earliest Icelandic literature: the learned interest, the interest in tracing back the history of the Icelanders not only to the Settlement, but also to the origin of the Scandinavian peoples, through genealogical connexions with the royal houses of Scandinavia. This interest is of course influenced by contemporary historical literature in other countries. In a way it is an interesting parallel to the first humanistic writings in Iceland in the last years of the sixteenth century, when Arngrímur Jónsson used the old Icelandic literature to connect Scandinavian prehistory with the historical theories of European humanism.

It is impossible to know for certain how much the Icelandic *literati* of the eleventh and twelfth centuries knew of contemporary historical literature. But we do know that a number of Icelanders studied abroad from the latter part of the eleventh century onwards, and that foreign schoolmasters were brought to Iceland to teach in the new cathedral school of Hólar in the beginning of the twelfth century. Both the Icelandic students and the foreigners must have brought books to Iceland and in addition must have transmitted knowledge acquired abroad to their pupils. The learned ideas of contemporary

Europe could thus penetrate in many ways into the Icelandic world of letters.

The author of *Skjöldunga saga* wrote his work in a period when Icelandic saga-writing was in the making. He did not, like his contemporary, Saxo, seek his models in classical antiquity; he followed the way of his countrymen in writing in Icelandic. For his type of work the only native models were the books of Ari and Sæmundr the Wise, the fathers of Icelandic historiography. Both had written lives of kings, and both works are lost. The relationship between them and *Skjöldunga saga* can only be guessed at.

On the other hand the author of *Skjöldunga saga* had, as source-material, the traditions and lays about the ancient history of Denmark that must have been widely known in twelfth-century Iceland. We have no reason to suppose that any of these traditions had been written down at that time. So far as we can see, the writing of heroic sagas proper did not begin until much later, when an altered taste, probably due in part to the translated tales of chivalry and romance, had paved the way for a new type of literature. The author of *Skjöldunga saga* faced a wholly new problem in presenting this material in writing. How was he to weld this fragmentary material into a unified narrative? His solution was, as we have seen, to connect the episodes by means of the genealogical list of the Danish kings, which he probably knew in writing in some form or another. In doing this he must of course have made a selection from the many more or less conflicting tales he knew, and perhaps himself made new combinations or revisions of half-forgotten stories. An important point is that the saga as a whole was presented as genuine history, connected as it was not only with the well-known royal houses of Denmark and Norway, but also with famous Icelandic chieftains of the Settlement period whose descendants were still the most prominent families in Iceland.

But why should anybody in Iceland bother to write a saga of the ancient kings of Denmark? Several years ago Professor Einar Ól. Sveinsson suggested an explanation that goes far to answer this question.³² In a number of Icelandic sources there exists a genealogy of the Scyldings combined with a genealogy from the Danish king Haraldr hilditǫnn to Icelandic settlers. It was pointed out long ago that this genealogy was in fact the pedigree of the Icelandic family of the Oddaverjar, the chieftains of Oddi in the south of Iceland; and it has been suggested that this genealogy was originally compiled by Sæmundr Sigfússon the Wise. He lived from 1056 to 1133 and was thus a somewhat older contemporary of Ari Þorgilsson.³³ It must be added that this genealogy agrees in the main with *Skjöldunga saga*, the variations between the single versions not being so great as to form valid reasons for doubting a common origin. Einar Ól. Sveinsson took up this suggestion and elaborated it further by proposing that *Skjöldunga saga* was written by somebody closely connected with the family of the Oddaverjar. This suggestion fits neatly the facts I have outlined. Sæmundr the Wise was one of the first Icelanders to study abroad and he is known to have written a book about the kings of Norway; these facts show his historical interests and that he presumably had some knowledge of foreign historical literature. His descendants became some of the most prominent chieftains in Iceland, especially his grandson, Jón Loptsson (who died in 1197) and his sons. Jón Loptsson's mother was a natural daughter of King Magnús Bareleg of Norway, and this fact seems to have added considerably to the family pride. About 1190 an unknown poet composed the poem *Noregs konunga tal*, a genealogical poem in praise of Jón Loptsson, where the pedigree of the kings of Norway is traced down to him.

³² See *Sagnaritun Oddaverja* (*Studia Islandica* I, 1937), especially pp. 12-16, 39-42.

³³ See Halldór Hermannsson, *Sæmund Sigfússon and the Oddaverjar* (*Islandica* XXII, 1932).

Its chief source was the work of Sæmundr the Wise on the kings of Norway. In the twelfth century Oddi was a renowned seat of learning, and it is especially significant that Snorri Sturluson got his education there as a fosterson of Jón Loptsson.

Einar Ól. Sveinsson has advanced very sound arguments for the theory that *Orkneyinga saga*, the saga of the earls of Orkney, was written under the auspices of the Oddaverjar.³⁴ The introduction to this saga deals with the prehistory of Norway in much the same spirit as prevails in *Skjöldunga saga*. It may go back to the work of Sæmundr, but at any rate it shows the interest in the learned prehistory that the two authors had in common.

As Professor Sveinsson has pointed out, it was quite natural for the Oddaverjar to be interested in the history of the Scyldings. In the first place, it is probable that their family pride would prompt them to have such a work written as a parallel to the work of Sæmundr about the Norwegian kings, so that the family might possess a saga about both the royal houses from which they descended. In addition, the literary activities in Oddi made it just the place where one would expect to find knowledge about old lays and tales, especially concerning the royal forefathers of the family. Finally, Snorri Sturluson later made extensive use of both *Orkneyinga saga* and *Skjöldunga saga* in his *Heimskringla*, and in the prologue to that work he says that he has written down certain genealogies of the kings, "as they have been taught me".³⁵ This has already been understood by several scholars as referring to his education in Oddi.

If we agree with this suggestion that *Skjöldunga saga* owes its origin to the Oddaverjar, several pieces of the puzzle begin to fall into place. Interest in the exploits of their heroic ancestors is a characteristic trait of the Oddaverjar, as may be seen for instance from the names

³⁴ *op. cit.* 16-39.

³⁵ *Heimskringla* (1893-1900), I 4.

they gave their children in the thirteenth century.³⁶ Among them we find — contrary to Icelandic custom — several names from the old heroic stories and later from foreign romances; in the first group we find such well-known names from the Scylding family as Hálfðan and Haraldr. Hálfðan Sæmundarson, a grandson of Jón Loptsson, is the first Icelfander we know of to bear that name so famous in the story of the Scyldings; from *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* comes the very uncommon name Randalín.

This interest in the old heroic tales did not develop suddenly; it must have had old roots in a family, proud of its ancestry and endowed with historical interests. On those grounds, one can say, there is no family in Iceland around the year 1200 more likely than the Oddaverjar to have instigated the writing of *Skjoldunga saga*.

Finally, I should like to add a few words about the influence of *Skjoldunga saga* on later works. I have repeatedly mentioned Snorri Sturluson's use of the saga; there is no doubt that it was not only his source but also his model for the *Ynglinga saga*. But the influence of *Skjoldunga saga* upon another genre of literature is equally certain. The oldest of the *fornaldarsögur* are just those *saga* are more or less directly connected with *Skjoldunga* that: the *Volsunga saga* and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, which, in the extant version, is written as a sequel to *Volsunga saga*. *Ragnars saga* is undoubtedly an expanded version of the tale of Ragnarr in *Skjoldunga saga*, even if the details are obscure, as I have said before. It is very probable that something similar took place with the original version of the separate saga of Hrólfr kraki, if we assume a lost redaction of the saga. *Skjoldunga saga* may thus have been the starting-point of the *fornaldarsögur* as well as Snorri's model for the *Ynglinga saga*. I began by mentioning the dual character of the Icelandic traditions of the Scyldings: the learned

³⁶ See Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Nafngiftir Oddaverja', in *Bidrag till nordisk filologi tillägnade Emil Olson* (1936), 190 ff.

prehistory and the heroic tales. *Skjöldunga saga* itself belongs in the first group, but it contained enough of the heroic material to become the germ from which many of the later traditions have been evolved, either by adding new material or by combining the old material in a new manner. Thus both groups are in a way derived from *Skjöldunga saga* or influenced by its example.

In order to make full use of the Icelandic traditions of the Scyldings in the study of old Scandinavian heroic legend, it is necessary to try to understand the evolution of the Icelandic sources in question. It seems to me that there is still much work to be done in this field. Many of the problems I have mentioned are far from being definitely solved. But so much is certain that the foundation for every future solution must be a closer and more painstaking scrutiny of the textual history and literary connexions of the Icelandic sources. I do not think that the last word has yet been said on these matters, neither from the English nor from the Icelandic point of view. We must still bear in mind and apply Chambers's words: "The Scandinavian stories help us to understand the hints in *Beowulf*; *Beowulf* shows the real bearing upon each other of the *disjecta membra* of Scandinavian tradition".³⁷

³⁷ R. W. Chambers, *op. cit.* 427.

HENRY VIII AND ICELAND

By BJÖRN ÞORSTEINSSON

NO one can turn the pages of the great collection of Letters and Papers, foreign and domestic, relating to the reign of King Henry VIII, without soon realising that the king and his ministers often had to deal with matters concerning Iceland. No historian of his reign has hitherto attempted to give a connected account of these dealings, a fact not surprising in itself, for the sources do not tell of great events and the materials, even with the addition of some fresh documentary evidence preserved in the Staatsarchiv, Hamburg, remain comparatively meagre. Iceland was not a fateful issue in Henry's foreign policy and it was only indirectly that he had any influence on the history of the Icelanders, but nevertheless he and his council had Iceland on their agenda more often than any English government down to our own time.

I

When Henry VIII came to the throne on 22 April 1509, English sailings to Iceland were prohibited by law but permitted in practice. The English had then been fishing, most often illegally, for just a century in Icelandic waters, since, as far as is known, it was in the spring of 1408 or 1409 that they first visited the Iceland banks.¹ In the following years these rich sources attracted many ships "unto the costes colde". At that time the merchants of Bergen had the monopoly of trade with the Norwegian colonies² and the English sailings were thus an encroachment on their privileges. Neither were the

¹ *Rolls of Parliament*, IV 79; *Diplomatarium Islandicum* XVI 80 (hereafter abbreviated *DI*; the arabic numeral after the volume number refers to the number of the document in the volume, not the page).

² *DI* IV 381.

Icelanders themselves pleased to see foreign seamen on their coastal fishing-banks. In 1413 King Eric of Denmark forbade the Icelanders to trade with foreign merchants other than those with whom they had been accustomed to trade in the past.³ Such an order was valueless under the circumstances of the time, for the Danes were not a sea-power and the administration in Iceland was too weak to make the ban effective, and the king was obliged to take other measures to prevent the losses that his revenues from Iceland were suffering. Accordingly, ambassadors from the Norwegian Crown waited on King Henry V on his return from Agincourt and complained to him of the novel and illegal fishing and trading by his subjects, in Iceland and in other island-fisheries of the king of Norway.⁴ Henry responded complaisantly to the complaints of his kinsman and prohibited English sailings for one year "unless in accordance with ancient custom" (*aliter quam antiquitus fieri consuevit*). This prohibition was then promulgated in English ports, and at the same time was strongly denounced in the Commons.⁵ The English government seems to have done nothing to make the ban effective, and, indeed, the sailings to Iceland appear to have increased steadily. According to Icelandic annals, 25 English ships were lost in a gale on Maundy Thursday, 1419,⁶ but otherwise we have little information about the numbers of English ships engaged in the Iceland fisheries in the fifteenth century; it is reasonable to think that there were often as many as a hundred.

Fish was Iceland's chief product, then as now, but Bergen had never been a very good market for it because the Norwegians had plenty of home-caught fish. The arrival of the English, offering prices about 50% higher

³ Gustav Storm, *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578* (1888), 291 (abbreviated *Isl. Ann.*).

⁴ Brit. Mus. MS Nero B. III, no. 25, fol. 30; *DI XVI* 77.

⁵ Brit. Mus. MS Nero B. III, no. 25, fols. 31-2; *Rolls of Parliament*, IV 79; *DI XVI* 78-80.

⁶ *Isl. Ann.*, 293.

than the Norwegians did, opened up new prospects for Icelandic stock-fish.⁷ In a few years this resulted in the death of the Norwegians' trade in Iceland and the final severance of the ancient economic ties between the two countries.⁸

English traders were welcomed by the Icelanders from the start, but various attempts were made to prevent the activities of English fishermen.⁹ The Icelandic authorities tried to regulate the conduct of the visitors by laws and licences agreed on by the Alþingi,¹⁰ but there was interference from the Crown and from the Bergen merchants and a new governor was sent out along with a German commercial agent.¹¹ These officials abrogated the Icelanders' arrangements, dismissed various men from their posts, and tried to stir up armed opposition to the English.¹² In 1425 the king of Denmark repeated his edict prohibiting foreign sailings to the Norwegian colonies, but this had no effect for the English replied by capturing the king's chief officials in Iceland and carrying them off to England.¹³ Friction between the Danish and English governments increased as a result of this violence, but stopped for a while when Parliament passed a law (29 September 1429) ordering all English subjects wishing to buy stock-fish to sail only to the staple of Bergen within the Norwegian kingdom, for there the noble King Eric had granted English merchants the same trading rights as he had to the Hanseatic merchants.¹⁴ This order was repeated in a treaty between the two countries in 1432 and in an English edict of 1444.¹⁵ That these enactments were little regarded by English seafarers may

⁷ *DI* IV 337, 377; IX 243; Þorkell Jóhannesson, 'Skreiðarverð á Íslandi', *Afmælisrit til Þorsteins Þorsteinssonar* (1950), 188-94.

⁸ *DI* III 599-601; IV 330; *Isl. Ann.*, 290.

⁹ *DI* IV 330.

¹⁰ *DI* IV 331.

¹¹ *Isl. Ann.*, 293; *DI* IV 343.

¹² *DI* IV 336, 341, 342, 344, 380.

¹³ *DI* IV 381, 384; *Isl. Ann.*, 293-4.

¹⁴ Rymer's *Foedera* (ed. Holmes, 1820-24), IV, *part* IV, p. 143; *DI* XVI 87, 91, 90; *Rolls of Parliament*, IV 347.

¹⁵ *DI* IV 558, 694.

best be seen from the following lines from *The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye*, assigned to a date c. 1436:¹⁶

Of Yseland to wryte is lytill nede,
 Save of stokfische; yit for sothe in dede
 Out of Bristow and costis many one,
 Men have practised by nedle and by stone
 Thiderwardes wythine a lytel whylle,
 Wythine xij yere, and wythoute perille,
 Gone and comen, as men were wonte of olde
 Of Scarborowgh unto the costes colde;
 And now so fele shippes thys yere there were,
 That moch losse for unfraught they bare.

In 1447 the Danes seized some English ships in the Øresund and so compelled the English to negotiate. A truce was agreed on in 1449 and was to last for two years, during which time English merchants were not to sail to Iceland, Hålogaland or Finnmark unless they had special licence from the king of Norway.¹⁷ By this the Danish-Norwegian authorities gave up the idea of completely excluding the English from the Iceland trade. It is noteworthy that there is no mention of fishing in this agreement. On the other hand, in a collection of statutes issued by the king to the Icelanders in the following year, there was one stating that all Englishmen and Irishmen who sail to Iceland without bearing a licence from the king are outlaws and their ships and goods liable to confiscation.¹⁸

At about this time the Danes tried to strengthen the administration in Iceland and to improve the collection of taxes and other revenues there, but with no apparent success. In this period the only power in north Europe which could have checked the English activities in Iceland and Icelandic waters was the Hanseatic League, and, as

¹⁶ *DI* XVI 97; Thomas Wright, *Political Poems and Songs relating to English History* (Rolls Series 14; 1859-61), II 191.

¹⁷ Rymer's *Foedera* (ed. Holmes), V, part II, pp. 22-4; *DI* XVI 147.

¹⁸ *DI* V 56.

yet, the Iceland trade had no attractions for the leading Hanse cities. The Norwegian stock-fish trade was in the hands of Lübeck merchants and seems to have been adequate to meet the needs of the continental market. When it did not prove feasible to monopolise the Icelandic trade through Bergen, the Lübeck merchants reckoned their interests were best served if it came to England, where the Hanse had no fish-trade of any size.

After 1449 English seamen could buy permission to sail to Iceland from the king of Denmark, but very few of them worried about such formalities. The voyages consequently continued to be a bone of contention between the two governments. Their representatives met in 1465, when an agreement was made allowing the English to sail to Iceland under licence from the Danish crown, but prohibiting sailings to Hålogaland and Finnmark except when weather conditions made them unavoidable.¹⁹ This distinction between Iceland and the Norwegian provinces was probably introduced at the desire of the Hanse merchants.

The king of England did not ratify the article of the treaty concerning tolls on ships passing through the Baltic Straits, and in return King Christian I repudiated all the licences he had granted to English ships. Englishmen sailed to Iceland just the same and killed the king's governor there. Christian's answer was to seize seven English ships in the Øresund, 5-8 June 1468.²⁰ War between Denmark and England followed, and the north German Hanse cities were soon drawn into the conflict.²¹ A truce was arranged in 1473, on the basis of the *status quo*, but a peace treaty was not concluded until 1490. By this Hans I granted Englishmen the right to trade and fish in Iceland as long as they obtained the

¹⁹ *Norges gamle Love*, 2 R., II. 1, no. 100; Rymer's *Foedera* (1700-10), XI, pp. 551-555; *DI* XVI 210.

²⁰ *DI* XVI 210, 216; X 22-5; Rymer's *Foedera* (1700-10), XI, p. 556.

²¹ Friedrich Schulz, *Die Hanse und England von Edwards III. bis auf Heinrichs VIII. Zeit* (1911); Walter Stein, *Die Hanse und England. Ein hansisch-englischer Seekrieg im 15. Jahrhundert* (1905).

necessary licence at seven-year intervals. When the Icelanders confirmed this treaty at the Alþingi, they deleted the clauses giving fishing-rights to the English, and in the following years they took stricter legal measures against foreign fishermen, condemning out of hand all doggers found in Icelandic waters that did not engage in trade.²² From the legal point of view the Icelanders thus gave permission to fish only to those foreigners who imported necessary and desirable wares and took fish in exchange. It can be seen from English customs accounts from the earlier part of the sixteenth century that many English fishermen availed themselves of this arrangement.

All the attempts of the Danes and Norwegians to hinder the English voyages in the fifteenth century and to direct the Iceland trade back on the old route to Bergen proved unsuccessful. During the war, about 1470, the Danish crown began to encourage the Hanse merchants to sail to Iceland, but both Lübeck and the Hanse in Bergen were firmly opposed to any direct voyaging between Iceland and the Hanse cities.²³ Thus the Hanse merchants were not at first dangerous competitors to the English in Iceland.

For some seventy years after the first sailings *c.* 1409 the English enjoyed almost unbroken supremacy in the Iceland seas. Wars might close the coasts of Europe to them, pirates might lie in wait for them all along the Atlantic seaboard, but there was this one route to the north-west which was never closed and always safe. When Hanse ships began sailing to Iceland, the English took increased security precautions, ensuring that their vessels had sufficient armaments and provisions and sending warships to protect the merchantmen. The earliest information we possess about such precautions is found in letters issued by Richard III, 23 February

²² Rymer's *Foedera* (ed. Holmes), V, *part* III, p. 29; *DI* XVI 230 and pp. 445-6; VI 617; VII 499, 550.

²³ *DI* VI 362-3; XI 27, 32-33, 36-8, 40-41 etc.

1484, to seamen in the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk.²⁴ By about 1500 the ships had been setting sail to the north-west in their dozens for nearly a century, sometimes as many as a hundred annually. Such voyages were something new in European history: a new naval power was coming into being, and its goal lay westwards across the Atlantic.

II

The first act of Henry VIII's first Parliament concerned the abolition of the statutes from 1429. It includes the following passage: "By force of whiche Statute made in the seid VIII. yere divers of the Kynges Subgiectes not knowing the seid Statute adventuryng & repairyng into Islande and other parties of the Lordshipps & Domynyons of the seid King of Denmark for Fyssh and other Merchaundyse hathe ben Grevously Punysshed to ther great Losse & Hynderaunce, and contrary to good concience considering that Fyssh and other Commodities of that Cuntre be muche behovefull and necessarie towarde the comen Weale of this Realme."²⁵ — As it happens, no one is known to have been punished under the statute since c. 1464,²⁶ but this blank may be due only to an inadequate investigation of the records. Otherwise, the statutes of 1429 had been seldom enforced to hinder sailings to Iceland: all the English monarchy did was to issue dispensations from the statutes, in return for an appropriate fee, Edward IV being especially openhanded in granting such licences.²⁷ After 1449 the English could legalise their voyages to Iceland by obtaining licences from the English and Danish authorities and by paying tolls and taxes on their trading and fishing in Iceland. This state of affairs was not altered by the treaty of 1490, but by that time the Iceland sailings had become so 'free'

²⁴ *Letters and Papers of Richard III and Henry VII*, II 287; *DI XVI* 235.

²⁵ *Statutes of the Realm*, III (1817), I; *DI XVI* 246.

²⁶ *DI XVI*, 206.

²⁷ *DI XVI* 193-209; 211-15 etc.

and so frequent that the English had given up asking royal permission to make them. The last licence I have come across was granted in 1478 to one Johannes Forster, merchant of Bristol.²⁸ By the time of Henry VIII's succession the 1429 statute was a dead-letter, but of course a law remains law until it is repealed, and the abolition of it by Henry's first Parliament was an inexpensive way of demonstrating the young king's friendly feelings towards the large seafaring interests in the East Anglian ports.

It is clear from the sources that English vessels sailed to Iceland to trade and to fish in greater numbers in the first decades of the sixteenth century than at any other time down to the nineteenth century. A list of the Iceland fleet is extant from 1528 and includes 149 vessels, all from east coast ports, from London to Boston.²⁹ The total number of fishing vessels in English ports in the same period is estimated by Fulton at 440,³⁰ but there is nothing to suggest that the Iceland fleet was unusually large in 1528. The Crown had interested itself in the Iceland fleet from Richard III's time onwards, not unnaturally, because it derived certain revenues directly from its operations. In 1526 Iceland voyagers complained of their heavy burdens, and agreement was accordingly reached between King Henry and "certen his servantes and subiectes adventuring into Iseland for lynge or code" that they should pay annually "to the use of his househould franke and free" a certain number of fish from each ship, these to be collected by "the kinges purveyors".³¹ This toll was soon converted into a cash payment, for in a letter sent by the Iceland voyagers in the autumn of 1532 the king is told that he receives £5 or 200 fish "of every Shyp that Carys owte Aboue X ways of Salt at hir Commyng home".³² A list made in

²⁸ *DI XVI* 231.

²⁹ *DI XVI* 283.

³⁰ T. W. Fulton, *The Sovereignty of the Sea* (1911), 89-90.

³¹ *DI XVI* 275.

³² *DI XVI* 311; Brit. Mus. MS Add. 34, 729, fol. 63.

1533 by Edward Weldonne, controller of the king's household, gives 85 vessels, average tonnage 84. Against each ship is entered an amount ranging from £4 to £8 according to size, giving a total of £414. This list is in duplicate, and in the other copy the sums range from £5 to £8, again according to size, giving a total of £582.³³ In this year the king had probably reduced the toll payable by smaller ships from £5 to £4. The higher figure agrees with the sum mentioned in the letter of the previous year, in which, unfortunately, the amount to be paid by bigger ships cannot be read owing to damage to the document. These lists from 1533 indicate the king's direct revenue from the Iceland fisheries, and in addition customs and subsidies were paid by the Iceland voyagers on the trade they did with the Icelanders.

The Iceland fleet was not only a source of income for the king: it involved him in expense as well. In the war with Scotland and France the fleet required the protection of warships, but, despite the precautions taken, the Scots succeeded in seizing certain English ships on their way from Iceland in 1524, to the great distress of Henry and Wolsey.³⁴ The protection offered can only have extended as far north as the Scottish islands: further northward there were other dangers awaiting the English ships, but against these Henry did not employ his navy.

III

The peace treaty of 1490 and the Icelanders' commercial legislation that followed it produced little change in the activities of the foreigners. There were frequent clashes between merchants, the Danish agents found it difficult to collect the tolls levied on the trade and fishing done by the foreigners, and the English were particularly blamed on this account. In the years 1511-14 English seamen

³³ *Public Record Office: State Papers Domestic*, Vol. 80, fols. 61-78.

³⁴ *DI XVI* 248, 272-3; *Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic*, IV, nos. 615, 651; *Brit. Mus. MS Cal. B. VI*, fol. 336 and *B. III*, fol. 80.

plundered some Hanse ships on the Iceland route, killed the king's agent in Iceland and some of his followers, and committed other acts of violence. English pirates were also accused of having plundered Danish merchantmen on voyages to Spain and France. Because of all this Christian II sent envoys to Henry in 1514, demanding compensation for the acts of violence committed by the English, the same privileges for Danish merchants in England as the Hanse enjoyed, and a new treaty between the two states.³⁵

Danish embassies had always been well received at the English court, and no exception was made on this occasion. Henry wrote in friendly terms to Christian, saying that he would instruct his Admiral and his Parliament to investigate the complaints and to punish any proved offenders.³⁶ It is not known whether these promises were fulfilled, but at any rate the treaty of 1490 was renewed in 1515. In the new agreement there is no mention of Christian's demands for compensation.³⁷

It was clear to Christian II that it was not enough to complain to the English authorities and make treaties with them, for the clashes in Iceland were in part due to the feebleness of the local administration. One of the king's complaints in 1514 was that the English were fortifying their stations in Iceland and trying to annex the country. This was not a new charge, for the Icelandic authorities had complained in 1425 that the English were building fortifications in Vestmannaeyjar.³⁸ In 1515 Christian II sent Søren Norby, the renowned Danish naval commander, as governor to Iceland with instructions, amongst other things, to build two forts, one in the Vestmannaeyjar and one on the royal estate of Bessastaðir.³⁹ Nothing came of these plans, and in 1517 the king recalled Norby and

³⁵ *DI* XI 46; VIII 156; XVI 245, 254.

³⁶ *DI* XVI 255.

³⁷ *DI* XVI p. 487.

³⁸ *DI* IV 381.

³⁹ *DI* VIII 422.

found him another post. The king then tried a new approach to the Iceland question and sent a new embassy to King Henry. The envoy had, as before, to complain of the damage suffered by subjects of the Danish Crown as a result of English lawlessness in Denmark, Norway and Iceland, but that was not all. Amongst the envoy's letters of instruction preserved in the Danish Rigsarkiv is a curious document: "De werwe Hans Holm heff van ijszland". In this he is instructed to offer to the Dutch of Amsterdam, the 'Waterlandische' cities (i.e. those of north Holland) and Antwerp the country of Iceland in pledge for 30,000 guilders, or at the least for 20,000. If the Dutch are not interested in this, the envoy is to make the same offer to King Henry of England for a sum of 100,000 florins, coming down to 50,000 if necessary. This offer is not to be made until the rest of his business has been discussed. The king of England should give to the king of Denmark a true bond (*vprichtich vorwaringes briff*), which would enable His Majesty to regain possession of his country Iceland, without hindrance and with all rights and duties pertaining thereto, as soon as the price of redemption had been paid to the king of England or his heirs in a safe place in Amsterdam or Antwerp, where the deed pledging the country should also be produced and returned to the Danish monarch.⁴⁰ On 6 November 1518 Henry wrote to Christian about Hans Holm's embassy. He says that in addition to the matters mentioned in the letters brought by the envoy, an important matter (*gravioris momenti*) had also been raised, which he himself had discussed with his council; some of the envoy's business had been answered in writing, but he had been entrusted with an oral and confidential message on this other important issue. This 'important matter' can only have been the proposed sale of Iceland. In the Danish Rigsarkiv there is preserved a document in which Henry VIII promises to return the

⁴⁰ *DI* XVI 254, 259; Marie Simon-Thomas, *Onze Ijslandsvaarders* (1935), 10.

island of Iceland with all its rights, delivered to him in pawn for an agreed sum in gold, silver and coin, as soon as that sum has been repaid in full.⁴¹ The document is undated and is either a copy or a draft.

In the autumn of 1519 the Danish ambassador in Holland was engaged in unsuccessful attempts to reach agreement with Antwerp and Amsterdam on the sale of Iceland.⁴² He would hardly have been busy in such negotiations if Henry had already been persuaded to buy the country for a satisfactory sum. The document mentioned above was probably a draft of the English side of the bargain, brought from Henry to Christian by Hans Holm. But events in Scandinavia were soon to put a stop to the whole transaction.

In 1522 a revolt against Christian II broke out in Denmark and he fled to Holland, being succeeded on the throne by Duke Frederick of Holstein. Christian's queen was Elizabeth, sister of the Emperor Charles V, and the exiled king expected help from him and his allies. On 19 July 1523 the Emperor's ambassador in London informed his master that the king and queen of Denmark had arrived at Greenwich and were seeking aid from Henry. The king of England is reported to have said that he could not give them either military or financial support, but he would do what he could by sending word to Denmark, and Christian could do the same and promise redress and reform for the future. He could thus help towards a peaceful settlement of the dispute, which would be better than the use of force, especially since Denmark's monarchy was not hereditary but elective. The Spanish ambassador rightly remarked that this was no answer to Christian's requests.⁴³ On 30 June 1523 the peace treaty of 1490 had been renewed,⁴⁴ but in other respects it is

⁴¹ *DI* XVI 260.

⁴² *DI* XVI 261-2.

⁴³ C. F. Wurm, *Die politischen Beziehungen Heinrichs VIII. zu Marcus Meyer und Jurgen Wullenwever* (Verzeichniss der Vorlesungen, welche am Hamburgischen akademischen Gymnasium von Ostern 1852 bis Ostern 1853 gehalten werden; 1852), 12.

⁴⁴ *DI* XVI 266.

clear that Henry, despite his connections and friendship with the Emperor, wished to stay neutral in the contest for the Danish throne. It is not known what passed between the two kings concerning Iceland, but from later events it is evident that the country figured in their discussions.

Before Christian II left Denmark he had put the administration of Iceland and the Faroes into the hands of a certain Tyle Petersen of Flensborg, whose duty it was to hold them against the officials sent out by Duke Frederick. Little is known of Tyle's activities in Iceland on this occasion (he had held the governorship previously), but they ended with the Icelanders' declaring him guilty of irredeemable crimes and executing him in the autumn of 1523.⁴⁵ It is noteworthy that the men who were responsible for this sentence were amongst Christian's strongest supporters, and they addressed their report of the sentence to him and not to Frederick. On 12 December 1523 Christian II's chancellor, Nicolaus Petri, wrote to his master from England to say that Henry would not interest himself in Iceland or the other countries on account of the news which English seamen had brought concerning the fate of Tyle Petersen and others who were supporters of Christian there; neither was the king prepared to accept them as a pledge in return for a loan.⁴⁶ The other countries referred to must doubtless be the Faroes. Icelandic annals, s.a. 1522, report that Christian II had sought King Henry's protection and offered to pawn Iceland to him, but that Henry had refused because "he was not certain of being able to hold it".⁴⁷

King Christian had not however completely abandoned his idea of pawning Iceland. He persuaded himself that it would be easy to regain the Danish throne with a small armed force, but he lacked the money to raise it. In the spring of 1524 he told his chancellor to sail to England and

⁴⁵ *DI IX* 118-9, 135; *XVI*, pp. 516, 521.

⁴⁶ *DI IX* 149.

⁴⁷ *Íslenzkið annálar* 1400-1800, I (1922-7), 85.

to ask Henry for a loan of 100,000 englots against a pledge of "some of our dominions, according to your instructions". The chancellor replied shortly afterwards and made it clear that he regarded this as a profitless mission,⁴⁸ and that was the last to be heard of Henry's purchase of Iceland from Christian II. On 27 May 1524 a fruitless meeting was held in Hamburg to discuss the succession to the Danish throne, and Henry sent a representative who brought Christian's chancellor a present of money but did nothing else for him.⁴⁹ In general Henry remained faithful to his policy of neutrality in these disputes. Gustav Vasa does say, however, in a letter to the Swedish peers written in June 1526, that the Emperor and Henry had agreed to marry Henry's daughter to Christian's son, who was then to inherit the English throne after Henry's death.⁵⁰ It is doubtful if there was any truth in this report, even though it worried Gustav Vasa. Neither was it long before Henry found himself in opposition to the Emperor and consequently uninterested in aiding his Scandinavian policies.

On this occasion the chief things that seem to have prevented the sale of Iceland to Henry were the revolt in Denmark and England's war with France and Scotland. As will be seen below, the question was raised once more, in 1535, at the end of the Count's War.⁵¹

IV

Between 1520 and 1530 the Hanse merchants, especially those of Hamburg and Bremen, began to send more ships to Iceland, and English and German competition for the Iceland trade grew fiercer. The period of England's undisputed mastery was at an end, and now there were frequent clashes between English and German crews. In 1531 the Iceland voyagers complained to Henry's council

⁴⁸ *DI IX* 181, 184.

⁴⁹ C. F. Wurm, *op. cit.* 13.

⁵⁰ *ibid.* 15.

⁵¹ *DI IX* 602, 627-8.

that Hamburg men were using violent methods against them in Iceland.⁵² When such grievances as this reached the king's ears, it was his custom to bring pressure to bear on the Hanse merchants of the Steelyard in London and threaten the withdrawal of their privileges. On this occasion the German merchants in London were at once informed of the complaints, but nothing of any importance happened thereafter. On the night of 3-4 April in the following year, however, a battle was fought between two English ships and one from Hamburg in the harbour of Básendar on Reykjanes. The outcome was that one of the English ships was stranded and destroyed and the other surrendered. The captured crew were harshly treated by the victors and some of them executed. The Germans had lost only one or two men in the whole engagement.⁵³ At this time one of the chief trading and fishing stations of the English was in Grindavík, a little to the east of Básendar, which had been fortified and was much used as a base for their fishing vessels. By Icelandic law foreigners were not allowed to fish in Icelandic waters except under licence; it was illegal for foreigners to use Icelandic harbours as bases for fishing vessels, and foreigners were also forbidden to winter in the country.⁵⁴ Hitherto any attempt by the Icelandic and Danish authorities to implement these laws had been defeated by the English, whose response had been either to capture or to kill the royal officials (1425, 1467, 1514). But now the authorities gained powerful allies. The Hanse merchants were not much interested in the fishing, but they were eager to get the Iceland trade into their own hands, and thus both ready and willing to lend aid against the English in return for increased commercial privileges and a share in the booty.

The leader of the English in Grindavík was John Breye, agent of a London merchant named Peter Gibson, and

⁵² *DI* XVI 291.

⁵³ *DI* XVI 287-88, 291, 293, 295, 297, 310.

⁵⁴ *DI* VI 617; VII 499, 500.

one of his chief lieutenants was the falcon-catcher of the Duke of Norfolk. The Germans disputed with Breye over the sale of some fish, and the governor brought various charges against him, especially because of the fortification and armament in Grindavík. A force of 280 men, mostly Germans, was collected by the governor and proceeded to Grindavík on the night of 10-11 June 1532. They took the English by surprise, entered the defences without resistance, killed John Breye and fourteen of his companions in their beds and seized a quantity of booty, including one ship. The sources say that 40 Englishmen were killed in Iceland this summer. After this attack the matter was brought before the Alþingi, where John Breye and his men were condemned as robbers, their slaughter legally justified, and their ship and goods judged rightly forfeit to the king and his officer. A similar verdict was recorded on the affair at Básendar.⁵⁵

By about midsummer 1532 the survivors from Básendar had arrived in England and made their complaint to the king. They estimated their losses at £3,000 and brought to the king's notice the fact that four ships from Hamburg were lying in the Thames, which they requested might be confiscated to make good their losses; they also demanded other efforts to punish the guilty.⁵⁶ Henry was slow to take strong-armed action on this occasion, however, and Hanse ships were able to sail unmolested in and out of English ports, as they had done hitherto, although in the winter of the same year some tons of fish from Básendar were sequestrated from a Hamburg ship.⁵⁷ The English authorities did, however, approach the Steelyard men in London with the demand that the principals in the Básendar battle should be arrested and their ship confiscated. The German merchants in London were afraid of punitive action against them, and they at once

⁵⁵ *DI* XVI 289-90, 294, 296, 298-99, 307.

⁵⁶ *DI* XVI 310.

⁵⁷ *DI* XVI 304-5.

forwarded the complaints to Hamburg (17 July 1532).⁵⁸ At home in Hamburg, however, people knew that something bigger was at stake and for the moment showed no signs of any conciliatory mood. As the summer passed, accusations that the men of Hamburg and Bremen were guilty of robbing and murdering English subjects in Iceland poured in to the English authorities. On 28 August the Steelyard men were summoned to meet before the king's representative, on this occasion Thomas Cromwell, who complained to them of their compatriots' violent deeds in Grindavík. If the Chancellor's lecture on this disturbed their peace of mind, however, his concluding remarks must have cheered them up again, since he then said that these charges were not laid before them because the king had it in mind to deprive them of their commercial privileges: he was indeed anxious that their trade should increase. He had, though, written two letters to Hamburg and Bremen and he wished the matter to be honestly and faithfully considered.⁵⁹ His letter to Hamburg is extant, dated 1 September. In it he demands punishment for the guilty, payment of compensation and settlement of the whole affair. He expresses his sorrow over the treatment of his subjects, "*quod facinus multo crudelius quam mutua nostra et antiqua cum vestratibus amicitia expectasset*", and he ends by saying that if compensation is not paid "*nos cogamur alia juris remedia subditis hic nostris concedere*".⁶⁰

The Hamburg merchants were not then in a mood to be moved by threats alone. They wrote to Henry on 7 September, rejecting all the charges on behalf of the men concerned in the affair at Básendar and asking the king to accept their justification. If the king is not to be satisfied by this, they tell him to send the English complainants to Hamburg, where they will get a just

⁵⁸ *DI XVI* 291.

⁵⁹ *DI XVI* 298.

⁶⁰ *DI XVI* 296.

hearing. Finally they say that the embroilments are especially due to the fact that in Iceland there prevails “keine sunderliche gude ordnunge und politie dan ein old ghebruck”.⁶¹

There is no mention of the slayings in Grindavík in this letter, and it soon appeared that the Hamburg men thought they had no charge to answer on this account. Reports of the excesses committed by their opponents were composed by both sides, and the Germans undeniably had more material to work on than the English. Hermann Röver, secretary of the Hamburg council, was at once sent with Henry's letter to the Danish king, since he was their sovereign as duke of Holstein.⁶² In a letter written by Frederick I a month or so later, he tells Henry that they have “exhibited those letters vnto vs onlie to trie purge and testifie their jnnocencie by vs towarde your Maiestie”. Frederick accepted all their excuses, as will be seen below, and on 13 October he wrote a long letter to Henry, bringing many serious charges against the English, the chief of which are as follows:

1. They clayme to have a fysshinge place whiche of tyme oute of mynde our pople of Islande haue occupied in the See and challenged onlie vnto theymselffe.

2. They haue vyolentlie taken awaey the halfe parte of our tribut due vnto vs this year. [For this and other reasons] our head officer called vnto hym for ayd and help in our name the people of Hamburgh as our subiects and the Bremes as our confederates and being garnished with their industrie and secours did repell and resist the said violence by a contraire violence. In whiche conflict somme of your subiects were slayne. Nor trewlie it cannot be deneyed but that the premysses considdered, they all as they deserued ought to haue been non otherwise entreated.

3. They mowed rebellion agenste our officer appoynted in that our isle.

⁶¹ *DI XVI* 296.

⁶² *DI XVI* 300; *Kammereirechnungen der Stadt Hamburg 1501-40* (1883), 466.

4. They wolde nott paie the Custome.

5. They where not ashamed to spoyle chalenge and take away for there pleasure as well our goods as goods of our saide Insulanes and Inhabitants.

Frederick says that it is obvious from this that the men could not refuse to give the aid requested of them, and he consequently bids Henry to hold the men of Hamburg and Bremen excused, "as our subiects and confederatos of our lawfull Power, and that ye will nott moleste nor hinder there causes and busynes in England, leste that a more Inconuenyence or displeasure there of do aryse".⁶³

When the king's letter was known to the Hamburg council, they wrote to Henry themselves, declaring themselves innocent of all deeds of violence in Iceland, seeing that they had only aided the governor in the legal execution of his duty. They could also produce a letter written to them and to Bremen by the king's bailiff in Iceland, testifying that their participation against the English had been at his request and in the king's name. They also wrote to the Steelyard merchants and heartened them with an account of Frederick's attitude in the dispute.⁶⁴

At this stage of the proceedings Henry found himself in some difficulty. On the one hand, some of his subjects were clamouring for extreme measures, while on the other, the king of Denmark, with the support of some of the Hanseatic League, threatened war if he tried to placate his own people. If it came to war, the Baltic and Scandinavian ventures of the English were at stake, but on the other hand the disasters of a single summer did not mean the end of the Iceland sailings. The king thus continued in his policy of demanding a treaty between the interested parties. To pacify those who were most zealously demanding redress, some Icelandic fish from Bäsendar was confiscated from a Hamburg vessel, though

⁶³ *DI* XVI 300; XI 104.

⁶⁴ *DI* XVI 301-3.

it amounted to no more than about 8 tons. This action was immediately complained of by the Hamburg council, who on 16 November despatched two sternly-worded letters to Henry.⁶⁵ On 4 December Henry had the Steelyard merchants summoned before his privy council. There they were told that they were responsible for seeing that the Hanse men who had plundered and slain the English in Iceland during the past summer were punished and that compensation was paid for the injuries they had inflicted. The king declared that he was astonished that anyone should dare to write such letters to him as those he had just received from Hamburg and Bremen and should hide their misdeeds behind a hypocritical plea of obedience owed to the Danish monarch's governor in Iceland. He did not hesitate to point out what kind of obedience and alliance this was: sometimes the cities were free cities, owing obedience to no prince, but as soon as they illtreated or plundered his subjects, then one of the cities found itself subject to the king of Denmark (as Hamburg and Bremen on this occasion), another to the king of Poland, others to this prince or that, so that they were fearless in their crimes and thefts. The king said it was useless for them to excuse themselves by saying that the governor had summoned them to give aid against the English: they should have refused to obey his summons on the grounds that a perpetual peace existed between them and the king of England; and in England they enjoyed greater privileges than any other foreign merchants. Henry declared that the English were popular in Iceland, as could be seen from the fact that no Icelfander had been involved in the attacks on them. He pointed out that the letter from the Danish king proved that the Hanse men had given him misleading information, for the booty from Grindavík had, for example, found its way to Hamburg. If the Hanse men did not henceforth have better regard for the truce and alliance that existed between

⁶⁵ *DI* XVI 304-5.

them and his subjects, he would be forced to avail himself of his rightful power and deprive them of their privileges and their freedom. And if it meant that his subjects were to lose the advantages and the trade they had by long custom enjoyed in Iceland, the king would don his armour, take sword in hand and fight to prevent it.⁶⁶

A letter couched in similar terms was sent to the Hamburg council on 10 December, in which he also accused them of promoting discord between himself and the Danish king. If they think that they will be permitted to commit crimes against his subjects in order to please others because of the obedience they allege as their excuse, then he bids them consider in their wisdom on what weak, indeed on what non-existent moral foundations their case is based. By their violation of justice, amity and the agreements long established between the English and the people of Hamburg, the latter were depriving themselves and other sovereign powers of the liberty to make treaties at all, and it would be imprudent to bind oneself in friendship to those whose acts were governed by the wills of others. Finally, he demands full justice for his subjects in this matter, so that he may not be compelled to seek compensation by other means. An English envoy was sent with this letter to Hamburg.⁶⁷

At about the same time, Frederick's ambassador arrived at the English court to discuss the matters in dispute, and Chapuys wrote to say that Henry was well content with the case put forward by the Danes, but was less well disposed towards Hamburg.⁶⁸ Henry could ill afford to drive the Danish king into his enemies' camp, but he could still force the Hanse merchants to retire by threats of action against the Steelyard. The Hanseatic merchants in London were by now apprehensive about their position. They wrote to the council of Lübeck, asking them to bring about the expulsion of Hamburg and

⁶⁶ *DI* XVI 309.

⁶⁷ *DI* XVI 306.

⁶⁸ *DI* XVI 307.

Bremen from the League if they did not come to terms with Henry: otherwise they feared that the end of their London house was in sight. They also wrote a detailed letter to Hamburg, describing all the dire consequences that threatened them and asking them to cultivate peaceful relations with the English and punish the offenders, for otherwise the German merchants in London would suffer terrible losses. Amongst other things they said that there was no harm in Hanse ships and English ships sharing the same harbours in Iceland, because the fish which the latter exported they had for the most part caught themselves.⁶⁹ In using this argument the English were doubtless trying to persuade the Hanse men not to interfere in disputes principally caused by the presence of English fishermen in Icelandic waters. The fisheries were probably much more important to the English than the trade in Iceland itself.

These letters closed the matter for the year 1532, but on 15 January 1533 Henry's envoy, Dr. Thomas Lee, arrived in Hamburg on his way to meet Frederick and representatives of Hamburg and Bremen. At this there was some panic in Hamburg, for the city councillors realised to their dismay that they lacked the education to sit at the same conference-table as Dr. Lee. He was a fluent Latinist, while they were at ease in neither Latin nor English, even though they had the services of able men like Hermann Röver, their secretary. After a short stay Dr. Lee went to visit Frederick at the palace of Gottorp in Schleswig, while the Hamburg council sent hasty messages to the adjacent towns, requesting the loan of their most learned men for some weeks to represent them at the conference. One such man was then to be found in Rostock, Dr. Johannes Oldendorp, one of Germany's best lawyers at the time. When Dr. Lee returned from his meeting with Frederick on 29 January,

⁶⁹ *DI* XVI 308-9.

Oldendorp had already arrived in Hamburg, and during the ensuing conference he acted as the city's adviser.⁷⁰

The conference began in Hamburg on 30 January, and failed entirely to reach agreement on the main issues. All the charges against the Hamburg merchants were rejected by them, especially on the strength of the condemnation pronounced by an Icelandic court, under the presidency of the bishops and lawmen, on those Englishmen who fell in Iceland in 1532. Dr. Lee for his part demanded punishment of the guilty and payment of £3,909. 10. 8, or 39,095 German marks, in compensation.⁷¹ It was probably when no conclusion was reached in these matters that Dr. Lee placed before the conference draft articles for regulating the Iceland voyages of both parties. This happened on 7 February, and on 10 February a document was finally completed on the basis of Dr. Lee's articles, bearing the title: *Formulae quaedam ad conservandam in Islandia Pacem omnium negotium sic obiter concepte, ut suo tempore tum a Superioribus Magistratibus, tum a subditis ad quamcumque emendationem legitime ratificentur* (Articles agreed on for the preservation of peace between all parties in Iceland, with the proviso that they be submitted for emendation and legal ratification to the supreme authorities and to the people of the interested powers). This document is extant in many copies, in Latin and Low German, and there is in one eighteenth-century copy an Icelandic translation of it. Two versions of the document are found in the copies. A single Latin copy is written in the same hand and on paper with the same water-mark as the main statement of Dr. Lee's complaints (A-version), and the first article in this copy says that no hindrance shall be offered to anyone fishing off Iceland and that the right to fish there shall be free to all. In all the other copies (B-version) no mention is made of fishing at this point, and the document opens by

⁷⁰ Hamburg Staatsarchiv, Islandica 1533-4, fols. 8-16; *DI* XVI pp. 641-2.

⁷¹ *DI* XVI 321.

saying that all men shall cultivate friendly relations with the inhabitants and with others. In the second article in the A-version it says that, by right and by obligation, all men should have the same access to the Iceland trade and fisheries; while in the B-version stands only: "Similarly the word *negotatio* also signifies fishing." In an Icelandic translation of the letter from Frederick, promulgating the treaty made between himself, the English and the cities of Hamburg and Bremen, nothing is said about fishing and only the articles dealing with trade are included.⁷²

Final assent was not given to these regulations in Hamburg, and on 14 February the members of the conference moved to Segeberg, at the invitation of Frederick, where another meeting was opened by Duke Christian of Schleswig and Holstein, Frederick's son. The governor of Iceland was then present. The meeting was held 15-17 February, and at the end of it Dr. Lee was given a final answer to his mission. In this it is said that the troubles in Iceland in the summer of 1532 were the fault of the English, according to the testimony of those with first-hand knowledge of them, especially the governor of Iceland. The English and the people of Hamburg and Bremen (the latter had no representatives at the meeting) were bidden in the king's name to avoid in future all such transgressions in Iceland. There is no word of compensation, although on his side Dr. Lee promised that there would be no retaliation on the Hanse merchants in England. Finally, it says that the English and the people of Hamburg and Bremen are permitted to fish off Iceland (*piscature in perpetuum*) on condition that they avoided strife and showed proper obedience to the king's governor and paid the customary tolls and taxes (*una cum antiquo theolonio omnis reverentia exhibeatur*). In this *finalis responsio* there is no mention of trade but only of *piscatura*. Arnold Ræstad thinks it conceivable that this term was also meant to imply trade in fish.⁷³ It is more

⁷² *DI* XVI 323-5.

⁷³ Arnold Ræstad, *Kongens Strømme* (1912), 135.

probable, though, that the English envoy attached so much importance to this point, in order to ensure English fishing-rights in Icelandic waters, that he finally dropped the demands for compensation when in the reply he was to take back to his master the fishing-question was clearly settled in the way he wished. It is another matter that both Frederick and the Hamburg men knew that fishing by foreigners off Iceland was forbidden by Icelandic law. The Staatsarchiv in Hamburg contains copies and translations of all the chief acts of the Alþingi concerning trade and fishing in Iceland from 1431 down to the end of the sixteenth century. In the disputes with the English the Hamburg men constantly quoted Icelandic law, which did not conflict with their own interests since their fishing operations were only on a small scale. Frederick's letter to Iceland promulgating the treaty of 1533 and the acts of the Alþingi that summer show that there had been no change in the legal position of foreigners in the Icelandic fisheries. At the Alþingi, which was attended by the governor and by representatives from Hamburg and Bremen, it was enacted that dogger-sailings in Icelandic waters were to be stopped. This act was confirmed by the Norwegian council of state, but by then war had broken out in Denmark.⁷⁴

After the meeting in Segeberg, the Hamburg council met on 19 February and it was announced that, while the governor of Iceland still had to deal with the Icelandic disputes, the Hamburg merchants were clear of the whole business. Finally a great entertainment was given in honour of Dr. Lee, who was sent on his way with gifts and reimbursement for all the expenses of his stay.⁷⁵ Lee remained in the city till after the end of the month and after a visit to Bremen arrived home on 28 March. On 3 April Henry wrote a friendly letter to the Hamburg council, thanking them for the hospitable reception they

⁷⁴ *DI* IX 550; XVI 333.

⁷⁵ *DI* XVI 326; Hamburg Staatsarchiv, Islandica 1533-4, fols. 134-40, 141-8.

had given his envoy.⁷⁶ No more was heard in England of the fish-seizures, except that some small fines were imposed on the Steelyard merchants.⁷⁷ Henry and his ministers can hardly have thought that Dr. Lee got as good as he gave on his embassy, but he did not suffer for it, for he later stood in high favour with Cromwell and was often employed on missions to the Hanse cities. But the Icelandic dispute with Hamburg was soon overshadowed by new dangers and matters of high policy abroad.

On 16 June 1533 Chapuys wrote to the Emperor that six warships were being equipped and were thought to be intended for the defence of the many English ships engaged in the Iceland fish-trade and fisheries: the Scots were lying in wait for English ships at sea, and there was also suspicion of the Danes and of Hamburg. To this summer must belong an undated document containing "Instruxions for Richard Forster and other his ffelowes now departing to the sees for the sure Waffetyng of the englisshe ffleets out of Islonde".⁷⁸ These instructions deal especially with precautions to be taken against the Scots, and there is nothing to indicate that Henry sent warships all the way to Iceland. Relations between foreign seamen there were reasonably peaceful in the following years: but the English fleet on the Iceland voyage was now little more than half the size it had been in 1528.

V

As is well known, Henry VIII married Anne Boleyn in the spring of 1533, and in September of that year the idea was broached at a meeting of the privy council that England should seek the friendship of the Protestant princes in Germany and of the Hanse cities in order to

⁷⁶ *Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic*, VI, no. 296; *DI* XVI 329; *Zeitschrift des Vereins für hamburgische Geschichte* III (1851), 190-91.

⁷⁷ *DI* XVI 331.

⁷⁸ *Calendar of State Papers, Spanish*, II, no. 1081; *DI* XVI 332, 334.

redress the balance in face of the hostility which Pope and Emperor had fostered against him since his marriage.⁷⁹ Because of this Dr. Lee was again sent to Hamburg in 1534, this time with the request that its council “*velit suae Majestati in hoc sua iusta causa favere et indicare quid sua Maiestas debeat ab eis expectare*”. And further, “*quod Senatus Hamburgensis velit in futuro concilio vel alias suae Maiestati adesse contra iniurias, quas Romanus pontifex suae Maiestati intulit*”.⁸⁰ Dr. Lee’s mission was thus completely different from the preceding year, but Henry clearly saw which way the wind was blowing, and this is the best explanation of his eagerness for a settlement. The Icelandic dispute was again on the agenda, but there was no discussion of compensation or punishment on this occasion, and the talks were confined to the articles of the pact establishing peaceful relations between the two sides in Iceland.⁸¹

At this time Henry began to take a more ambitious view of northern politics, one not merely confined to the Iceland voyages and their attendant disputes. Frederick I died on 3 April 1533 and the succession was contested by sharply divided factions. The Danish Rigsdag postponed the election to the throne that summer, at the instance of the Catholic party, but Lübeck under Wullenwever along with some other Hanse cities tried to create a government in the name of the imprisoned king, Christian II. Their aim was to guarantee the Hanse cities trading privileges in the Danish dominions and to hinder the Dutch voyages into the Baltic. Their chief antagonist soon proved to be Duke Christian, son of Frederick I, who enjoyed the support of the nobility in Denmark and Holstein and for a time of the Dutch also. The Count’s War (1534-6), as it is called, in which Protestant citizens, often with the aid of Catholic princes, fought against a Lutheran duke, was for much of the

⁷⁹ *Zeitschrift des Vereins für hamburgische Geschichte* III (1851), 192.

⁸⁰ *ibid.* 193-4.

⁸¹ *ibid.* 204.

time waged more zealously by diplomats at the courts than by soldiers in the field, but it does not concern us here except insofar as it appears that for a while Henry nourished some hopes of extending his influence to Scandinavia if the Lübeck side came off best.

Late in 1533 Lübeck approached Henry with a request for a loan "to subdue the realm of Denmark", and in 1534 the city's agent received at least 20,000 guilders "gelehnt empfangen und zu der Stadt Lübeck Bestem aufgewendet".⁸² In the summer of this year Duke Christian was elected king of Denmark, although he had little power at first outside Jutland, the islands being for the most part in the hands of Lübeck and her allies. Christian III soon made diplomatic contact with Henry and tried to persuade him not to lend aid to his enemies. Early in 1535 he sent his secretary, Peder Svave, to Scotland and England, with the purpose, among others, of discovering what sort of alliance existed between England and Lübeck. He was able to gain no certain information about this, but Henry did, on the other hand, convey the impression that he was eager to mediate between the contending parties in Denmark.⁸³ On 15 March 1535 Svave placed before Cromwell draft articles for a peaceful settlement and pact between Denmark, Lübeck and England, which included a provision to the effect that Iceland should be pawned to Henry for a stipulated sum. It is not known that Henry found this treaty at all desirable, and he had in any case been newly offered better terms from elsewhere.⁸⁴

⁸² Brit. Mus. MS Nero B. III no. 54, fol. 105b; C. F. Wurm, *op. cit.* 33: "Lord Herbert of Cherbury says: 'I find by a Dutsch history, as well as by our records, that a great sum of money was lent by our king, whereupon also they proceeded in their war, which yet at last being composed, our king demanded repayment.'" The Lübeck council appear to have succeeded in repaying these war-debts to Henry in 1543, with the Hanse merchants in London acting as middle-men. Cf. also J. N. Lappenberg, *Urkundliche Geschichte des Hansischen Stahlhofes in London* (1851), 174, and see A. F. Pollard, *Henry VIII* (1913), 311-2.

⁸³ C. F. Wurm, *op. cit.* 50-51.

⁸⁴ *DI IX* 602; *Forty-fifth Annual Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records* (1885), App. II, 15-16.

On 26 July Henry's envoys in Lübeck, Robert Candish and Edmund Bonner, reported to Cromwell that Marcus Meyer, Lübeck's chief naval commander in the Count's War, "is content and agreeable that the kings Highnes shall have not oonlee the castell whiche he now hath (i.e. Varberg Slot), but also elbow (i.e. Malmø), lannscron (i.e. Landskrona), coppeniehaven (i.e. Copenhagen) and elsyneur (i.e. Helsingør)". They remark later in their report "that it is much easier soo liberalle to offer, than like to bring all the same to pass".⁸⁵

Huitfeldt maintains that this was not the only offer to come to Henry at this time, saying that in 1534 he was even offered the Danish crown.⁸⁶ Whether Henry accepted any of these offers is not known, but at any rate he did not break with Marcus Meyer as long as there was any hope of Lübeck's victory in Denmark. In the summer of 1535 prospects of such a victory grew dim; Christian III began the siege of Copenhagen on 24 July and captured 13 English ships on passage through the straits. He had thereby put himself into the strategic position from which his predecessors had regularly been able to force the English to negotiate. Messages passed between the kings in the autumn of 1535,⁸⁷ and in January 1536 Candish and Bonner sent a report on their negotiations with Christian on the captured ships and on the question of mediation between the two sides. Christian had told them that he had had ten ships released immediately and that he would pay for the three others. He was not encouraging when it came to discussion of Henry's mediation between himself and Lübeck, but on the other hand he sought aid from Henry, declaring that his enemies, if victorious, intended to yield Copenhagen and Malmø to the Emperor. Christian was well aware that the last thing Henry wanted

⁸⁵ C. F. Wurm, *op. cit.* 27; Brit. Mus. MS Nero B. III, no. 51; *Aarsberetninger fra det kongelige Geheimearchiv*, IV (1870), 5-6.

⁸⁶ Arrild Huitfeldt, *Danmarckis Rigis Krónicke angaaende den Hóylofflige Oldenborgiske Stamme* (1652), 1417-8; A. F. Pollard, *op. cit.* 311-2.

⁸⁷ C. F. Wurm, *op. cit.* 52-3.

was to see the Emperor as master of the Danish straits, and nothing could have been better calculated to restrain him from giving help to Lübeck than the knowledge that the city's leaders were guilty of double-dealing in their affairs with him and the Emperor. Candish's response to Christian's efforts to enlist English aid was to ask "upon what good ground he might make suche advertisement, alleaging it shuld not only be mete, in case they should have any money of his grace, to haue the same again restored and repaid, but also sufficient gage and pawne for the same, with other benefite and commoditie, demanding for a pawn the delyverance of Copman-haven and Elbow (Malmö) into the kings hands. Which they (i.e. Christian's representatives) answered was not possible, being Copman-haven the seate of the king of Denmark, but they said, their master had divers other isles as Iseland and Feraye, wherein his grace might be satisfied".

The day after these discussions, Candish had a private audience with the king himself and told him that he had no commission to do more than negotiate on the question of a truce and the captured ships. The king paid no attention to this and slandered Lübeck to the best of his ability, declaring that their troops had been put into the field at the Emperor's instigation, and asking for an English loan against a pledge of Iceland and the Faroes — "two great countreys . . . whereof th'one, that is Iseland he had found had great plentie of brymstone". Candish replied that the request for a loan was not an adequate basis for agreement, since Henry would pay too high a price for aiding Christian if he incurred thereby the anger of the Emperor, with whom at the moment his master was on good terms. When the English envoy proved thus adamant, Christian hastened to his council but soon returned and said "that in no wise he cold depart with any other parcel of his realm than the two islands before named, which, as he said, he was content, his grace shuld have for a token and his money repaid to;

so he wold besides be bound to pursue his grace with shippes, horsemen and fotemen at all times after for a reciproque, requiring for his ayde iijc ml angelots”.

Candish was not yet satisfied with the outcome of his mission and asked for an answer to the matters he had been especially empowered to raise, but to no avail: instead he was presented with a valuable chain as a personal gift.⁸⁸ Edmund Bonner had previously made it known to Peder Svave that Henry did not wish to accept Iceland as a pledge in return for aid to Christian;⁸⁹ what he was deeply interested in was the control of Malmö and Copenhagen, two Gibraltar-like fortresses which would have well served the interests of English sea-power. At that time they were both in the hands of Lübeck, who offered to pledge them to Henry in return for his support. In one letter to Lübeck Henry wrote as follows: “Nor is it alonelie to be considered what a man may wyne and atteyne, but also by what means he may kepe and defend it when it is won and gotten”.⁹⁰ Christian’s troops were successful in 1535, but in January 1536 he was still by no means firmly established in power, and the Emperor, for example, was nursing thoughts of retaliation. Allies were a pressing need, but Henry demanded a high price.

There was nothing unrealistic about Henry’s policy in the Count’s War. He supported Wullenwever in Lübeck and even tried to get him released after his fall from power and his imprisonment, but he refused to aid Christian by loans or any other means except in return for control of the Baltic Straits. He could lend money to Lübeck without much risk because he always had the Steelyard merchants and the Hanse privileges in England as a guarantee of repayment. It was quite different when it came to dealings with the king of Denmark. He exercised

⁸⁸ *DI IX 628; Aarsberetninger fra det kongelige Geheimearchiv, IV (1870), 30-31.*

⁸⁹ *DI IX 627.*

⁹⁰ C. F. Wurm, *op. cit.* 19.

control over an important sea-route, but he had few financial or commercial interests at stake in England. As long as the English navy was no stronger than it was in Henry's time, it was best for the English to avoid any dealings with Denmark that might later lead to war. It is true that the Danish cannon at Copenhagen did not cover the Iceland seas, but it was in effect due to Danish supremacy in the Baltic Straits that Iceland remained a possession of the Danish Crown.

VI

Hamburg was neutral in the Count's War and sought good relations and an alliance with the English. The Iceland dispute seems to have been gradually buried under the greater events succeeding it. It is true that in 1535 Henry's envoy again brought up the question of compensation for the damage done in 1532 and apparently met with some response from the city council. Nothing came of it, however, for the German merchants involved flatly refused to pay and, as far as is known, the matter was then dropped for good.⁹¹

In Iceland itself the situation was unaltered. The Hamburg merchants there drove the English out of business, and the Icelandic authorities gradually expelled them from their trading and fishing stations. The administration in Iceland both profited and suffered from the fact that Christian III's power was more firmly established than that of most of his predecessors and from his possession of a fleet. He was the first Danish king to send troops across the Atlantic in order to impose his will on the Icelanders, and now the edicts of the Danish government were worth something more than the paper they were written on, when behind them stood a powerful centralised authority and an efficient military machine. Thus, after 1536 it was difficult for the English to regain

⁹¹ Hamburg Staatsarchiv, Islandica 1535 bis 1560, fols. 4-16.

what they had lost in Iceland, and it cannot be seen that Henry made any attempts to improve the position of his subjects in that sphere. The English seamen apparently made some attempt to redress the balance themselves. On 10 December 1538 Christian complained to Henry of English aggression in Iceland. Henry replied by letter on 25 February 1539 and obviously wished to bring about a peaceful settlement, since he ends by asking Christian not to resort to hostile measures (i.e. in Øresund) until there had been further investigations into the matter.⁹² The Icelandic governor made a similar complaint on behalf of the Icelanders themselves in a letter of 20 March 1539.⁹³ In the autumn of that year the lawman in the south of Iceland instituted a court to deal with cases brought against certain named Englishmen, who, despite the disasters of 1532, must still have been based in Grindavík. They were accused of robbery, usury and violence against persons, and their possessions adjudged forfeit to the king. They might be attacked with legal impunity and any who defended them or their property brought condemnation on themselves. "And we judge the Englishmen and foreigners who stay through the winter in Iceland to be outlaws, forfeiting their right to hold property and enjoy peace in this country, according to the law of the land".⁹⁴ After this an attack was made on the English in Grindavík, in which some men were lost on both sides but which ended with the lawman's successful seizure of the merchants' goods there and the final expulsion of the English from the Icelandic mainland.⁹⁵ These events do not appear to have led to any differences between Denmark and England. It is however unlikely that no complaints were made to Henry, or that he could turn a completely deaf ear to them. On 18 April 1543 Chapuys wrote a long report to the queen of

⁹² *DI* X 164.

⁹³ *DI* X 170.

⁹⁴ *DI* X 198.

⁹⁵ *Safn til sögu Íslands* I (1856), 86.

Hungary and said, amongst other things, that he had asked Henry what news he had of the agent "he had sent to Denmark to inquire after a man the merchants of England had sent to Iceland for the purpose of establishing a fishery in those parts". When no news came of the merchants' agent, Henry had sent another to look for him, "as the loss to English trade would be great", but now he too had disappeared. The king thought however that the lost agent would soon turn up, and he considered Hamburg to be very well disposed towards himself.⁹⁶ No other information about these agents has come to light, but it must be thought likely that, in this period when Danish warships were for the first time present in Icelandic waters, Henry was trying to reach agreement with Christian III and Hamburg over the Iceland trade and fisheries. It is also likely that the English merchants and fishermen themselves tried to come to some arrangement with the Icelandic authorities. But if such attempts were made, they were certainly unsuccessful. It had never been the Danish king's intention to give Hamburg a monopoly of the Iceland trade. As long as their fleet was a negligible force, the Danes supported Hamburg against England, but now they were preparing to turn against their former ally. The Iceland trade was destined for Danish merchants and the Icelandic fisheries were to be worked by the Icelanders and the agents of the Danish Crown. Late in 1542 the king reissued the edict forbidding foreign merchants to winter in Iceland, and instructed the governor to enforce this law. He acted energetically in the autumn of 1543, and at the Alþingi of 1544 he had a judgment passed to the effect that all the property of foreigners in Iceland was forfeit to the king. The property in question proved to be mainly fishing-boats belonging to Hamburg merchants, and it is not known that the English suffered any noteworthy losses on this occasion.⁹⁷ For some time

⁹⁶ *Calendar of State Papers, Spanish*, III, no. 130.

⁹⁷ *DI XI* 167, 285.

after this the English still had a trading and fishing post in the Vestmannaeyjar, until it was finally captured by the governor, with the aid of the Scots, in 1559.⁹⁸ This was the end of the English bases in Iceland, and at that time the English fleet on the Iceland voyage numbered no more than 40-50 fishing vessels.⁹⁹ The government of Elizabeth I felt that the English ventures to Iceland had much decayed since the beginning of the century, and one of the chief reasons for this Lord Cecil declared to be "the recovery of the Iles of Island into the possession of the Kyng of Denmark".¹⁰⁰ There is truth in what he says. It was about the middle of the sixteenth century that the king of Denmark for the first time achieved complete control of Iceland and Icelandic waters, and this marked the end of Henry VIII's engagement in his subjects' affairs in Iceland and the beginning of a fateful period in Iceland's history.

⁹⁸ *Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, Hatfield House, Part XIII*, 70.

⁹⁹ *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, IV 426; *DI XII* 235.

¹⁰⁰ R. H. Tawney and Eileen Power, *Tudor Economic Documents II* (1953), 105.

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON *TRISTRAMS SAGA*¹

By PAUL SCHACH

I

Here is recorded the story of Tristram and Queen Ísönd, which tells of the unbearable love they had for each other. 1226 years had passed since the birth of Christ when this tale was written in Norwegian at the behest and command of noble King Hákon. It was executed and written down by Brother Róbert to the best of his ability in the words which follow in the saga now to be told.

With this introduction begins *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, the only member of the Thomas group of Tristan romances to be preserved in entirety. Of the courtly epic of Thomas of Brittany, only fragments comprising less than one-fifth of the work are extant. Gottfried von Strassburg did not live to complete his magnificent Middle High German adaptation; his continuators, Ulrich von Türheim and Heinrich von Freiberg, used sources other than Thomas. The English *Sir Tristrem*, from the latter part of the thirteenth century, is preserved in very imperfect form only in the Auchinleck Manuscript. And so *Tristrams saga* is "notre témoin le plus sûr du poème de Thomas,"² upon which Joseph Bédier and Roger Sherman Loomis in large measure based their reconstructions of the Anglo-Norman epic and upon which Kölbing founded his critical evaluation of Gottfried's poem in relation to its source.

Tristrams saga is no less important for the study of Icelandic literature. As the first of the southern metrical romances of chivalry to be translated into Norwegian and then into Icelandic prose, it had a revolutionary impact

¹ Portions of this paper were presented at a meeting of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study on 4 May, 1958, at the University of California in Berkeley.

² Joseph Bédier, *Le Roman de Tristan par Thomas* (1905), II 64.

upon the literary taste of the Icelanders in the thirteenth century. The native literature was strongly influenced by it, both in content and spirit. Motifs and situations, such as the ambiguous oath in the Spes episode of *Grettis saga*, were borrowed from it.³ Its plot, in part or in toto, was used in imitations and adaptations; and the tragic conclusion of the story was the source of one of the finest Icelandic ballads, *Tristrams kvæði*. The romantic element of *Laxdæla saga* and *Gunnlaugs saga* can be attributed in large part, I believe, to the influence of *Tristrams saga*. Nowhere is the spirit of courtesy and chivalry stronger than in this saga, which was translated, as the initial chapters clearly show, for the express purpose of introducing that spirit at the court of King Hákon Hákonarson. None of the other translated romances remotely approach *Tristrams saga* in tragic depth and intensity; and, what is even more important, most of these translations had probably not yet been made at the time when *Laxdæla saga* was written. Thus *Tristrams saga* is the most likely source of the romantic elements of *Laxdæla*, which Einar Ól. Sveinsson discusses so succinctly in the Introduction to his edition of that saga. By the time *Gunnlaugs saga* was written, a considerable number of translated romances must have been known in Iceland. But here again the native saga seems to me to be closer to Brother Róbert's translation in theme and spirit than to any other, despite the loan-motif from *Trójumanna saga*.

Perhaps the most cogent evidence of the pervasive influence and popularity of this work is the opposition which soon arose against it. *Haralds saga Hringsbana* is a case in point. When King Dagr suggests that Haraldr would be a more fitting match for his daughter Signý than Harald's father, the young man replies that he is unwilling to become a *dróttinsvikari*, 'a betrayer of his lord', for

³ For a different point of view regarding the source of this motif in *Grettis saga*, see Henry Goddard Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia* (1921), 186-189.

her sake. Margaret Schlauch suggests that this saga may have been “constructed as a deliberate reply to the French romance.”⁴ And Sigurður Nordal is of the opinion that the author of *Eyrbyggja saga* was in “deliberate reaction against his times, frowning upon the newfangled romantic chivalrous fashions that obviously had free play in *Laxdæla*.”⁵ Nordal points out that the contrasting description of the “dandified” Þorleifr kimbi and of the “prudent and unostentatious Snorri” looks like a sarcastic jibe (*stikpille*) at the author of *Laxdæla*, who is “insatiable in the descriptions of the love of finery of his favourites.”⁶

In view of the capital importance of *Tristrams saga* for the study of medieval literature in general and of Icelandic literature in particular, it seems almost incredible that so little attention should have been paid to it. There exists neither a critical edition nor a faithful English translation of this saga. Only a few years ago Jan de Vries could repeat an old error and say that *Tristrams saga* is preserved in only one paper manuscript and several vellum fragments, “which, however, belong to a strongly divergent and very defective version.”⁷ I cite this not as a criticism of Professor de Vries, but as an indication of the lack of recent scholarly activity in this field. In the following I shall confine myself in the main to commenting on those aspects of the study of *Tristrams saga* which have hitherto been neglected or overlooked.

II

Like most Old Norwegian translations of continental romances, *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* has come down to us only in Icelandic copies. The oldest manuscript of this saga is a vellum from the second half of the fifteenth century, AM 564 4to, in the Arna-Magnæan collection

⁴ *Romance in Iceland* (1934), 151.

⁵ Thus Stefán Einarsson, *A History of Icelandic Literature* (1957), 142.

⁶ *Sagalitteraturen* (1953), 248.

⁷ *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte* (1942), II 350, footnote 7.

in Copenhagen, of which only three leaves are extant. A triangular piece is missing from the lower right hand corner of the first and third leaves, which have also suffered damage from moisture and rubbing. The second leaf has been badly mutilated: four lines are missing at the top of the page, and the lower right hand corner and the left inner margin including about two inches of writing have been cut off. Through the magic of modern photography the darkened vellum manuscript has been rendered easily legible. The three leaves correspond to the following pages and lines in Kölbing's edition: 15²⁰-18²²; 18²⁸-20³³; 31³⁶-35⁴. A diplomatic print of leaves one and three is appended to Gísli Brynjúlfsson's edition (pp. 201-213). On these editions see p. 113 below.

Tristrams saga is preserved also in three paper manuscripts: AM 543 4to, from the seventeenth century (hereafter referred to as *a*); ÍB 51 fol., written about 1688 (hereafter called *b*); and JS 8 fol., written in 1729 (*c*). *a* is in the Arna-Magnæan collection in Copenhagen; *b* and *c* are in the National Library in Reykjavík. *b* lacks a few sentences at the end of the saga and has suffered considerable damage to the lower inner and outer margins, especially of the first few pages. Most of the lacunae can be filled from *c*, which is a fairly accurate, slightly abbreviated copy of *b*. *Af Tristram* and *Og Isönd* are written at the top of the left and right hand pages respectively throughout *b*. This manuscript, written in one hand except for two pages, is from the *Svartskinna* of Magnús Jónsson of Vigur (1637-1702). The relationship of *a* and *b* to each other and to the vellum (*A*) will be clarified by a comparison of the variant readings of pertinent portions of the story. Unless otherwise indicated, the first quotation is from *A* and the second from *b* in each case. Since the paper manuscripts are divided into 101 chapters, chapter references are valid both for the manuscripts and for the editions of the saga, all three of which are based on *a*.

Chapter 15 of the saga, which relates the birth of Tristram and the death of his parents, Kanelangres and Blensinbíl, ends as follows in *A* (cf. Kölbing, p. 15):

Nu uex harmur hirdslids þeirra. vinir gretu herra sinn adrir frv sina allir huortt tueggia. mikell uar harmur j haullvm millvm hird manna af fra falli sins dyrligs herra. Meire uar sorg j svefnburum med meyvum af sinnar fru dauda allir gretu er sa sa sueininn so ungann an bædi faudur ok modur.

[Now the grief of their court attendants increases. Friends mourn their lord; others, their lady; and all mourn both of them. Great was the grief in the halls among the men because of the death of their glorious lord; greater was the sorrow in the bed chambers among the young women because of the death of their lady. All wept who saw the boy, so young, without both father and mother.]

In view of the general situation and the translator's marked predilection for antithetical correlatives, it seems probable that *vinir* is a scribal error for *sumir* 'some'. Further evidence of scribal carelessness in *A* is the repetition of *sa* in this passage, of *snuit* with the variant spelling *snuid* a few lines further on, and of *fadir* on the *verso* side of leaf one.

In the paper manuscripts this passage reads differently:

Nú vex harmur hirdmönnum öllum, af fráfelle sýns Dýrdlega Herra, meiri var nú Sorg, Enn svefn, med Meyumm og konumm, þuj allar hörmudu og Grietu Dauda sinnar frúr, og suo það, ad sveijrninn var so wngr, fødurlaus, og módur, eppter þau Bæde frammlidinn.

[Now the grief of all the men increases because of the death of their glorious lord. There was now more sorrow than sleep for the maidens and women, for all mourned and lamented the death of their lady as well as the fact that the boy was so young fatherless and mother(less) after the death of both of them.]

The corruption of this passage apparently began with the inability of a copyist to decipher the abbreviation of the second element of *svefnburum*. Although quite clear on the photograph, the first syllable of *burum* is difficult to read in the manuscript itself. The frequent use of antithesis and pairs of synonyms throughout the saga

may well have suggested the expressions *sorg en svefn* and *meyjum ok konum*.

Fearing that the child might die unbaptized, Róaldr, the faithful steward, immediately summons a priest; *ok kom þa kennemadur med krisma ok gaf barninu* ‘and then a priest brought the chrism and anointed the child’. According to the paper manuscripts, however, the priest comes *med Christna trú* ‘with the Christian faith’. The form *krisma*, which is difficult to decipher on the vellum, does look very much like *kristna* when seen from a certain angle. The copyist, who may not have been familiar with the word *krismi*, in any event misread it and then had to add *trú* and omit *ok gaf barninu* in order to make the sentence meaningful.

It was inevitable that the Pictish name of the hero in its Celtic form Drystan should come to be associated with the French word *triste* (*tristre*), both because of the sorrowful circumstances surrounding Tristan’s birth and because of his tragic life and death. Gottfried, who could assume an acquaintance with the Tristan story and some knowledge of French on the part of his German audience, was able to curb his penchant for punning and keep his etymology of the name relatively simple:

nu heizet triste triure
und von der âventiure
sô was daz kint Tristan genant,
Tristan getoufet al zehant.
von triste Tristan was sîn name. (1997 ff.)

Brother Róbert, who could make no such assumption for his Norwegian audience at the court of King Hákon, had to expand the explanation somewhat (cf. Kölbing, p. 16):

Enn j þersu mali er trist. hryggur enn hum er madur ok uar þi
snuít snuid nafni hans at fegra atkuædi er Tristam enn Tristhum,
þui skal hann so heita . . . ok uar hann þa Tristram kalladur
ok skirdur med þi nafne.

[But in this language *triste* is ‘sad’ and *hum* is ‘man’, and his

name was changed since Tristam sounds better than Tristhum. Therefore he shall be named thus . . . And he was called Tristram and baptized with that name.]

In the paper manuscripts the etymology is somewhat simpler:

Enn i þessu maale þýder Tristám hriggur, Og var nafne hans snúid til fegra atquædis, og skal svejrninn Tristram heita.

[But in this language Tristám means sad, and his name was changed to a nicer pronunciation, and the boy shall be called Tristram.]

Again the corruption is due partly to the condition of the vellum and partly to the ineptness of the copyist. The word *trist.* in *A* looks very much like an abbreviation of Tristam or Tristram, for there is a faint mark above the period, which resembles the ligature for *ur* or for *re*. This was apparently overlooked by the writer of the source of *a* and *b*, which we shall call *x*. Otherwise we should probably find *Tristram* rather than *Tristám* in *b* and *Tristam* in *a*. Once the scribe had expanded the supposed abbreviation to *Tristam*, the following clause *hum er madur* became meaningless. Indeed, he may well have interpreted *hū* as *hún*, so that the clause for him then read *hún er madur*. The copyist thereupon “corrected” the sentence to read ‘Tristam means sad’ and omitted the silly clause ‘she is a man’ and the puzzling form *Tristhum*.

In order to prevent Duke Morgan from discovering the true identity of the child, Róaldr decides to represent it as his own. For this purpose he has his wife go to bed and pretend she has given birth to the child. At this point Brother Róbert or an early scribe made an amusing mistake, for we read that the faithful steward bade *systur sinne at fara at hvíla* (cf. Kölbing, p. 16¹⁷⁻¹⁸). The same error is found in *a*, but the infinitive phrase has been amended to *ad leggiast J hvýlu*. In *b* the word *systur* and the correct word *konu* ‘wife’ both occur, and at first glance it looks as though *systur* had been superimposed upon *konu*. Closer inspection, however, reveals that the

opposite is the case. The upper part of the letter *k* is lightly drawn; the lower part, on the other hand, roughly coincides with the *s* of *systur* and therefore makes the *s* stand out instead of hiding it. The writer turned the *y* into an *o* by erasing the tail and closing the top of the original letter. The second *s* stands unchanged. A heavy *n* with a line above it and a clumsy *u* were written over the last three letters of *systur*. The writer of *c* evidently understood what was meant by the resulting *kosnnu*, for he wrote *conu*.

This tendency to emend and to interpolate is characteristic of the writer of *b*. Almost every chapter contains marginal or interlinear additions as well as occasional corrections, all of which are incorporated into the text of *c*. Usually the interpolations in *b* help to clear up the meaning of a passage or to render an expression more idiomatic. Occasionally, however, they compound the confusion. When the Norwegian merchants kidnapped Tristram, for instance, they let the boat drift away from the harbour so *ad Tristram vard ei var vid firr enn þeir voru fiærre lande* (*a*). The last two words of this have been lost in *A* (cf. Kölbing, p. 18¹⁶). In *b*, however we read so *ad Trygguj hanz filgiare vard ej var vid*. Apparently the writer of *b* expanded the abbreviation for Tristram incorrectly to *Trygguj*, and thereupon, thinking of the hero's faithful tutor and companion, added two words in the margin to make the clause read 'so that Tryggvi, his companion, did not become aware of it'. After leaving the court of King Markis (Ch. 68; cf. Kölbing, p. 83), Tristram went to Brittany to visit his foster-brothers, the sons and heirs of Róaldr (*til arfa Róalds*). In *b* the final letter of *arfa* is missing and the uncompleted word is crossed out. According to *c*, Tristram goes *til Róalds* 'to Róaldr'. In the following chapter, Tristram meets Kardín's "beautiful, gentle, and courteous sister" Ísodd. Brother Róbert blundered in assigning the name *Ísodd* rather than *Ísönd* to Tristram's

wife, for the situation requires the identity of names between Tristram's sweetheart and his wife. Probably for this reason the writer of *b* or a later scribe here inserted the marginal addition *Hún hiet Ísond*.⁸ In chapter 70 and thereafter, however, she bears the name *Ísodd*. It was on the basis of these last two interpolations that I concluded that *b* and not *a* must have been the source of an interesting excerpt of this saga made around 1700 for Árni Magnússon by an unidentified scribe.⁹

One of the few instances in which the writer of *b* incorrectly interpreted a word which the scribe of *a* correctly changed is found in chapter 19. In the description of the storm which befell the Norwegians after they had abducted Tristram we read in *A* that *treit var hatt enn hafit diuft* (cf. Kölbing, p. 19²⁷). It is obvious from the upper part of the letter that the scribe had first written *diuþt* and then, perhaps for phonetic reasons, altered the *þ* to an *f*. In *a* the sentence correctly reads *Tried var hatt enn haffed diuþt* 'the mast was high but the sea was deep'. The writer of *b*, however, changed the faulty *diuft*, which must have been the spelling in *x*, to *Dauft* 'deaf', though how he then meant the sentence to be understood is problematical.

Nearly all of the corruptions in the paper manuscripts thus far discussed resulted from the inability of a copyist to decipher or to understand *A*. There are several, however, which must have been due to carelessness on the part of the writer of *x*. In Chapter 18, for example, we read that the Norwegian merchants 'admired this young man' (cf. Kölbing, p. 18⁸). Although the word *undrudu* is perfectly clear in *A*, it must have been replaced in *x* by the meaningless *endu*. *a* has *Endu*. In *b*, *endu* has been altered to *unduduz*. *c* has *vndruud*. Some of the many common omissions in *a* and *b* are also due to

⁸ This interpolation seems to be in another hand, possibly that of the writer of folios 303 and 304 of the codex.

⁹ Leaf 19 *r-v* of MS AM 576b 4to, which I have discussed in a paper to be published in *Scandinavian Studies*.

the faulty condition of *A*; most of them, however, must be attributed to the carelessness or disinterest of the writer of *x*, who had a marked tendency to abbreviate and condense. At the end of chapter 18, for example, an entire line, perfectly legible, has been omitted. In chapter 28 Mórholdr is described as *sterkur digur ok dramb samur ok mikill uexti* 'strong, stout, and haughty, and of great stature' (cf. Kölbing, p. 34²⁵). In the paper manuscripts he is *mikill vexti, sem sagt er* 'of great stature, as is said'.

In spite of its many interpolations, *b* is demonstrably closer to *A* in style and phraseology than *a*. During the battle in which Kanelangres was killed (Ch. 15), there were *sumer hoggner, sumer saarer, sumer Dreþner af huoru tueggia Lide* 'some cut down, some wounded, and some killed in each of the two armies'. *a* omits *sumer hoggner* (cf. Kölbing, p. 14³⁴⁻⁵). In view of the frequent arrangement of words or phrases in groups of three, it is likely that *b* is nearer to *A* than *a*. When Tristram's tutor returns with word of the boy's abduction, *Hanns fósturfader vinnur harm allra annara* (*a*) (cf. Kölbing, p. 19¹). Kölbing was puzzled by the last three words ('grief of all others'). In *A*, the sentence states that Róaldr *uinnur allann harmm . . .* The original reading seems to be preserved in *b*, *allann harm annara*, so that we can fill the lacuna in *A* from *b*. The sense is that the grief of Róaldr was as great as that of all the others together. A more striking example is found a few lines further on, where Róaldr, standing by the sea, gives vent to his grief (cf. Kölbing, p. 19⁵⁻⁶). He calls in a loud voice: *huggari minn ok herra, huggarro min ok hiarta, ast min ok . . .* (*A*). The reading in *b* is almost identical: *Huggun mýn og herra, huggarró mýnz hiarta, aast mýn og ynde*. The strongly rhythmic, alliterative phrase then means 'My comforter and my lord, my comfort and my heart, my love and my delight'. In *a* the rhythmic effect is largely lost through the destruction of one of the

alliterative word-pairs: *Huggun myn og Herra, Hugar Roo myn, ást myn og Inde*. A further interesting example is found in the passage describing Tristram's forlorn condition after the Norwegians have set him ashore (cf. Kölbing, p. 20²²⁻³). He looks about and can see nothing but *fiöll, og skóga og Dali, Sliett biorg og Hamra* (*b*) 'mountains and forests and valleys, sheer cliffs and crags'. *a* omits the valleys. *A* reads . . . *oll ok dali. stliett biorg ok hamra*. Borrowing a word from *b* and correcting *stliett*, we get *skoga ok fioll ok dali, sliett biorg ok hamra* as the complete reading of *A*. This piling up of five nouns in one group of three, preceded or followed by a group of two, is likewise characteristic of the style of the saga.

The one addition, the various corruptions, and the many omissions (including several entire sentences and totalling about 12 lines for the three vellum leaves) which *a* and *b* have in common as opposed to *A* indicate that the two paper manuscripts came from a somewhat corrupt and considerably abbreviated source derived and possibly directly copied from *A*. Most of the common corruptions can be explained on the basis of the state of the vellum *A*. The omissions, for the most part, must be blamed on the writer of *x*. It is obvious, of course, that *b* cannot possibly be a copy of *a*. Conversely, *a* cannot have been copied from *b*, for it contains several essential phrases and sentences which are missing in *b*.¹⁰ Since *b* is less abbreviated and more faithful to *A* than *a*, it must be used (together with the extant leaves of *A*) as the basis for a new edition of the saga. Most of the many lacunae in *b* can be filled from *a* and *c*, although *c* must be used with discrimination because of the mechanical and uncritical manner in which its writer incorporated the interpolations of *b*.

¹⁰ In Ch. 86, for example, the writer of *b* skipped a whole line of his source in the conversation between Tristram and Kardín about the statues of Isönd and Bringvet, whereby words and actions of Kardín are attributed to Tristram.

III

Tristrams saga has been edited three times: by Eugen Kölbing (Heilbronn 1878), by Gísli Brynjúlfsson (Copenhagen 1878), and by Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (in *Riddarasögur* I, Reykjavík 1949).

The edition of Bjarni Vilhjálmsson is based on that of Gísli Brynjúlfsson, from which it differs only in minor details. It is a popular edition in modern orthography, with a brief introduction but without critical apparatus. Because of its large clear type it is very readable, and its use for quick reference is facilitated by the chapter headings.

To the text of *Tristrams saga* (according to MS *a*) in the edition of Gísli Brynjúlfsson is appended (in addition to the text of leaves one and three of MS *A*) a lengthy summary of the story in Danish. The volume also contains the text of *Möttuls saga* (with Danish summary), the Danish, Icelandic, and Faroese Tristram ballads, and a discussion of the two sagas in relation to their sources.

Although the publication of this volume by Gísli Brynjúlfsson produced only a ripple on the scholarly scene (judging from the reviews), the appearance of Kölbing's edition of *Tristrams saga* called forth a veritable wave of critical comment, especially in France and Germany. This was not due to interest in the saga itself, however, but because of the light which the saga shed on the works of Thomas and Gottfried. Indeed, almost the entire Introduction of Kölbing's edition — 140 pages of fine italic print — is devoted, as the critic in the *Scottish Review* (Vol. 14, pp. 138-172) aptly commented, to "determining a controversy which the author has with Professor Heinzel as to the sources whence Gottfried derived the materials for his celebrated poem." In a brilliantly written monograph entitled "Gottfrieds von Strassburg *Tristan* und seine Quelle"¹¹ Heinzel had advanced the now untenable view that Gottfried's

¹¹ *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* XIV (1869), 272-447.

immediate source had been a lost French Tristan epic which combined the work of Thomas with another version of the story. For the purpose of refuting Heinzel's thesis, Kölbing made a painstakingly minute comparison of the text of the saga with the extant fragments of Thomas, with Gottfried's *Tristan*, and with *Sir Tristrem*. He arrived at the conclusion that the Norwegian, German, and English adaptations were translations of various recensions of one poem, and that that poem was the lost epic of Thomas. This conclusion almost immediately found general acceptance among scholars; only Heinzel remained unconvinced. If Kölbing had been less intent on refuting Heinzel, his comparison of the saga with the other adaptations would be less difficult to read. But despite its poor organization and its other shortcomings, this treatise is a major contribution to Tristan scholarship.

The Icelandic text of this edition leaves much to be desired. Presumably Kölbing wished to produce a text which reflected the language of the first half of the thirteenth century; but as Cederschiöld pointed out, he used archaic forms such as *mínn* for *minn*, *gótt* for *gott*, and *hánun* for *honun* beside forms which are too modern, such as *vóx* and *vorðinn* for *óx* and *orðinn*, *nógr* for *gnógr*, and *-st* for *-sk* or *-z* in the reflexive verbs.¹² Kölbing replaced the loan-word *bifalningu* (dat. sg.) 'command' by the native word *boði* (p. 5⁴), but failed to change the modern masculine form *þrír skilningar* to the older feminine *þrjár skilningar* (p. 20¹⁵) or to emend *ek hefi mist þik* (p. 19⁷) to *ek hefi mist þín*. The criticisms directed against Kölbing in this regard are valid also for Gísli Brynjúlfsson, but to a lesser degree. Kölbing's footnotes, while inadequate, are better than those of Gísli. Kölbing erroneously wrote *Ísond* for *Ísönd* or *Ísönd*. His German translation of the saga is in the main good. Neither Kölbing nor Gísli devoted much

¹² In a review of the two editions in the *Literaturblatt für germanische und romanische Philologie* I (1880), columns 93-97.

space to a discussion of the manuscripts, of which they knew only *a* and the first and third leaves of *A*. (Kölbing incorporated these leaves of *A* into his text.) Gísli believed that *A* could not have been the original from which *a* was copied; Kölbing thought that *A* and *a* were closely related and that the latter was possibly a transcript of the former. As we have seen from the comparison of the manuscripts, both were partly right.

In regard to content, the saga differs from its source primarily in length. The order of events has been slightly changed, but none of the essential action has been deleted. As edited from MS *a*, the saga is about half the length of Gottfried's *Tristan und Isolde*. We have seen that *a* is somewhat shorter than *b*, and that *b* is considerably more condensed than *A*. Assuming that *A* is as much shorter than the original Norwegian translation as *a* is shorter than *A*, and allowing for the expansions of Gottfried, we can estimate that Brother Róbert's translation was about two-thirds as long as its French source.

More important than the degree of compression is the question of what was suppressed by the translator. Joseph Bédier's answer to this question was brief and to the point: *Ce que le plus volontiers il a supprimé de son original, c'en est la poésie*.¹³ Einar Ól. Sveinsson is evidently in agreement when he declares that Brother Róbert's translation "very nearly ruined that great love story."¹⁴ There is little that one can say to extenuate these strictures except to suggest that some of the blame for the weakness of the saga in its present form must be shared by the scribes through whose hands it went between 1226 and 1688, and to point out the fact that it is a bit unfair to compare the first literary effort of an English cleric, as he probably was, working in a foreign

¹³ *Le Roman de Tristan*, II 75.

¹⁴ *The Age of the Sturlungs*, translated by Jóhann S. Hannesson (1953), 41; cf. also his *Sagan af Tristan og Ísól* (1955), xix.

tongue, with the magnificent poetry of Gottfried and the consummate craftsmanship of the *Íslendinga sögur*. Missing from the translation are the passages which Gottfried delighted in elaborating: the reflections of the author and the sentimental analyses of the characters. The mental torture and the moral conflict of Tristan after his marriage to Îsôt als Blanche Mains, to which Gottfried devotes several hundred lines, is in the saga summarily dealt with in a few sentences. Whereas the story of the killing of the dragon and the subsequent identification of Tristram is skilfully related, the account of the drinking of the love potion is dry and perfunctory. The scene in which Tristram and Ísönd meet under the tree in which the king is hiding is so badly bungled that one can scarcely put the entire blame for it on the translator.

In contrast to the terse, unadorned, lucid language of the *Íslendinga sögur*, the style of *Tristrams saga* is almost ludicrously turgid and embellished. Whereas the native sagas use alliteration only sparingly, *Tristrams saga* fairly bristles with alliterative word-pairs such as *vald ok virðing*, *vald ok vápn*, *vel ok viturlig*, *vel ok virðuliga*, *vás ok válk*, *angr ok óbót*, *angr ok óró*, *sæmdr ok signaður*, *sorg ok sút*, *hauss ok heili*, *harmr ok háski*, *haldnir ok herteknir*, *heilir ok haldnir*, *stormr ok straumr*, *herra ok höfðingi*, *hertugar ok höfðingjar*, etc. Occasionally the translator employs three successive alliterative words, as when he has Tristram present Róaldr to King Markis as his *frændi*, *faðir*, *ok fóstri*. Frequently he uses a series of three nouns, adjectives, or verbs. The death of Kanelangres is mourned by all who knew his *frægð*, *drengskap*, *ok góðlyndi*. Tristram declares that the false steward of King Markis will never obtain the hand of Ísönd *með falsi*, *lygum*, *og hégóma*. Mórholdr had a shield *harðan ok mikinn ok þykkvan*. This warrior was *breiðr í andliti*, *mikill at vexti*, *ok digr í limum*. When Tristram volunteers to fight against Mórholdr, the men of the court vow to *unna . . .*, *tigna . . .*, *ok þjóna* him. At particularly

dramatic or solemn moments in the story, the translator tends to use three pairs of synonyms or alliterative words. After abducting Tristram, the Norwegian merchants endure *vás ok válk, hungr ok óhægindi, hræzlur ok hryggleik*. Before engaging Mórholdr in single combat, Tristram addresses the followers of King Markis as *herrar ok höfðingjar, lendir menn ok riddarar, yngri menn ok eldri*. As we saw above, these stylistic predilections of Brother Róbert are preserved much better in *b* than in *a*. Other peculiarities of style are a tendency to use rhyme and a certain penchant for antithesis, both of which may be explained as reflections of the French source.

Probably the most awkward and objectionable stylistic feature of this saga is the frequent use of the present participle, both as part of a progressive verb-form and in a dative absolute construction. The first type is illustrated by the following sentence which describes Kanelangres' unrest after meeting Blensinbíl: *Ok svá um nóttina, sem hann er í rekkju sinni liggjandi, þá var hann þetta svá hugsandi, at hann engan svefn né hvíld er hafandi*. A characteristic example of the second type is found near the end of the saga: *Sem Ísönd var nú af skipi gengin, þá heyrði hon fólkit allt gráta með miklum harmi, öllum klukkum hringjandi*. These unnatural uses of the participle, as well as other stylistic aberrations, are obviously due to Latin and French influence.

IV

One of the most curious stories derived from *Tristrams saga* in Iceland is the rustic *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, which seems to have been written around the end of the fourteenth century. Although its literary value is slight, this "boorish account of Tristram's noble passion" (Leach) is of interest and importance for the study of Icelandic literary history during the post-classical period. Space will permit only a brief discussion of the story of Tristram and Ísodd here.

The *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* is preserved in two complete manuscripts: a vellum from the middle of the fifteenth century, AM 489 4to, in the Arna-Magnæan Collection in Copenhagen, and a paper manuscript, Lbs 2316 4to, written *ca.* 1850, in the National Library in Reykjavík. The two manuscripts differ in a number of interesting details. There is also a portion of a paper transcript of the vellum, Ny kgl. Saml. 1745 4to, in the Royal Library in Copenhagen. The saga was edited with Danish translation from the vellum by Gísli Brynjúlfsson in *Annaler for nordisk Oldkyndighed* (1851). Only sixteen lines of Gísli's sixty-page *Bemærkninger* are devoted to the saga itself. In the Foreword the editor states that the short saga is the older of the two versions of the Tristan story in Icelandic. Later on (p. 157), he comes to the conclusion that this saga is " obviously only a later Icelandic adaptation of the original Norwegian translation of the French novel." Still later, in his edition of the longer *Tristrams saga*, Gísli rejects this explanation in favour of the thesis that the *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* was based on a lost story which an Icelander had heard told abroad, probably in England or Scotland (p. 300). The few scholars who have concerned themselves with the shorter saga agree with the second surmise of Gísli. The *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, as we shall see, is clearly based on an imperfect recollection of the longer saga, which has been further distorted by the addition of names and situations from other sources.

As the story begins, Tristram's grandfather, Philippus, is king of England. Philippus was a popular royal name in the *lygisögur*: it is borne by kings in *Valdimars saga*, *Flóvents saga*, and *Bærings saga*. The name Markis was apparently forgotten, for the son of King Philippus is called Mórodd, and his sister is named Blenziblý. In a tournament Plégrus, the lover of Blenziblý, is killed by a Spanish knight, Kalegras (evidently a corruption of Kanelangres), the son of Patroclos, vassal to King Hlöðvir of Spain. Blenziblý, watching the joust from a high tower, immediately falls in love with Kalegras and has him brought to her bower. This episode may have been

borrowed from *Ívens saga*, in which Lúneta falls in love with Íven, the slayer of her husband, and marries him.¹⁵ Kalegras and Blenziblý love each other so ardently that they do not leave the bower for three years — a situation which is reminiscent of the infatuation of Erex for Evída in *Erex saga*. Kalegras goes to Spain to avenge the death of his father, and is himself mortally wounded. Blenziblý with their son Tristram is brought to Spain, but even her skill in leechcraft is unable to save her husband. Blenziblý dies of a broken heart.

Tristram is reared by his foster father Bíringr. This name seems to be a combination of Bæringr (often written Beringr in the manuscripts) and of Híringr. Both of these names occur in *Mírmanns saga*, which also knows a king of France called Hlöðvir. The abduction of Tristram and his arrival at the court of King Mórodd are quite different in the shorter saga: a king named Túrnés conquers Spain, abducts Tristram, and sells him to a viking, who abandons the boy on a skerry off the coast of England. Tristram swims ashore, proceeds to the court, and introduces himself to King Mórodd. Here he is joined in due time by his faithful foster-father Bíringr.

The rôle of Mórhold is played in the shorter saga by a King Engres of Ireland, who has a mother named Flúrent, a sister called Ísodd fagra, and a counsellor named Kæi hinn kurteisi (likewise borrowed from the translations of Arthurian romances). When Tristram slays Turnes, the sword-splinter remains lodged in Tristram's head and not, as in Gottfried and in Brother Róbert's saga, in the head of his dead enemy. This recalls the plight of the god Thór after his fight with the giant Hrungnir. A closer analogue is found in *Havalds saga Hringsbana*, where the hero, who suffers a similar wound, must be cured by the sister of the slain Hermóðr (or, in another version, by a dwarf).¹⁶

Probably the strangest distortion of a motif in the entire saga occurs in connection with Tristram's quest for healing. Tristram sets out in a ship with sixty knights, all of whom are related to each other by blood or by marriage. As the vessel approaches the coast of Ireland, Tristram provokes a fight among these knights which ends, as he intended, in the death of all of them. No reason is given for Tristram's having his sixty companions slain, nor is there anything in the story of Brother Róbert that can explain it. Tristram is cured by Ísodd, who desists from slaying him when she learns his true identity merely because her mother asks her to. In the longer saga, the sparing of Tristram's life was carefully motivated. After slaying the dragon, Tristram cuts off a piece of the tongue;

¹⁵ For other parallels see Margaret Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland*, 167.

¹⁶ Cf. the study of Gertrude Schoepperle and H. G. Leach in *Scandinavian Studies* II (1914-15), 264-276. Additional analogues are listed by Miss Schlauch, *op. cit.*, 153.

Kæi, who rides past shortly afterwards, does likewise. When Kæi asserts that he has slain the dragon, the queen calls him a liar even before she has ascertained that Tristram has killed it. It is obvious that the person who composed this saga recalled that Tristram had cut out a piece of the dragon's tongue; but he had no understanding of the importance of this in the exposure of Kæi and the identification of Tristram as the real slayer of the dragon. Unmotivated incidents like these and the garbled and confused names are cogent evidence that the shorter saga is based on a very faulty reminiscence of Brother Róbert's work. Queen Flúrent offers Tristram her daughter as a reward for his slaying the dragon, but the young hero declares that only his uncle, King Mórodd, is worthy of her.

Tristram returns to England, reports to King Mórodd, and immediately sets out again for Ireland with three ships to woo Ísodd for his uncle. Ísodd indicates that she would not be averse to marrying Tristram (another point of similarity with *Haralds saga Hringsbana*), but the marriage with King Mórodd is agreed to. Ísodd is accompanied by her foster-mother, Bringven, the daughter of a certain Jarl Cúsen. After drinking the love potion, Tristram and Ísodd tarry for three months before proceeding to England. The king magnanimously offers to give Tristram his kingdom and Ísodd, since a marriage between them would be more suitable because of their youth. (In *Haralds saga*, as we saw above, King Dagr, the father of Signý, makes a similar proposal to the young hero.)

The motif of the substituted bride is somewhat modified: Bringven takes Ísodd's place for three successive nights, and "although the king was a wise man, he did not succeed in discovering this deception." The motif of the clean and soiled shirts is retained with no essential change. When the king is finally convinced of the infidelity of his wife, he sends the two lovers off to a cave, where they have to remain for a week without food. The role of the "traitor" is played by the king's counsellor, Héri hinn hyggni, who was introduced at the very beginning of the saga. The name Héri 'hare' is rare, occurring in the *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* and the *Færeyinga þáttur*. What is remarkable is the fact that the name is found amongst the *heiti* for 'dwarf'.¹⁷ The scene with the beggar preceding the ambiguous oath, although greatly simplified, resembles that of *Grettis saga* more than that of the longer *Tristrams saga*. The incident of the audacious water, however, which Brother Róbert related with remarkable frankness and gusto for a cleric, is badly bungled. We are told that Tristram and his wife, Ísodd svarta, attended a banquet. As they were leaving, it was raining heavily. "And Ísodd said that the rain was more inquisitive than her husband." It is difficult to decide whether this amazing distortion of a piquant episode

¹⁷ See *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, ed. A. LeRoy Andrews (1909), 80.

was due to prudishness or ignorance, for we read in the very next sentence that "when they had been together for three years, Ísodd svarta gave birth to a boy child," which was named Kalegras. The death of Tristram and Queen Ísodd is related much as in the longer saga. Tristram helps his namesake slay seven brothers in Jakobsland. Seriously wounded, he sends for his family and his jarls. Later he sends for Ísodd fagra to heal his wound. When Ísodd svarta tells him that the white tents on the approaching ship are black, Tristram dies. Ísodd fagra mourns Tristram for three days and then dies of a broken heart. King Mórodd penitently goes off to Jerusalem and becomes a hermit. Kalegras Tristramsson, who succeeds his great uncle as King of England, marries Lilja, the daughter of the Emperor of Saxland. They have three children, a daughter and two sons. The vellum states that there is a "great saga" about these sons, but the nineteenth-century manuscript denies this.

V

As Henry Goddard Leach¹⁸ and Bjarni Vilhálmsón¹⁹ have pointed out, the most cogent evidence for the fact that the Icelanders truly appreciated the deep tragedy in the love of Tristram and Isönd for each other is the naively beautiful *Tristrams kvæði*, a ballad which was probably composed in the second half of the fifteenth century.²⁰ This poem, like the Faroese *Tístrams kvæði*, relates only the death of the hero.

Mortally wounded in battle by a "heathen dog," Tristran (as his name is spelled in recension A) is carried home on his shield. He sends his men to fetch Ísodd bjarta to heal him. Overcoming the anger of the king, Ísodd sets out on the voyage, which lasts eighteen days. Blue sails are hoisted on the ships as a sign to Tristran that Ísodd is coming. When the ships come into view, Ísodd svarta tells Tristran that the sails are black. Three successive stanzas in the middle of the poem begin with the line *Til orða tók hún svarta Ísodd* 'Isodd the Black began to speak'; and each of these stanzas contains the ominous false words *svört eru segl á skipunum* 'black are the sails on the ships'. Tristran turns his face to the wall and dies.

¹⁸ *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, 197-198.

¹⁹ *Riddarasögur*, lxx.

²⁰ For a brief discussion of the four versions of this ballad, see the edition of *Tristrams saga* by Gísli Brynjúlfsson, pp. 334-339. The various recensions are found in S. Grundtvig og Jón Sigurðsson, *Íslensk Fornkvæði*, (1854-85), I.

When the ships land upon the black shore, Ísodd bjarta hears the bells tolling. She goes to the church, bends down to her dead lover, and dies. At the command of jealous Ísodd svarta, the two are buried on opposite sides of the church. From their graves grow two trees, the branches of which intertwine above the roof of the church.

The ballad consists of thirty-two stanzas (in recension A) of four lines each with the rhyme-scheme *a b c b*. The metrical pattern, which is called *úrkast*, is somewhat unusual in that the second and fourth lines have only two stressed words. Each stanza is followed by the one-line refrain — *þeim var ekki skapað nema að skilja* 'For them it was fated only to sever'. This line, which embodies and intensifies the restrained pathos and the tragic undertone of the poem, was fittingly used by Leach as a motto for the chapter "Tristan in the North" in his *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*.

Kölbing's insistence (p. xvii) that this beautiful ballad was derived from the inartistic *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* seems almost preposterous. His argument is based entirely on the identity of names of the second Isolde, Ísodd svarta, "eine Namensform, die sich wohl nirgends sonst findet." The name does, of course, occur elsewhere. And even if it did not, its occurrence in the ballad would indicate at most the possibility that the name itself might have been borrowed from the derived saga. Kölbing failed to notice that the heroine's name in the ballad is not Ísodd fagra but Ísodd bjarta. Furthermore, all the other details in the ballad agree with Brother Róbert's saga. In the ballad, for example, the sails are to be blue if Ísodd bjarta is aboard one of the ships; in the longer saga we read that *Kardin siglde með Hvítum og Bláum seglum* 'Kardín sailed with white and blue sails'. In the shorter saga, there is no mention of sails; the signals are to be white or black tents (or awnings) on the ship. What is of decisive importance, however, is the fact that the ballad so effectively captures and intensifies the tragic mood of the final chapters of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*.

It seems likely, as Wolfgang Golther suggested, that the ballad composer knew both sagas.²¹ From the longer one he drew the inspiration and the material for his poem; from the shorter one, he got the suggestion for the names of the two women characters. The three verses referred to above clearly show the symbolic force of the adjective *svartur*. As the epithet of the second Ísodd, it symbolizes the evil which results from her jealousy; and the black tents and the black sands are the symbols of tragedy and death. Like the teller of folk-tales, the composer of ballads is fond of striking contrasts. *Svarta* naturally suggests *bjarta*, which not only describes the radiant beauty but also indicates the noble character of the first Ísodd. Another possible explanation of the intensification of *fagra* to *bjarta* is found in the description of Ísodd fagra in the shorter saga (Ch. 8):

She was more beautiful than any other woman. She was so fair that men saw no blemish on her; and, if one might have the boldness to say so, it seemed to people that rays of light shown from her eyes and her countenance . . . And her hair was as much fairer than gold as gold is fairer than iron.

Surely a woman so radiantly beautiful is not merely *fögr*: she is *björt*.

VI

And finally a few words should be said about the relationship of the Icelandic folk-tale of Tistram and Ísól bjarta to *Tristrams saga*. Golther sees only a very tenuous connection between the saga and the folk-tale, which he equates with the *märchen* of Maid Maleen (no. 198 in Grimm's collection). Only the names of "the light and the black Ísodd," Golther maintains, are derived from the saga; he explains the forms *Tistram* and *Ísól* as corresponding to the names in Danish and Faroese ballads.²² A careful study of the available versions of the

²¹ *Tristan und Isolde in den Dichtungen des Mittelalters und der Neuen Zeit* (1907), 188.

²² *Ibid.*

Icelandic folk-tale, however, reveals essential differences between it and the German *Märchen von der Jungfrau Maleen*, most of which can be explained as echoes of *Tristrams saga* and the derived *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*. One must be careful, too, in drawing conclusions from the forms of the names, for they appear in an almost infinite variety of spellings in the ballads.

In the Faroese ballad, the names are frú Ísin (obviously derived from Ísönd) and Tístram. In the two Danish ballads, the second of which exists in six major recensions, the many spellings of the names are merely variants of Ísalt (Eilhart) and Ísolt (Gottfried) on the one hand, and of Tristram or Tristran(t) on the other hand. Although Ísól does not occur in any of the Danish ballads available to me at present, this form could possibly have developed from Ísal or Ísolt, which do occur. This seems unlikely, however, since the Danish ballads have nothing in common with the Icelandic sagas or the Icelandic ballad.

The third edition of Jón Árnason's *Íslenzkar Þjóðsögur og Ævintýri*, brought out by Árni Böðvarsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík 1954—), contains five variants of the folk-tale and references to two others. Their titles are:

- A. *Sagan af Fertram og Ísól björtu* (II, 308-312).
- B. *Sagan af Tístram og Ísól björtu* (II, 312-317).
- C. *Tístram og Ísól bjarta* (IV, 486-489).
- D. *Sagan af Tístram og Ísoddu* (IV, 489-493).
- E. *Sagan af Helgu Kóngsdóttur* (IV, 494-495).
- F. *Sagan af Ísól björtu og Ísól svörtu*.
- G. *Sagan af Fertram og Ísoddu*.

These stories vary greatly in length and manner of presentation. Several of them have borrowed verses from another well-known *stjúpusaga* ('stepmother tale'), the *Saga af Mjaðveigu Mánadóttur*. Some have borrowed names from other tales. It is interesting to note that the name of the hero appears in its nearly "correct" form

Tristran in *E*, which is not much more than a dry summary of the story. The names of the women in *E*, however, are Helga and Sólsvört. The heroine is called Ísól bjarta in four of the versions of this tale; but the villainess is called Ísól svarta in only one. Sólsvört in *E*, to be sure, is a corruption of this name; and in *A*, *svarta* has been replaced by the synonymous *blakka*. In *D* she is called Laufey, a name borrowed from the tale of *Líneik og Laufey*. The relatively infrequent occurrence of Ísól svarta compared with Ísól bjarta, as we shall see, is not without significance. There are more variants of this tale extant than the ones listed above, and they probably contain additional motifs and name forms. Since they are not available, they must be disregarded for the moment.

If we combine those motifs which occur most frequently in the five variants contained in Jón Árnason's collection, we arrive at the following reconstruction, which may be fairly close to the original folk-tale:

A daughter, conceived in wedlock under very strange circumstances, is born to a certain king and queen. Because of her great beauty, her parents name her Ísól bjarta. The mother dies shortly after the birth of the child. Before her death, she gives her daughter a pair of scissors, a belt with magic properties, and a gold ring.

Because of his grief at the loss of his wife, the king neglects his kingdom. Therefore his counsellors urge him to marry again. With his consent, they set out to find a suitable bride. After a stormy voyage they come to an unknown land, where they hear the strains of a harp. They follow the sound and come to an opening in the forest. Here they find a beautiful woman, sitting on a golden chair and combing her hair with a golden comb. Beside her is her daughter, Ísóta, playing the harp. Their only companion is a thrall named Kollur. The woman agrees to accompany the counsellors and to marry their lord. The existence of her daughter, who accompanies her, is concealed from the king.

Meanwhile Ísól bjarta has been living in a bower built for her by her father. At an early age she begins to devote much time to the care of the sick. She frequently goes down to the seashore in search of medicinal herbs. (According to *B* there were *græðsluhús* 'houses for the sick' there; in *C* the word is *græðslusmyrsl* 'healing ointments'.) One day she discovers a

chest which has been washed up on the shore. In it are a beautiful baby boy and a note requesting that the child be baptized and named Tistram. The boy grows up with Ísól bjarta and the two become very fond of each other.

After some time has passed, the new queen grows rather cool toward her husband because he has not collected the taxes for years. The king and Tistram accordingly set out in two ships to do so. Tistram and Ísól pledge their loyalty to each other before he leaves. The king and his crew perish in a storm.

Meanwhile the queen and her daughter, who has been called svarta because she is less beautiful than Ísól bjarta, entice Ísól and her two servant girls out into the forest and push them into a deep pit. The two servants perish from hunger; Ísól is saved by the magic power of her belt. With her scissors, she cuts steps into a wall of the pit and thus escapes. She makes her way to a hut in the forest, where she lives with an old man and woman.

When Tistram returns and asks for Ísól, he is given a drink of forgetfulness by the queen. (In *D* the queen asks him to drink a *sáttabikar*, a 'peace-beaker' or 'loving cup' with her and Ísóta svarta. But the narrator explains that this is really an *óminnisveig*, a 'potion of oblivion', which causes him to forget Ísól.) At the urgent request of the queen and her daughter, Tistram consents to marry Ísóta svarta. It is stipulated that the bride must sew the wedding garments for her husband and herself. Since she is unable to sew, Ísóta hires Ísól, whom she does not recognize, to do this. Ísól sews a plain garment for Ísóta, and a beautiful garment with golden thread for Tistram.

Ísóta now requests Ísól to take her place during the marriage ceremony and during the three-day tour on horseback which precedes (or follows) it, for Ísóta is about to give birth to a child, the father of which is the thrall Kollur. The queen accompanies Tistram and Ísól on their wedding tour to make sure that Ísól keeps her promise not to talk to Tistram. Ísól does keep her promise, but as they ride past the ruins of her bower, which the queen has had burned to the ground, she speaks to them in a verse. Later, as they ride past the brook where she and Tistram pledged their troth, Ísól speaks a verse about this. She addresses still a third verse to a grove of trees.

After the wedding tour, Ísóta svarta, who has borne her child and destroyed it, changes places with the substitute bride. Before she can enter the nuptial bed, however, the deceit is discovered. Ísóta and her mother, who are really witches (*flögð*), are put to death. Tistram and Ísól bjarta are married and reign as king and queen.

The following are some of the motifs or incidents in the Icelandic tale which do not occur in the *Märchen von der Jungfrau Maleen*:

1. The unusual circumstances surrounding the conception of the child.
2. The re-marriage of the king at the insistence of his counsellors.
3. The ambassadorial voyage for the new bride.
4. The rôle of the harp.
5. The voyage of the king to collect the unpaid taxes.
6. The interest of Ísól bjarta in leechcraft.
7. The note requesting that the child be named and baptized Tistram.
8. The pit into which Ísól and her two maidservants are thrown.
9. The drink of oblivion.
10. The plain and the adorned bridal garments.
11. The reference to the brook and the grove as trysting places.
12. The reason for the bridal substitution.

All of these motifs have close parallels in the longer *Tristrams saga*, or the derived shorter one, or in both. The occurrence of all of these Tristan motifs indicates that the connection between the sagas and the folk-tale is not quite so tenuous as Golther believed.²³

I shall comment briefly on only three of these motifs. The reference to the brook and the grove is a blind motif, a faint echo from the sagas. As the significance of the brook and the grove was forgotten, the verses in several versions of the story became corrupted or were replaced by inappropriate ones from other stepmother tales. The leechcraft of Ísodd is another blind motif. In some versions of the story it was lost for this reason; in others, it was cleverly combined with the popular motif of a child's being found in a boat or box along the sea.²⁴ The attempt of the evil queen to get rid of her stepdaughter by having her thrown into a pit is reminiscent of the passage in the

²³ Cf. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Sagan af Tristan og Ísól*, xx-xxi.

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.* xxi, where Einar Ól. Sveinsson regards the chest as a transformation of the oarless boat.

shorter saga which tells of the imprisonment of Tristram and Ísodd fagra in a cave.

The only apparent point of contact between *Tristrams kvæði* and the folk-tale is the epithet *bjarta*. But this was an important one, for the new appellative in turn attracted the form *Ísól* because of its obvious association with *sól* 'sun'; and this name then replaced Ísodd as the name of the heroine in four of the seven versions of the saga considered here. In spite of the strong tendency of folk-tales to use identical names for persons of opposite characteristics together with rhyming appellatives (*Ferdinand the Faithful* and *Ferdinand the Unfaithful*, *Golden Marie* and *Black Marie*, etc.), the name *Ísól svarta* did not supplant Ísodd svarta to the same degree, evidently because the combination of the adjective 'black' with a name phonetically similar to the word for sun seemed ludicrous.²⁵

VII

Each of the three works derived from *Tristrams saga* discussed here — the shorter saga, the ballad, and the folk-tale — reflects its source in a manner peculiar to its respective *genre*. The derived saga, based on the faulty reminiscence of oral tradition, retains the general outline of the story but garbles motifs and borrows names and incidents from a variety of other sources. In spite of the general confusion of names, the author of this story has hit upon three happy designations of characters: Kæi as the name of the lying suitor of Ísodd, Héri as the name of the counsellor of King Mórodd, and Ísodd svarta as the opponent of Ísodd fagra. The ballad captures and intensifies the tragic climax of the story. The contrast between the women characters is sharpened by the intensification of the appellative of the first Ísodd from

²⁵ In the *Fjolsvinns mál* the father of Svipdagr bears the name Sólbjart (v. 47), and his bride Menglǫð is described as *in sólbjarta brúðr* (v. 42). In the same poem the father of the dwarves who built the gate Þrymgjöll is called Sólblindi (v. 10).

fagra to *bjarta*. In the folk tale the content of the saga has been lost. There remain only the names, further confused through borrowing and popular etymology, and a surprisingly large number of motifs, which have been woven more or less successfully into the general framework of the stepmother tale.

A critical edition of *Tristrams saga* will not change the findings of Bédier and Kölbing essentially, but it will add many significant details, especially in the comparison between Gottfried and the saga, and it will bring us a bit closer to the translation of Brother Róbert and thus to the original of Thomas. It will also facilitate the study of the influence of *Tristrams saga* on Icelandic literature — an area of research in which much remains to be done. And finally, a faithful English translation based on that edition will make the saga of Tristram and Isönd available to those who are not conversant with Icelandic.

A SOURCE FOR *HRAFNKELS SAGA*

By A. R. TAYLOR

THE short saga of Hrafnkell Freysgoði was for long thought of as one of the best examples of a saga-man's tale which, having been handed down from generation to generation, gave a substantially true account of the events which it describes. Its literary value was also early acknowledged, but many of its qualities were, by implication, attributed to its closeness to historical truth, which was supposed to account for its symmetry and unity of composition. But more recently critics have argued that the saga should rather be regarded as a literary composition, a short story with little or no basis in historical fact.¹ The result has been an even greater appreciation of the literary value of the saga and an increase in admiration for its author. But if the author was not describing historical events, which were the traditional basis for the Icelandic saga, are there any literary sources from which he can be shown to have taken his material?

Professor Nordal has demonstrated that the author made use of *Landnámabók*, Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók* or some other work dependent upon it, and *Droplaugarsona saga*, as well as place-names from eastern Iceland.² He adds that use may also have been made of *Heiðarvígja saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga*.³ This suggestion was accepted by the late Professor Jóhannesson, who in his edition states 'it may well be that he [the author] knew many

¹ Cf. S. Nordal, *Hrafnkatla* (*Studia Islandica* 7; 1940) and E. V. Gordon 'On Hrafnkels saga freysgoða', *Medium Ævum* VIII (1939), 1-32. Criticism of their views are to be found in K. Liestøl 'Tradisjonen i Hrafnkels saga freysgoða', *Arv* (1946), 94-110, and in M. Olsen 'En navnefeil i Hrafnkels saga', *Maal og Minne* (1945), 93-95. Nordal's main arguments, however, remain unassailed.

² Nordal, *Hrafnkatla*, 20 and 35ff.

³ *ibid.* 61.

other written works'.⁴ One of these other written works seems to have been *Fóstbræðra saga*.⁵

When the two sagas are read side by side, it is impossible to escape the conviction that the one is dependent upon the other: similarities of motif and verbal reminiscences are sufficient to preclude coincidence.

It is clear to the reader that the authors have two distinguishing features in common. The first is a fondness for proverbs,⁶ and the second an antiquarian interest in place-names.⁷ Admittedly both these characteristics will undoubtedly be found, either separately or combined, in the works of other saga-writers, and hence they can never constitute more than supporting evidence. But they must, however, weigh quite heavily when we consider how integral a part they are of *Hrafnkels saga*, which on chronological grounds must be the borrower.

Verbal reminiscences strengthen the impression of borrowing. Professor Nordal suggested Víga-Styr in *Heiðarvíga saga* as a model for Hrafnkell on the strength of the wording 'stóð mjök í einvígjum ok boetti engan mann fé'.⁸ But the parallels with *Fóstbræðra saga* are still closer.

Hrafnkels saga

[Hrafnkell] var ójafnaðarmaður mikill, en menntur vel . . . var linur ok blíður við sína menn, en stríður ok stirðlyndr við Jökulsdalsmenn, ok fengu af honum engan jafnað. Hrafnkell stóð mjök í einvígjum ok boetti engan mann fé, því at engi fekk

Fóstbræðra saga

Hann [Jǫðurr] var garpr mikill ok hǫfðingi, ódæll ok lítill jafnaðarmaður við marga menn, ríkr í heraðinu ok stórráður, vígamaður mikill ok boetti menn sjaldan fé, þótt hann vægi. (p. 126).

⁴ *Austfirðinga sögur* (Íslensk Fornrit XI; 1950), p. lv. References throughout are to this edition.

⁵ References will be made to the edition by B. K. Þórólfsson and G. Jónsson in *Vestfirðinga sögur* (Íslensk Fornrit VI; 1943).

⁶ *Hrafnkels saga*, 102. 8, 106. 28, 115. 2-3, 122. 6, etc. and in *Fóstbræðra saga*, 138. 16, 150. 1, 187. 16, 200. 3.

⁷ *Hrafnkels saga*, 97. 13, 98. 1, 99. 19, 105. 16, 119. 19, 124. 4, 301. 22-23; *Fóstbræðra saga*, 126. 8, 178. 10, 181. 15, 184. 4.

⁸ Nordal, *Hrafnkatla*, 61.

af honum neinar bætr, hvat sem hann gerði. (p. 99).

Þorbjörn beiðir Hrafnkel bóta fyrir víg sonar síns . . .
 “Er þér þat eigi ókunnigt, at ek vil engan mann fé bæta, ok verða menn þat þó svá gert at hafa. En þó læt ek svá sem mér þykki þetta verk mitt í verra lagi víga þeirra, er ek hefi unnit.” (p. 105).

“Eptir vil ek leita, ef þér vilið nokkuru bæta víg þat, er þú vátt Hávar, fœður minn.” Jðurr mælti, “Eigi veit ek, hvárt þú hefir þat spurt, at ek hefi mǫrg víg vegit ok ek hefi ekki bætt.” “Ókunnigt er mér þat,” segir Þorgeirr; “en hvat sem um þat er, þá kǫmr þetta til mín, at leita eptir þessum vígsbótum, því at mér er nær höggvit.” Jðurr segir, “Eigi er mér allfjarri skapi at minnask þín í nokkuru, en fyrir því mun ek eigi þetta víg bæta þér, Þorgeirr, at þá þykkir ǫðrum skylt, at ek bæta fleiri víg.” (p. 129).

The two descriptions are of the same man, and the variations are dictated by the part played by each in the respective sagas. Hrafnkell is ennobled and more sympathetic traits are added to his character, because he is to be the hero of the saga, though it is noteworthy that the germ of the idea that Hrafnkell recognises the justice behind Þorbjörn's plea for compensation is to be found in the conversation between Jðurr and Þorgeirr.

The connection between the two descriptions is further emphasised by a later parallel, in *Hrafnkels saga*, to the ‘því at mér er nær höggvit’ in Þorgeirr's speech above. Þorbjörn in his struggle against Hrafnkell seeks the help of his nephew Sámr and says, “Er þetta mál þann veg, þótt mér sé nánast maðrinn, at þó er yðr eigi fjarri höggvit”.⁹

A later similarity of situation produces a further similarity of wording.

⁹ *Hrafnkels saga*, 107.

Hrafnkels saga

Heilráðr muntu okkr vera, en eigi sýnisk mér þetta ráðligt. (p. 113).

(Cf. also Hina bar skjótt eptir, er lausu riðu. p. 129).

Fóstbræðra saga

"Eigi veit ek, hversu heilráð þú ert oss nú, því at þeir eru vinir Vermundar, ok mun þat eigi laust eptir renna, ef þeim er nokkut til meins gort." (p. 137).

In *Fóstbræðra saga* Sigurfljóð, for her own purposes, is asking Þorgeirr and Þormóðr to do something which it seems will bring trouble upon them — the anger of the chieftain Vermundr. In *Hrafnkels saga* Þorkell leppr is doing exactly the same; he urges Þorbjörn and Sámr to antagonize the chieftain Þormóðr, from whom they desire aid. In both stories, moreover, the inciters make sure, though in different ways, that their instruments do not suffer as a result.

Other verbal parallels between the two sagas are:

Hrafnkels saga

. . . fyrir því at má mér þat, sem yfir margan gengr. (p. 115).

. . . at leiða svá smámönnum at sækja mál á hendr honum. (p. 117).

Fóstbræðra saga

. . . ok má þér þat, sem yfir margan gengr. (p. 187).

. . . ok leiðir svá Íslendingum at berja á mínum mönnum. (p. 183).

The coincidence of the above similarities seems too close for accident, although the parallel of the wording in each, except for the proverb, is not exact. It may be that the author of *Hrafnkels saga* did not have a copy of *Fóstbræðra saga* before him when he wrote, but he must at least have known it well. Indeed, when we consider how free a use he made of his other sources, the inexactitude of the verbal parallels does not preclude the actual presence of this source. That it was in fact a direct source for him is made certain by a consideration of two of the motifs used by him in his saga.

Einarr Þorbjarnarson, Hrafnkell's shepherd, rides his

master's horse, though previously forbidden to do so, and in consequence is slain by Hrafnkell at the sheepfold.¹⁰ This motif, of the borrowing of a horse without permission, is twice used in *Fóstbræðra saga*. Jǫðurr from Skeljabrekka is on his way to Akranes to buy flour and borrows a horse from Hávarr, promising to give it back on the return journey. But finding it more convenient to use the horse for the whole of the journey back, he decides to take it all the way home and to return it when he has no further use for it. But Hávarr sees them as they go past his farm and demands the immediate return of the horse. In the subsequent quarrel Jǫðurr slays Hávarr and keeps the horse.¹¹

The second parallel is much closer, for the horse is borrowed in order to find sheep that have strayed — the purpose for which Einarr borrowed Hrafnkell's horse. Þorgeirr and his companions are on a journey from Reykjahólar to Borgarfjörðr. They break their journey in Miðdalr in order to rest; but when they wish to continue, Þorgeirr's riding-horse is missing and he has to content himself with a pack-horse for the time being. As they approach Hundadalr, they see a man riding a fine horse and driving sheep before him. Þorgeirr suspects that the horse is his and, on reaching Hundadalr, goes straight to the sheep-fold. The rider, Bjarni, is outside, still sitting on the horse. Þorgeirr asks him why he took the horse and bids him dismount. Bjarni refuses and is slain.¹²

The second motif strongly reminiscent of *Fóstbræðra saga* is in the story of the slaying of Eyvindr Bjarnason. In *Hrafnkels saga* Eyvindr, returning from abroad, rides from his ship with his wares on a train of pack-horses. As he passes below the homefield at Hrafnkelsstaðir he is seen by a garrulous serving-woman, who enters the farm and

¹⁰ *Hrafnkels saga*, Ch. 3.

¹¹ *Fóstbræðra saga*, Ch. 2.

¹² *Fóstbræðra saga*, Ch. 8.

informs her master. Hrafnkell rides after him and slays him.¹³

Again this seems to be an amalgam of two episodes in *Fóstbræðra saga*. In the first Þorgeirr is riding with his wares on pack-horses past the homefield of Höekils-Snorri's farm. The pack-horses enter the homefield and begin to crop the growing grass, and Þorgeirr tries unsuccessfully to drive them out. Höekils-Snorri, in his annoyance, attacks the horses with his spear. In a subsequent fight with Þorgeirr he is slain.¹⁴ The second episode tells how the foster-brothers, Eyjólfur and Þorgeirr hofleysa, slew each other. Eyjólfur, on his way from Reykjahólar to his home in Ólafsdalur, passes the farm at which Þorgeirr is staying. He is seen by the cowherd, Qnundr, who, just like the serving-woman in *Hrafnkels saga*, enters the farm and reports his presence.¹⁵ Þorgeirr rushes out and pursues him; they fight and are both slain.¹⁶

It is interesting that all the above parallels are from that part of *Fóstbræðra saga* which tells of Þorgeirr Hávarsson. Unfortunately, at least on a preliminary survey, this makes it impossible to say whether the *Hrafnkels saga* author knew the longer or shorter version of *Fóstbræðra saga*, for the text of Hauksbók, which represents the shorter version, is defective for the greater part of the Þorgeirr story. It might perhaps suggest that Guðbrandur Vigfússon was correct in his assumption that there once existed a separate saga of Þorgeirr which was later combined with that of Þormóður to make up *Fóstbræðra saga*.¹⁷ However, the divisions of the saga in Flateyjarbók seem to argue against such an assumption, and in any case there are at least two other possible explanations for the absence of parallels in the Þormóður part of *Fóstbræðra saga*: either it may be assumed that

¹³ *Hrafnkels saga*, Ch. 8.

¹⁴ *Fóstbræðra saga*, Ch. 12.

¹⁵ The *griðkona* in *Hrafnkels saga* may be a composite of Qnundr and the *spákerling* in *Fóstbræðra saga*.

¹⁶ *Fóstbræðra saga*, Ch. 16.

¹⁷ *Origines Islandicae*, II 673.

the author of *Hrafnkels saga* himself used a defective manuscript or else perhaps he was only interested in that part of the story which told of Þorgeirr's actions in Iceland and was not attracted by the doings of Þormóðr abroad.

This connection between the two sagas helps, I think, to explain one or two puzzling elements in *Hrafnkels saga*. If its author was attracted by the Story of the Foster-brothers, it is easy to see why he chose the names Þorgeirr and Þormóðr for two of his fictional characters.¹⁸ It is easy also to see why the chieftains who helped Sámr should come from the Vestfirðir. As E. V. Gordon pointed out, he could scarcely make use of chieftains from the east; they had to come from elsewhere.¹⁹ Yet another puzzle remains: why the author should choose Þormóðr Þjóstarsson as the name of the third brother and why he should place him at Garðar on Álptanes. *Fóstbræðra saga* suggested the name Þormóðr, and as Nordal pointed out the full name must have come from *Landnámabók*.²⁰ Yet *Landnámabók* does not mention the name of Þormóðr's farm, but simply describes Þjóstarr as living on Álptanes. When considering this problem, Nordal points out that Garðar on Álptanes was a well-known farm in the thirteenth century and that the author may well have added it to the information that he found in *Landnámabók*. Nordal, however, does not give any reason why this particular farm should have been chosen. Again *Fóstbræðra saga* may provide a clue. As it happens, there were two well-known farms with this name in the thirteenth century: Garðar á Álptanesi and Garðar á Akranesi. In *Fóstbræðra saga* we are told that Hávarr, Þorgeirr's father, was '*kynjaðr sunnan af Akranesi*' (in *Möðruvallabók* — *Ál(p)tanesi*)²¹ and from

¹⁸ Vigfússon in *Origines Islandicae*, II 194, identifies the brothers with characters in *Gísla saga*.

¹⁹ Gordon, *loc. cit.*, 6.

²⁰ Nordal, *Hrafnkatla*, 16.

²¹ *Fóstbræðra saga* 123. Does this mean our author's original had the same reading as *Möðruvallabók* here?

Landnámabók we gain the additional information that Hávarr's family originated from ‘*Garðar á Akranesi*’.²² It may well be, therefore, that the *Hrafnkels saga* author was led to Þjóstarr by way of Hávarr.

Professor Nordal's stimulating monograph on *Hrafnkels saga*, which so clearly demonstrates its fictional character and the high standing of its author, is one of the most illuminating of recent documents on the art of the Icelandic sagas and urges us to further efforts towards the understanding and appreciation of their thirteenth-century authors. We shall probably never know the origins of all the elements which go to make up *Hrafnkels saga*, but the more we can learn of its sources the more we shall appreciate its author's genius.

²² Ed. by F. Jónsson (1900), 13.

BOOK REVIEWS

OBSERVATIONS ON SYNTAX AND STYLE OF SOME ICELANDIC SAGAS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE RELATION BETWEEN *VÍGA-GLÚMS SAGA* AND *REYKDÆLA SAGA*. BY ARI C. BOUMAN. *Studia Islandica* 15a. 1956.

Professor Bouman's starting-point is the relationship between Ch. 16 of the *Víga-Glúms Saga* and Ch. 26 of the *Reykðæla Saga*, which has long been a problem, and he has put an enormous amount of labour into the making of this valuable monograph. In Part I Bouman examines eleven sagas, some of them complete, others only in parts, on the following five points of style and syntax: the number of periods, the number of syllables per period, the number of syllables per phrase, parataxis and hypotaxis. In Part II the results of the statistics obtained in Part I are applied to a section of the *Víga-Glúms Saga* (*V.Gl.*) and Ch. 26 of the *Reykðæla Saga* (*R*) and it appears that Ch. 13-16 of *V.Gl.* "stand in opposition" to the rest of the saga, while in *R* the problem only concerns Ch. 26. Bouman assumes that Ch. 13-16 of *V.Gl.* come from one source which he calls *X*. This source *X* contained two episodes which were originally individual units: the Kálfr-episode and the Skúta-episode. At some time one writer combined them (neither the author of *V.Gl.* nor the writer of *R*). The problem now is: which of the extant versions of *V.Gl.* and *R* is nearest the original *þáttir*? A very careful and thorough investigation of all the possibilities leads to the following results: the whole of *X* has been inserted in *V.Gl.*, but *R* has only inserted the *Skútu-þáttir*; the version in *Mqðruvallabók* (*M*) stands nearest to *X*; both the *Vatnshyrna*-version (*V*) and *R* have come from the *M*-version through *V.Gl.* Bouman points out, however, that this may be a simplification and that " *V.Gl.*, for instance, of which *V* is a corrupt version, might, just like *M*, derive directly from *X*. *M*, being the best of all versions, may have been written down at a later stage than *V.Gl.* from a manuscript which then was still extant " (p. 70). Yet, when all is said and done, this important study raises some doubts in one's mind.

There is first of all the general doubt one always feels about the use of stylistic statistics for problems of chronology, and any discussion of the relationship between sagas naturally involves problems of dating. Professor Bouman is himself aware of this,

for he quotes Professor Turville-Petre's *caveat* (see his edition of *V.Gl.*, Introduction, p. xix and Bouman, p. 33). In matters of style and syntax one has to take into account the personality of the writers and the nature of what they have to say.

Further, Bouman does not seem to take enough notice of the implications suggested by the existence of the longer versions *V*, *C* (A.M. 5, 4to) and *R*. They seem to point to an earlier and longer version of *V.Gl.*, now lost. Bouman also assumes this (pp. 28 and 29). Turville-Petre (p. xxx) even assumes the existence in the Middle Ages of at least two longer versions of *V.Gl.* However this may be, on p. 28 Bouman states that "Both *V* and *R* are derived versions, *V* from *M*, or possibly from *R*, *R* either directly from *X*, or from *M*, or from the longer *V.Gl.*, as represented by *V*." This, however, leaves room for another possibility, that the *þættir* may have come straight from *X* in both the longer *V.Gl.* (as represented by *V*) and *R*, in which case *V* would stand nearer to the original of *V.Gl.* than *M*. Then both the *þættir* and the whole of *V.Gl.* were shortened in *M*. This relationship virtually agrees with what Turville-Petre suggests in his Introduction, p. xxix. It is the opposite of Bouman's scheme 9, with *M* at the bottom instead of at the top. Bouman calls scheme 9 least acceptable, because "we are left with the unsurmountable difficulty of *V.Gl.* and *R* being in agreement against *M*." But if one takes *V* and *R* as representatives of now lost older and longer versions and *M* as a later abridgement "though by chance the oldest palaeographically" (Turville-Petre, p. xxx), then it does become possible that *V* and *R* or the texts they represent can be in agreement against *M*. Moreover, there is a close parallel to this state of affairs in *Egils Saga*, cf. Nordal's edition in *Íslenzk Fornrit*, II, pp. lxxxii ff. and Turville-Petre, pp. xxxi f., even if the abridgement is here not so drastic as in *V.Gl.*

These objections are not intended to show that the method applied by Bouman in this important study is wrong. What is unsatisfactory is the linking up of stylistic and syntactic features in authors with the time element implied by chronology. The method works much better within the literary field when comparing the style of various sagas, as Professor Bouman has himself shown in his admirable article 'An Aspect of Style in Icelandic Sagas', in *Neophilologus* 42 (1958), 50-67.

B. J. TIMMER.

A HISTORY OF ICELANDIC LITERATURE. By STEFÁN EINARSSON. *The Johns Hopkins Press for the American Scandinavian Foundation.* New York, 1957. xii + 409 pp.

In recent years no other scholar has done so much for the study of Icelandic language and literature abroad as Professor Stefán Einarsson. In 1945 he published his *Icelandic: Grammar, Texts, Glossary* (second edition 1949, since reprinted), and in 1948 his *History of Icelandic Prose Writers 1800-1940* (*Islandica* XXXII-XXXIII). At the same time he has published numerous articles on special topics; two of these of particular importance and interest are 'Alternate recital by twos in *Widsiþ* (?)', *Sturlunga* and *Kalevala*', *Arv* 1951, and 'The origin of Egill Skallagrímsson's *Runhenda*', *Svenska Landsmål*, 66-7 årg. (1953-4). Now he has published a survey of Icelandic literature from the beginning to the present day.

The writer of such a history is faced with many difficulties. The older literature in most of its forms has been exhaustively treated by many scholars, although their views on many important matters are far from unanimous. There are gaps even in this early field, and from the fourteenth century down to the Reformation the gaps predominate. Thereafter we have more special studies of individual writers, but there has been little critical assessment of the relative importance of this or that author, and studies of the growth of literary forms or of foreign influences, for example, are few and far between. The later part of Stefán's book is pioneering work, and should be judged as such.

In the first part of the book the author gives a concise and readable account of eddaic and scaldic poetry, with separate chapters on sacred poetry and the secular poetry of the later middle ages; the last are particularly welcome. The study of the medieval prose literature is introduced by a chapter on the literature of the clergy (like other writers, he appears to me to overstress the dichotomy of the church-state relationship in Iceland). Consideration of the Kings' Sagas is introduced by a description of the work of Ari and Sæmundr and of the *Landnámabók*. The arrangement of the following sections on the sagas is an unhappy one in that it entails some repetition of material in the chapters entitled The Sagas and The Family Sagas respectively; and in the latter chapter there is some conflict between the chronological and topographical arrangement. Of particular value is the writer's brief discussion of various general theories, like those on the origin and date of the eddaic poems, for example, where his own views are usually judicious

and independent. There are some erroneous or misleading statements,¹ but these 170 pages dealing with pre-Reformation literature make a good introduction to the subject.

Roughly the same space is devoted to post-Reformation literature, and more than half of this to the period from 1874 to the present day. Here, inevitably, the book tends to disintegrate, to become a chronicle rather than a history. Each chapter begins with a few pages devoted to the discussion of foreign influences, the leaders of literary opinion, the development of literary genres, and continues with portraits of individual writers. Here the author does his best to give something more than a mere catalogue of career and publications, but in general he is too much the chronicler and too little the critic. His interest in and sympathy for younger living writers is refreshing.

The book is furnished with an admirable index, a bibliography and list of translations. There are times when precise bibliographical references would have been useful in the text instead of the mere mention of the year in which a scholar published his views. The style is sometimes curiously undignified; I do not think that this impression is entirely due to differences in American and English idiom. PETER FOOTE

ÍSLENZK ORÐTÖK. By HALLDÓR HALLDÓRSSON. *Ísafoldarprentsmiðja h.f. Reykjavík*, 1954. 416 pp.

ÖRLÖG ORÐANNA. By HALLDÓR HALLDÓRSSON. *Bókaforlag Odds Björnssonar. Akureyri*, 1958. 199 pp.

These two books are important contributions to the study of Icelandic idiom and vocabulary. In the first, the author writes a theoretical introduction of some 60 pages on the definition of the concept *orðtak*, with special consideration of the metaphorical idiom, which is his main subject, and of the changes to which such idioms are subject through factors like contamination, verbal coalescence, ellipsis, and popular etymology. This is followed by a list of idioms classified according to their origin: from warfare, sports and games, fishing and hunting, seafaring, farming,

¹ The count of church-dedications, p. 77, should have been taken from Guðbrandur Jónsson, *Safn til sögu Íslands* V (1915-29), Nr. 6, 29 ff., not from Jón Þorkelsson. According to the *Jóns saga helga*, 'the impious and sexy dancing' could not have been introduced by the bishop's 'French cantor' (pp. 96-7; cf. Dag Strömbäck, 'Cult remnants in Icelandic dramatic dances', *Arv* 1948). The chronological order, *Laxdæla saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, *Gísla saga*, p. 138, is not the one usually accepted; *Eyrbyggja saga* seems undoubtedly to have borrowed from *Gísla saga*. The comment on *Grœnlendinga saga*, p. 139, must be revised in the light of Jón Jóhannesson's important article in *Nordæla* (1956), although this presumably came too late to be of use to the author.

the weather and land-travel, buildings, furniture and food, crafts and handwork, the law, popular beliefs and saga-literature, with others of foreign or miscellaneous origin. This list is enough to show at once how deeply concerned the student of idiom must be with every branch of cultural history, and suggests too that the historian of Icelandic culture will have a useful aid in the present work. The remainder of the book then consists of a list of 830 idioms, arranged in alphabetical order, each with a discussion of its meaning and a note of its earliest recorded use, parallels in other languages, and its origin. Obviously, there must often be uncertainty in the conclusions reached, and under present conditions the instances recorded as the earliest, for example, must often be doubtful.¹ Apart from its intrinsic value as a contribution to our knowledge of the history of Icelandic, it will also prove an extremely useful reference-book for anyone concerned with the interpretation of Icelandic texts, old or modern.

The second book mentioned above is a collection of essays on both idioms and single words and expressions, including some interesting contributions to the study of idiom from the point of view of Icelandic dialect-geography, a subject which urgently needs intensive study in all its aspects.² The most interesting essay in the book is called 'Keisaraskurður. Óborinn. Óborið fé'. In this the author comes to the conclusion that the expression *barn óborit* must be understood on the basis of the phrase *bera í ætt* and means an unacknowledged child; similarly *óborið fé* means *fé óborið undir mark*, an unmarked animal, a usage attested in the south of Iceland in the eighteenth century and in Mýrasýsla in the nineteenth. Neither of the expressions has anything to do with Cæsarian delivery, as has been commonly held in recent years. We can hardly reproach the author for not being a folklorist, but in this essay and in some others we are left hungry for more when, at the end, he refers to 'some kind of folk-belief' as an element in the full explanation of a particular phrase. Amplification of such hints on a comparative basis would be welcome.

It is important to note that in both books much use has been made of the collections of the *Orðabók Háskólans*, in preparation at the University of Iceland under the direction of Dr. Jakob Benediktsson, which have now reached such proportions that they cannot be safely ignored by any worker in the field of Icelandic linguistic history.

PETER FOOTE

¹ The critique by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Skírnir* CXXVIII (1954), 206-18, should, for instance, be read in conjunction with the book.

² See the admirable survey by Karl-Hampus Dahlstedt, 'Isländsk Dialektgeografi', *Scripta Islandica: Isländska Sällskapets Årsbok* 9 (1958), 5-33.

ASPECTS OF TRANSLATION. STUDIES IN COMMUNICATION 2. *The Communication Research Centre, University College, London. Secker and Warburg, 1958. viii + 145 pp.*

We must all be concerned with translation and translations. A student's introduction to medieval Icelandic literature will often be through the medium of translation, and his impression of that literature may well never lose the colouring which the translators have imposed on the originals. Given the distance in time and civilization, the use of some colouring appears unavoidable, and it becomes then a question of shades and quantities. In the end, of course, the translator is faced with a series of tiny individual problems which have to be solved in some consistent and coherent way, but to which no single formula can be applied. The first two essays in the present book can be warmly recommended to anyone interested in the general problems of literary translation. Professor L. Forster brilliantly clarifies our thoughts for us in 'Translation: An Introduction', and Dr. L. W. Tancock, in 'Some Problems of Style in Translation from French', offers much sound advice which may be safely applied in other fields than his own. The other essays in the book are concerned with other aspects of the subject, including one on the linguistics of translation by C. Rabin.

PETER FOOTE

AN INTRODUCTION TO OLD NORSE. By E. V. GORDON. Second Edition revised by A. R. TAYLOR. *Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1957. lxxxii + 412 pp., with Illustrations, Diagrams, Maps.*

It is now more than thirty years since the late Professor E. V. Gordon's *Introduction to Old Norse* was first published, and after several reprintings, the book has now received a thorough and masterly revision at the capable hands of Mr. A. R. Taylor of Leeds University, who was President of our Society from 1952 to 1954. From the compendious pages of the first edition a generation of students learnt to read the best medieval prose of western Europe with some linguistic accuracy, and gained a new conception not only of the 'fearful land' of Iceland but also of the whole Teutonic world of early times.

Only those who have attempted a similar compilation can have accurate knowledge of the difficulties of such an undertaking, for the very wealth of material at an editor's disposal makes his task all the more formidable. If there were some bad misprints in the original edition, there was also ample compensation in the classic introductory essay, the judicious selection of extracts,

and the informative Notes and Glossary. Some, perhaps, may consider the sections on Runic inscriptions and the phonology of Old Norwegian and East Norse strong meat for an *Introduction*, and think Extract IA not too happy a choice for a beginner, preferring, say, the rich variety of Snorri's account of the death of Balder, or complain that Harald the Fairhaired is slighted by one bare mention in the texts — but these are minor things and personal prejudices. The book is undoubtedly a classic, and endures to perpetuate the memory of one of the most devoted and best loved of our northern scholars.

Mr. Taylor was privileged to be Gordon's pupil; and he has spared no pains to repay the debt for the inspiring teaching he received by undertaking this revision and bringing it to so successful a conclusion. The original intention was to revise the book on the plates, but when this plan proved impracticable, the decision was taken to reset the book, and Mr. Taylor was able to bring it up to date in the light of recent scholarship. No attempt has been made, except in small details, to alter the already existing texts, but references have been given to more modern editions in the short introduction to each extract; and, by a happy inspiration, Mr. Taylor decided to replace Selection VI by the whole of *Hrafnkels saga*, in the belief that it would be an improvement if one short saga could be included in its entirety. Some alterations, too, have been made to the account of the Grammar: for example, reference is made to the theories of Kock and Sturtevant on 'Front Mutation', and to the views of Svensson on 'Fracture'; and users of the book are constantly finding themselves indebted to Mr. Taylor for observations embedded in the Notes and Glossary which clarify some of the hitherto unexplained obscurities of meaning or interpretation. Most welcome is the rewriting of the chapter on the sagas, where the results of recent investigations into their origin and development are given with clarity and in a style to match the original *Introduction*. Although the price of the book is high, it is not too much to pay for a re-issue of this standard work enriched as it is by Mr. Taylor's contributions.

G. N. GARMONSWAY

THE PLACE-NAMES OF DERBYSHIRE. By K. CAMERON. English Place-Name Society, Vols. XXVII-XXIX. *Cambridge: The University Press* 1959.

Anyone who is engaged in trying to arouse enthusiasm for "language" in university students knows the value of the

Place-Name Society's volumes; they can always be relied on to provide the link between theory and practice in little more than the time needed to consult the index and turn over the pages. The three latest volumes are as fascinating as their predecessors for the linguist, the historian and the merely curious "general reader". All three will, for instance, find great interest in the material collected around one of the distinctive features of Derbyshire: the mining, from Roman times to the nineteenth century, of lead and silver in a western area from Wirksworth to Castleton. This industry produces an element not previously noted by the Survey: *bole* "a place where ore was smelted before the invention of furnaces", as in Burton Bole and Bole Hill; and it is responsible for occupational surnames like Boler, Jagger, Miner; for the specialised meanings of *gang* as "a lead-mine which has a grove or shaft whereby to descend to the foot" (e.g. Yearde Gange (1576)), and of *rake* as a vertical vein of ore (Middlehillrake (1653)); and for an unexpected connection between Derbyshire and the South-West where, from 1308 to 1333, hundreds of the best miners from Derbyshire were impressed to work in the royal stannaries, so that Dymdsale Wood in Devonshire is almost certainly called after a family coming from Dimonsdale in Cromford. Distinctive lead-mining terms are also to be found in a group of minor names and field-names.

Although the Scandinavian element is much slighter than in the neighbouring country of Nottinghamshire (there are only ten examples of *-by*, for instance), it gave its name to the county itself and to its chief town, here replacing the native Northworthy. Many of the Scandinavian names, besides the obvious Denby, are of Danish rather than Norwegian origin, the three Normanton names serving to emphasise Danish preponderance.¹ Of special interest is the name Ireton, with ON *Íri* as its first element, used of a Scandinavian who had been in Ireland before coming to England, or of an Irishman who accompanied vikings to England. It can be set beside Mammerton, which preserves the Old Irish personal name *Mael Maire*; Bretby, the farm of the Britons, probably men who accompanied the Scandinavians in their settlement; and Mercaston, containing the British *Merchiaun*.

In his preface, Dr. Cameron, while emphasising his debt to local antiquarians and "interested amateurs", comments on the fact that Derbyshire possesses no County Archives. It is to be hoped that the publication of the present volumes will encourage the authorities to make good this lack, since, as the editor says,

¹ See Dr. Cameron's separate survey, 'The Scandinavians in Derbyshire: the place-name evidence', *Nottingham Mediaeval Studies* II (1958), 86-118.

“work in various fields of the county’s past will inevitably suffer while such a situation persists”.

Useful features of the work are the six small maps showing the distribution of elements, and an index of field-names separate from that of town and village names.

KATHLEEN M. DEXTER

THE ARNAMAGNÆAN DICTIONARY

IN September 1959, the staff of the Old Icelandic Dictionary undertaken by the Arnamagnæan Commission can survey the results of twenty years' work. This dictionary will include words from the earliest period down to the sixteenth century, the starting-point of the dictionary now being prepared by the University of Iceland under the direction of Dr. Jakob Benediktsson.

The editor of the Arnamagnæan dictionary (*Den Arnamagnæanske Kommissions Ordbog*), Dr. Ole Widding, writes from Copenhagen to say that the preliminary work is now nearly complete. More than half a million slips have been assembled and catalogued, from Old Icelandic texts read by qualified scholars. Full advantage has been taken of the work of modern editors, but it has been necessary to read in manuscript the many variant versions of published texts, and other items never yet printed. Material for reassessing textual traditions will be a valuable by-product of these investigations; Dr. Widding's article in the *Saga-Book* XIV (1956-7), 291-95, gives a foretaste of the results that may be expected.

There is still time for the editor to consider records of vocabulary and discussions of semantic development or other matters concerning the history of words. Dr. Widding will be grateful for offprints of articles or any similar material that scholars are able to contribute. The address is: Den Arnamagnæanske Kommissions Ordbog, Proviantgaarden, Christians Brygge 8, Copenhagen K.

