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SAXO GRAMMATICUS AND SCANDINAVIAN HISTORICAL TRADITION.

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THE *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus is well known to consist of two main parts. The first—occupying Books I-IX—deals with Danish legendary history in the heroic age, and has been freely used by all modern students of Germanic legend. The second main part of Saxo's history occupies the bulk of Book XI and the whole of Books XII-XVI. It deals with the history of Denmark from the time when Sveinn Úlfsson was firmly established on the throne by the death of his great enemy, Haraldr Harthráði, in 1066 down to Saxo's own period, and is well known to historians as a source of major importance. Between these two parts of Saxo's work there is a short section, occupying Book X and the first few pages of Book XI, which has attracted less attention than the other two, but which is full of interest, especially to the English student, for it deals with the period from 925 to 1066, during which Danish and English affairs were most intermingled, and during a part of which England was a province of a Danish empire. Upon this part of Saxo's work, apart from a few rather perplexed references to it in Freeman's *Norman Conquest*, modern historians of Anglo-Saxon England have hardly drawn at all. This is perhaps understandable: it is often clearly at fault historically and much of it is derived from Adam of Bremen. Accordingly, the historian tends to dismiss this part of Saxo as an

embroidery upon Adam which adds nothing to its source which can be trusted, and it must be admitted that its contribution to history is not great. It is the student of Scandinavian historical tradition, rather than the pure historian, who has lost by the neglect of the part of Saxo to which I refer. The period with which it deals corresponds to that covered by the great Icelandic Sagas of the kings of Norway from Haraldr Hárfagri to Haraldr Harthráthi, during which the political contacts of Denmark and Norway were so close that Saxo and these Sagas inevitably often handle the same matters. It is thus the student of the traditions embodied in these Sagas, and hence the Saga critic in general, who will find this portion of Saxo of the greatest value. The major outline of the history contained in the Sagas mentioned is shown by comparison with the Norwegian compendia of history,¹ and with West Norse poems of about the same date,² to represent a fairly settled West Norse tradition, which already existed shortly before 1200. Comparison of this tradition with a non-West Norse tradition is seldom possible. Adam of Bremen and other German chroniclers are meagre and disjointed in their allusions to Scandinavian affairs. English and Celtic chroniclers seldom mention Scandinavian matters, and when they do so it is only to horrify by the grossness of their misconceptions. Sven Aggeson's Danish history is brief, and the shadow of Adam of Bremen lies heavily upon the *Annals of Roskilde*. Saxo alone offers a connected and fairly detailed account of any part of the Scandinavian history of the tenth and the

¹ I.e. Theodricus Monachus; *Historia Norvegiæ*; *Ágrip*.

² I refer to *Nóregskonungatal*; *Óláfs drápa Tryggvasonar*; *Rekstefja*; *Jónsvíkingadrápa*; *Bíadrápa*; *Geisli*. All these poems are to be placed in the twelfth or very early thirteenth century, and are derived from the West Norse historical tradition independently of the Sagas. Accordingly, their value to the student of the state of the tradition in question before it received literary form in the Sagas is great, and the general neglect of them is to be regretted. Their existence seems still entirely unknown to English historians.

first half of the eleventh century, which may be profitably compared with the West Norse accounts of that period.

The Sagas of the Norwegian kings from Haraldr I to Haraldr II are most familiar in the versions of Snorri in *Heimskringla*. Older versions are, of course, extant of several of them, but these do not differ from Snorri in the major outline of history presented,¹ and the same outline appears in the Norwegian compendia, and to some extent in the West Norse poems alluded to above, though these cover only a part of the period. *Heimskringla* can, therefore, fairly be regarded as giving the history of this period according to a well-established West Norse tradition of the twelfth century. I propose to examine Saxo's account of the same period with two questions in mind. Firstly, how far does Saxo in dealing with this period draw upon tradition, and how far does he offer reproductions or (like the *Annals of Roskilde*) literary modifications of Adam of Bremen? Secondly, does Saxo suggest that the Danish historical tradition was in such close agreement with the West Norse tradition that this must be explained as due either to the direct influence of the one upon the other (and Saxo, it may be remembered, claims to have had Icelandic informants), or to the two traditions having risen independently from the same historical truths; or does he rather suggest that the Danish historical tradition differed so widely from the West Norse that neither can be regarded as founded upon long transmitted memories of real events, but that both have

¹ Snorri diverges most in purely historical matters from his predecessors in *Haralds saga Harðráða*, because he elected to follow *Hákonar saga Ívarsonar*, rather than the earlier Saga of Haraldr preserved in *Morkinskinna* and *Flateyjarbók* and summarised in *Fagrskinna*. Nineteenth-century scholars tended to place a high historical value on *Hákonar Saga* (which is extant in a late recension in a fragmentary state), but E. Bull, in his recent sketch of the history of the period (*Det Norske folks liv og historie*, II, 97), reverts to the older Saga of Haraldr as a source. In his article on *Hákonar Saga* the same scholar has demonstrated its historical unreliability (*Edda*, 1927, pp. 33-44).

independently distorted history, or, at least, that one has distorted history, and the other preserved it, so that we cannot now decide which should be believed, except when we have an account in a good non-Scandinavian source to decide the matter? Should the enquiry lead to the latter conclusion, it will follow that the Sagas which deal with Icelandic affairs must also be suspected of presenting a development from history rather than history itself.

Saxo opens his tenth book with the succession of Haraldr Blátönn to the throne of Denmark, an event which he makes practically contemporary with Æthelstan's succession in England. Both Danish and Icelandic sources¹ give Haraldr a reign of fifty years, and Snorri, *Fagrskinna*, *Ágrip*, and the *Historia Norvegiae* regard his reign as having begun in the time of Hákon Góthi,² who was, of course, a younger contemporary of Æthelstan. Haraldr died about 986, so there is no difficulty in regarding his reign as extending back into the time of Æthelstan, though we cannot extend it to the beginning of Æthelstan's reign (925) as Saxo does. According to Saxo, the king of Norway, who is not named but is evidently Haraldr Hárfagri, launched an attack on Æthelstan when that king succeeded to the English throne, and the war ended with a treaty under which Æthelstan had to bring up Hákon, the son of the Norwegian king. This story of the fostering of Hákon is, of course, in remarkable agreement with a well known story found in the West Norse sources, except that in the latter the relationships of Haraldr of Norway and Æthelstan are entirely friendly. On the other hand, a bellicose expedition of Haraldr to the British Isles, though not to England, is mentioned by both Snorri, who quotes apparently early verse to support his

¹ *Chronicon Erixi*; *Annals of Roskilde*; *Knyllinga Saga*. So also Adam of Bremen, II, 26.

² *Heimskringla*, *Hákonar saga Góða*, chap. 10; *Fagrskinna*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, p. 31; *Ágrip*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, p. 12; Storm's *Monumenta historica Norvegiæ*, p. 106.

story,¹ and by a Celtic source.² Saxo seems to give a version in which the stories of the expedition and of the fostering are combined and it is unlikely that an actual clash of arms between England and Norway would have escaped all reference in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Yet it is by no means impossible that Æthelstan's fostering of Hákon was part of a treaty with a possible enemy, and we have no right to regard Saxo as completely wrong in his version of the story.

Saxo goes on to describe how Hákon ultimately returned to Norway, where he became king, whereupon Haraldr, son of Gunnhildr, asked the help of Haraldr of Denmark. (Saxo does not indicate precisely who Haraldr, son of Gunnhildr, was). Haraldr of Denmark places a fleet under Eyvindr and Karlshöfuth at the suppliant's disposal, and Norway is invaded. In the ensuing battle, Hákon kills Eyvindr, and one Thórálfr kills Karlshöfuth. Hákon is struck down by a mysterious arrow, some say owing to the spells of Gunnhildr. The extraordinary similarity of all this to the West Norse accounts of Hákon's last fight hardly needs to be pointed out, but it may be remarked that there also one leader of the Danish contingent is called Eyvindr, and he is killed by Hákon, while in Snorri's account the other Danish leader (who is called Álfr) is killed by Hákon's supporter, Thórálfr the Icelander. Hákon in both Saxo and the West Norse story is killed by a mysterious arrow, and though magic is not hinted at in the West Norse sources,³ Saxo's version shows that Gunnhildr's reputation as a sorceress, so familiar in the Sagas, was known to him. With this similarity of detail in the description of the final battle, the similarity of

¹ *Haralds saga Hárfagra*, chap. 22; cf. *Orkneyinga Saga*, chap. 4; *Landnámabók* (chap. 270, *Hauksbók*; chap. 309, *Sturlubók*).

² See the genealogical introduction to *Hanes Gruffydd ap Cynan*.

³ Unless the words of Theodricus, *quod quidam imputant militiæ Gunnildar*, be so taken; but *Ágrip*, which uses Theodricus as a source, has *með görningom Gunhildar*.

Saxo's account of the fall of Hákon to that in the West Norse sources ends. In the latter, the sons of Gunnhildr, with Danish help, make several major attacks on Hákon before the final successful one, and it is now necessary to consider whether this story is in any way better founded than that of Saxo, in which one immediately successful attack is made. Theodricus Monachus is very brief in his account of the matter. He mentions only the final battle, but says that the war lasted five years. The *Historia Norvegiae* mentions, in addition to the final battle, a serious attack upon Hákon, which he repulsed at the battle of Fræthi, and with this *Fagrskinna* agrees. *Ágrip*, however, like Snorri, has two major invasions before the final one: the first is repulsed at Ögvaldsnes, the second at Fræthi. It is obvious that the historicity of these two battles can be regarded as proved in the face of Saxo's silence only if skaldic verse can be produced which definitely alludes to them. Now, of these two battles, *Fagrskinna* mentions only Fræthi, and it does not quote or allude to a single verse in the section devoted to it. Snorri, in describing the battle of Ögvaldsnes, quotes two verses said to be by Guthormr Sindri. The first of these Snorri declares to allude to the death in the battle of Guthormr Eiríksson, but it only indicates that an unnamed hero killed an unnamed king.³ The second of these verses describes how an unnamed hero put all the sons of his brother Eiríkr to flight, and though Hákon is, no doubt, the hero in question, the incident alluded to may be the flight of the sons of Eiríkr when Hákon returned to Norway. Snorri produces a further verse by Guthormr to illustrate the battle of Fræthi, but this is a description of prowess without names, and it is impossible to say to whom or to what occasion it refers. All the sources which mention Fræthi state that Gamli Eiríksson was killed

³ It may be observed that according to *Fagrskinna*, p. 57, Guthormr fell on a viking cruise, not in battle with Hákon.

there, and Snorri and *Fagrskinna* quote a flitting of the poets Eyvindr Finnsson and Glúmr Geirason,¹ which, if the verses be genuine, shows that Hákon was in some way responsible for Gamli's death. These verses, however, are not sufficient to prove that Hákon ever had a major battle with the sons of Eiríkr between the time when they first withdrew before him and the last battle: Gamli may have fallen on either of these occasions. Accordingly, it is not possible by any means at our disposal to decide whether Saxo's one-battle war or Snorri's three-battle war is nearer the truth.

Saxo next describes the ill-fated attempt of Styrbjörn to remove his uncle Eiríkr inn Sigrsæli from the throne of Sweden with Danish help. We have two West Norse versions of the story, one in *Knyllinga Saga*, and one in *Styrbjarnar þáttr*. These two versions differ considerably from each other and from Saxo in detail, but all three accounts agree that Styrbjörn's expedition failed because Haraldr of Denmark deserted him. The main difference of Saxo's version from the others is that he clears Haraldr's character, and at the same time neatly links the story to another one, to which it will soon be necessary to return, by making Haraldr desert Styrbjörn's cause before the start of the expedition, because the Emperor Otho had launched an expedition against Denmark. Styrbjörn goes on alone, owing to the taunts of his foolhardy companions. This is probably a literary re-modelling of the story, and one may assume that the tradition received by Saxo did not materially differ from the familiar West Norse story in which Haraldr deserts Styrbjörn at a critical stage in the expedition, in which, according to the *þáttr*, he was from the first an unwilling participant. It is, however, of considerable interest that Saxo credits Haraldr with the foundation of Jómsborg, and makes him install Styrbjörn as its first governor, when the Swedish

¹ *Heimskringla*, *Haralds saga Gráfeldar*, chap. 1; *Fagrskinna*, pp. 50-1.

prince comes to him as a suppliant. In the *þáttr*, Styrbjörn is the leader of the Jónsborg vikings, but Jónsborg is not a Danish outpost. Of the West Norse sources only *Fagrskinna* and *Knyttlinga Saga* make Jónsborg a Danish outpost, founded in Haraldr's time, the other authorities making it an independent nest of pirates founded before or after Haraldr's death. Clearly we have considerable divergence among the West Norse sources, some of them agreeing more closely with Saxo than others. It may be noted that Sven Aggesøn agrees with Saxo in regarding Jónsborg as a foundation of Haraldr's, but he dates it from a later period, when Haraldr fled east before his rebel son. Since the historicity of the Jónsborg pirates' lair is now generally rejected, we do not have to consider which account of its foundation is the nearest to the truth. We need only note that again we have found tradition divided against itself.

It has been remarked above that Saxo connects the Othonian invasion of Denmark with Haraldr's desertion of Styrbjörn. Since he connects Haraldr's conversion with the peace which concludes the war, we may assume that it is the unhistoric invasion of Otho I which is referred to, and we may regard the preliminary defeat of the Emperor described by Saxo as a literary embroidery upon Adam of Bremen dictated by patriotic considerations. There is no reason to suppose either that this unhistoric invasion had any place in Danish tradition, or that Saxo has used genuine traditions relating to the historic invasion of Otho II to embellish the unhistoric invasion of Otho I.¹

Saxo makes Hákon Hlathjarl, the ruler of Norway,²

¹ On Saxo's story of how Otho cast his spear over the waters of the Limfjord, see Müller's edition of Saxo, II, p. 287. It is merely an amplification of Adam's statement, that the sea between Norway and Denmark received the name *Ottinsund* from the Emperor's victory, into a story of a familiar type.

² Saxo does not reproduce Adam of Bremen's statement (II, 22) that Hákon owed his kingdom to Danish help. He may have thought this a confusion with the Danish restoration of Haraldr Gunnhildarson. He, however, accepts

whom he assumed to be a son of Haraldr Gunnhildarson (a natural error, since he was his successor), stop his tribute to Denmark, when that kingdom was in difficulties owing to the Othonian invasion. The West Norse sources agree with Saxo on this point, and quote skaldic verses to confirm that Hakon stopped the tribute. Saxo, however, dates the origin of this tribute back to the restoration of Haraldr Gunnhildarson, but the West Norse sources connect it with the restoration of Hákon Hlathajarl himself. Once again Danish and West Norse traditions are in conflict. Saxo, furthermore, regards the attack on Norway by forces of uncertain composition with Danish backing, whom tradition identified with the legendary Jómsvíkings, as an immediate consequence of the stopping of the tribute, whereas the West Norse tradition places this attack after the death of Haraldr Blátönn. Again we have a disagreement between the Danish and West Norse traditions, and here several considerations suggest that the Danish account is correct, and that the West Norse version places the attack too late.¹ The description which Saxo gives of the Jómsvíking battle, however, has many points of similarity with those in the Sagas, especially the grim story of Hákon's human sacrifice in the course of the battle. Saxo names several Jómsborg chiefs, and two of these, Búi and Sigvaldi, are famous in West Norse tradition.

I do not wish to dwell at length upon the different accounts of Haraldr Blátönn's deposition and death at the hands of his son Sveinn and Pálnatóki, for it concerns my subject only to point out that, while in all the

Adam's view that Tryggvi ruled Norway between Hákon and Oláfr Tryggvason, and states that this Tryggvi was once expelled from his kingdom and received Danish help. He does not reproduce Adam's statement that Tryggvi was a son of Hákon, nor does he mention the mysterious Harthild-said by Adam (l.c.) to have been a son of Hákon, and his immediate successor.

¹ See Bjarni Aðalbiarnarson's edition of *Heimskringla*, I (Reykjavík 1941, p. cxii).

Scandinavian accounts the Jónsborg vikings play a part,¹ in the West Norse accounts Pálnatóki, the Jónsborg leader, supports Sveinn, whereas, in Sven Aggesøn and Saxo, Haraldr takes refuge at Jóm. In Sven Aggesøn, Pálnatóki supports Haraldr, and, although in Saxo he supports Sveinn, he has there no connection with the Jónsborg settlement. There is very good non-Scandinavian evidence that Haraldr did take refuge in a Slavonic country at the end of his reign,² so here again the Danish tradition seems to contain a greater element of truth than the West Norse. Saxo and Sven Aggesøn, while telling widely different stories, have sufficient agreements on points concerning which Adam of Bremen is silent to show that they draw on tradition concerning Haraldr's end, and that Adam is not the sole source of their versions. For example, in both these writers, Haraldr is engaged in erecting a monument to his mother when his son's rebellion breaks out.

Saxo and Sven Aggesøn, the Icelandic Sagas, and the German chroniclers Adam of Bremen and Thietmar, all have stories to the effect that Sveinn of Denmark was captured and held to ransom by his enemies early in his reign. The accounts differ so widely that it is not possible to decide even vaguely the nature of the incident which underlies them. Nevertheless, Saxo and Sven Aggesøn, while telling obviously independent stories, have in common the feature that Sveinn was ransomed by the women of his country with their jewels, and thus show that they are working on a Danish traditional account of the matter, and not merely embroidering upon Adam of Bremen.³

¹ Except, of course, in Danish chronicles which merely follow Adam of Bremen.

² Adam of Bremen, II, 25-6; *Encomium Emmae*, I, 1.

³ Saxo shares with the *Annals of Roskilde* and the *Chronicon Erici* the view that Sveinn was captured three times: Adam says twice, other authorities (except those which follow Adam) once.

Adam follows his account of Sveinn's capture with his famous and now discredited story that Eiríkr of Sweden expelled Sveinn from Denmark soon after the latter began to reign. Sveinn applied vainly for help to Thruccho, king of Norway. This Thruccho is Tryggvi, whom Adam, knowing him to be Óláfr's father, assumes to have been a son of Hákon Hlathjarl, and to have ruled between Hákon and Óláfr. This inept handling of the Norwegian royal genealogy is typical of all non-West Norse authorities.¹ Next, Sveinn sought help from Æthelred of England, again in vain, but finally the king of Scotland entertained him for fourteen years. On the death of Eiríkr, Sveinn returned, but was expelled again by Eiríkr's son, Óláfr. At this point, Sveinn underwent a spiritual regeneration, and the heart of his enemy was softened, so that he restored Sveinn to his kingdom. Saxo reproduces this ridiculous story, which seems to have no better foundation than Sveinn's frequent absences from Denmark on foreign expeditions, and follows Adam so closely that there is no reason to believe that the story had any place in Danish tradition. Saxo, however, knows that Tryggvi was never king of Norway, so he makes Óláfr Tryggvason the king whom Sveinn asks for help. He, however, spoils the effect of this reasonable alteration by making Eadweard (d. 978), instead of Æthelred, the king of England to whom Sveinn turned, when Óláfr of Norway (who did not come to the throne till 995) rejected his petition.² Saxo also omits Sveinn's clash of arms with Eiríkr's son.

Saxo gives a detailed account of Sveinn's defeat of Óláfr Tryggvason, and, although we have no account of

¹ One need only quote as an example William of Malmesbury's extraordinary attempt to trace the succession of the kings of Norway from Óláfr Helgi to his own time (*Gesta Regum*, III, 260).

² Saxo, it must be admitted, says that at the time when Sveinn applied for help to Óláfr, the latter was ruling Norway, but did not yet enjoy the title of king.

the matter by Sven Aggesøn, Saxo has so many details, which are not found in Adam of Bremen, that we can have no doubt that he is drawing on Danish traditions which resembled but were not identical with those found in the West Norse sources. Adam merely makes Óláfr Tryggvason perish in an attempt to end the threat implied in the good relationships which Sveinn and Óláfr of Sweden have established. He has the well-known story of Óláfr's final leap into the sea. Saxo, like the West Norse sources, traces the beginning of the war to an insult offered by Óláfr to Sigríthr, the widow of Eiríkr of Sweden. Óláfr seeks her hand in marriage, aiming at combining forces with Sweden. Sveinn, however, has the merits of his daughter Thyri brought to Óláfr's attention, and so Óláfr having secured a promise of her hand, when he meets Sigríthr, has her tipped into the sea, as she is coming on board his ship. Sveinn then married Sigríthr himself, and refused to allow the marriage of Óláfr and his daughter to proceed. Óláfr, robbed of both royal ladies, sets out to avenge himself, but falls in a sea fight, in describing which Saxo, like Adam and the West Norse sources, tells the story of Óláfr's leap into the sea. Saxo also knows the famous story of Einarr Thambarskelfir's bow. As in the cases of the last battle of Hákon Góthi, and of the Jómsvíking battle, we see here that the Danish and West Norse historical traditions agree to a considerable extent concerning the details of a great fight, while diverging widely concerning the circumstances leading up to it. In the West Norse accounts, Óláfr actually marries Thyri (whom they make Sveinn's sister, not his daughter), and one cause of the war is the bad feeling between her and her brother Sveinn. Adam of Bremen appears to confirm the West Norse version, for he says that Óláfr was married to a noble Danish lady, who incited him to war against Denmark. Adam gives her name in the form *Thore*. Sigríthr is now held not to have been an historical

figure, and both the Danish and the West Norse traditions are historically at fault in introducing her into the story. Saxo, however, is the more at fault, since he makes her the mother of Knútr.

Saxo and Sven Aggesøn suggest by their silence that Sveinn's wars in England were entirely forgotten by Danish historical tradition, or, rather, were replaced by legends about his early capture by his enemies. Sven Aggesøn does not mention Sveinn's wars in England at all. Saxo, however, had before him Adam's story, that Sveinn, accompanied by his son Knútr and Óláfr Helgi (whom Adam believed to be a son of Óláfr Tryggvason), conquered England and expelled Æthelred. Accordingly, Saxo felt that a word should be said on the matter, so he makes Sveinn succeed in making a peaceful agreement that he is to succeed to England on the king's death. (Saxo, by a slip, calls the king Æthelstan instead of Æthelred). Saxo seems to imply that Sveinn succeeded to England under this pact, for he says that at his death the English made Eadweard, the Norwegians Óláfr, king.

According to Adam, Knútr returned to Denmark on the death of Sveinn, and there planned a fresh expedition against England, while the Norwegians made Óláfr king. Knútr returned to England, Æthelred died in the course of the siege of London, and Knútr secured the crown. Saxo considerably modifies this account. He makes Knútr undertake various campaigns in the Slavonic area after Sveinn's death,¹ and then embark upon a conquest of England. Saxo, having obliterated the former expedition in which Sveinn, Knútr, and Óláfr Helgi operated together, makes Óláfr and his brother Haraldr join Knútr's expedition. Here, he may be simply rearranging his material, or he may have known the widely

¹ These campaigns seem to be a fantastic traditional magnification of a peaceful journey undertaken to visit his mother by Knútr during the period between his withdrawal from England in 1014 and his return there in 1015. See *Encomium Emmae*, II, 2.

spread European tradition that Óláfr Helgi helped Knútr to conquer England. Adam mentioned that Sveinn drove Æthelred out, but he failed to make it clear that he returned after the death of Sveinn, so Saxo seems to have thought it an oversight when Adam makes Æthelred still king during the war with Knútr.¹ Saxo knew the story of the bargain of Eadmund Ironside and Knútr to divide the kingdom until the one to outlive the other should succeed to it all, but, in telling it, he substitutes Eadweard for Eadmund, because Adam mentions that Æthelred left a son named Eadweard. Adam mentions Eadmund, but believed he was a brother, not a son of Æthelred. Accordingly, Saxo not unnaturally inferred that Æthelred did not return after his expulsion, but that his son Eadweard was the enemy with whom Knútr had to contend. He therefore transfers to Eadweard, not only the story of the treaty of Eadmund and Knútr, but two traditional stories about the death of Eadmund, of a type familiar in English sources. It is historically regrettable to make the Confessor die early in Knútr's reign, but Saxo only does so in an attempt to reconcile a good stock of traditional material with Adam.

It has already been noticed that Saxo makes Óláfr Helgi accompany Knútr to England, and many sources, both West Norse and non-Scandinavian, have a tradition that Óláfr helped Knútr to conquer England, so Saxo may here be drawing on tradition. On the other hand, it is not likely to be more than an invention of his own when he makes Haraldr Harthráthi take part in the expedition also. Saxo seems to have thought of Óláfr and Haraldr as regular companions, for he makes Haraldr share

¹ *The Annals of Roskilde*, similarly, find Adam difficult at this point: they solve the matter by duplicating the Æthelreds, so that the first one fights Sveinn and the second Knútr. They know that Æthelred was succeeded by his son Eadmund (this is an advance on Adam, who thought Eadmund was a brother of Æthelred), so they put his reign between those of the Æthelreds. He drives out Knútr (who has Óláfr with him), but dies, and Knútr returns to fight the second Æthelred, who is the father of Eadweard.

Óláfr's flight to Russia. When, however, Saxo mentions, as a possible reason why Óláfr and Knútr parted company, the seduction by Knútr of Álfifa of Northampton, with whom Óláfr was in love, he is no doubt giving the Danish version of the story of the disagreement of Knútr and Óláfr, of which we know the West Norse form from the *Legendary Saga of Óláfr Helgi*. Saxo does not reproduce Adam's error about the paternity of Óláfr Helgi, and this also suggests a use of tradition to correct Adam.

Saxo goes on to note the marriage of Knútr to Emma and of Knútr's sister Ástríthr to Emma's brother, Richard of Normandy. Here Saxo is following Adam, and reproduces his mistake that it was Richard, Emma's brother, instead of her nephew Robert, who married Ástríthr. Saxo's next paragraphs deal mainly with four matters: (1) Knútr's relationships with Óláfr Helgi; (2) Knútr's relationships with his brother-in-law, the duke of Normandy; (3) the story of Earl Úlfr; (4) Knútr's relationships with the German emperor.

To Óláfr Helgi, Saxo does reasonable justice; he knows about his miracle with the chips, his flight to the east and return, and Knútr's use of internal corruption against him, all familiar elements in the West Norse tradition, but not found in Adam of Bremen. Nevertheless, Saxo has quite a different chronology of the outstanding events of Óláfr's last years from the familiar one found in the West Norse accounts, for he places the battle of the Helge-å after Óláfr's return from his eastern exile. I propose to deal with this matter elsewhere,¹ so I will here merely remark that a minute examination of the material derived by Icelandic sources from the lost *Saga of Knútr* has led me to believe that that *Saga* had a chronology of Óláfr's later period differing from that of the *Sagas of Óláfr Helgi*, and in some degree resembling that of Saxo. Tradition would again seem to be divided against itself.

¹ See my forthcoming edition of the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, Appendix III c.

Saxo's story of Knútr's two wars with his Norman brother-in-law is extraordinary. The first war was undertaken in the cause of Ástríthr, for the duke was a most bitter hater of his wife. The duke was driven from his country, and Ástríthr married Earl Úlfr. The second war was intended to wipe out the memory of the same wrongs. The duke (who had apparently returned to Normandy) again fled, but Knútr died in Normandy in the course of the campaign. Here we seem to have traditions derived from the same unknown events, which gave rise to the stories in the Norman chroniclers concerning the uneasy relationships of England and Normandy in Knútr's time.¹ One can be confident only that Norman and Danish tradition have diverged independently and widely from the truth. Adam of Bremen only remarks that Richard (i.e. Robert) died on a pilgrimage taken to avoid the anger of Knútr, whose sister he had repudiated.

I will touch only briefly on Saxo's story of Earl Úlfr's rebellion, his part in the battle of the Helge-å, and his death, for I have discussed it in detail in a work about to be published,² and will only remark that, while Saxo's version has remarkable similarities with those given by Snorri and *Fagrskinna*, it has the peculiarity of making Úlfr fight against Knútr at the Helge-å. Here we are able to confirm the Danish tradition against the West Norse in its surviving form from the sober evidence of the *Old English Chronicle*. For the whole story of Úlfr, and his strange descent from a bear (a legend known also from English sources), Saxo draws upon tradition; Adam of Bremen knows only that Úlfr was married to Knútr's sister.

Saxo and Sven Aggesøn share with the West Norse tradition the misconception that Henry III was already emperor when he married Knútr's daughter. Saxo and

¹ See Freeman's *Norman Conquest*, I, note PPP; Stenton's *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 402-3.

² *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, loc. cit.

Sven, however, have a wild story that Knútr went to Italy to assist his son-in-law against certain rebels. Sven places an invasion of France on this journey, thus seeming to telescope Knútr's alleged Norman and Italian expeditions, which Saxo keeps apart. The West Norse tradition is that the emperor accompanied Knútr on a pilgrimage to Rome. Saxo and Sven seem to have a Danish traditional story arising from Knútr's peaceful visit or visits to Rome. At least one such visit is a well-established historical fact, and since it is noticed by Adam, Saxo appears to have definitely preferred to follow the more picturesque story offered by tradition. Saxo is also contradicting Adam when he makes Knútr's son-in-law already emperor.

Saxo's story of events after the death of Knútr is as follows. Hörthaknútr is ruling Denmark as under-king at the time of his father's death, and Knútr's other sons, Sveinn, who had been ruling Norway, and Haraldr, who had been ruling England, are already dead. The Norwegians make Magnús Ólafsson king, when Knútr dies, and Hörthaknútr makes peace with him, the terms being that whichever outlives the other shall succeed to both realms. Hörthaknútr hurries to England, where he finds that affairs have been put in good order by his cousin Sveinn Úlfsson, and invites his half-brother Eadweard to share the kingdom with him. Since Saxo has already made Eadweard, the son of Æthelred die, he has to make this Eadweard the son of the dead one, and Emma has to be the widow of the former Eadweard, instead of Æthelred, at the time when Knútr marries her. After the death of Hörthaknútr, Sveinn returns to Denmark, but the Danes hold to the terms of the treaty, and make Magnús king. Meanwhile Harold Godwinson (whom Saxo apparently knows to be Sveinn's cousin³) holds a slaughter of Danes

³ See Freeman's *Norman Conquest*, I, p. 744, where, however, a different interpretation of Saxo's obscure words is preferred.

(this no doubt is a magnification of the murder of Earl Björn, Sveinn's brother), allows Eadweard only the empty title of king, and ultimately kills him, and secures the throne. Sveinn is beaten by Magnús in Jutland both in a sea and a land fight, and retreats, contemplating flight to Sweden. The position of Magnús is rendered secure by a great victory over the Slavs. Before this battle he is encouraged by a dream, as in the West Norse sources, though there the character of the dream is entirely different. He afterwards returns to the pursuit of Sveinn, but is killed by a fall from his horse, which had been startled by a hare. This account compares very favourably with that of Adam of Bremen, apart from the wild story about the murder of King Eadweard, and the magnification of the murder of Björn into a massacre. Adam, for example, places the death of Sveinn Knútsson and the succession of Magnús to the Norwegian throne after the death of Knútr, does not know about the pact of Magnús and Hörthaknútr, and has an account of the war of Sveinn and Magnús more complimentary to the Danish king's prowess than those of either Saxo or the West Norse sources, and doubtless derived from Sveinn himself. Saxo is also able to add to the story the well-established fact that Hörthaknútr associated Eadweard with him in the government of England. In making Haraldr die before his father Knútr, Saxo unhappily deserts Adam in favour of a bad Danish tradition, which also appears in Sven Aggesøn. That writer is extremely brief in his treatment of the reign of Sveinn, and extremely ill-informed, for he believed that all Knútr's sons died before him, and that his nephew Sveinn succeeded him at once. He agrees with Saxo that Magnús was killed by a fall from his horse, so this story may be presumed to represent a current Danish version, differing from both the West Norse tradition and from Adam of Bremen. The West Norse sources are so very much more diffuse than Saxo in

their account of the wars of Magnús with Sveinn and with the Slavs, that it is difficult to compare them with him. The familiar West Norse story that Sveinn was originally in Magnús' service is absent from Saxo, and may not be a sound tradition: the only skaldic verse quoted to support it may be otherwise interpreted.¹ It may be said that, in dealing with the period from the death of Knútr to that of Magnús Góthi, Saxo diverges freely from Adam, and frequently (though not always) improves his story as history by so doing. Saxo is not in frequent conflict with the West Norse sources in this period, but, on the one major matter concerning which he diverges from them (the precise relationships of Sveinn and Magnús), he is not improbably following a Danish tradition which is more sound than the West Norse.

In the next period, corresponding to the reign of Haraldr Harthráthi in Norway, the relationships of Saxo, Adam, and the Sagas are very much the same as in the one just discussed. Saxo is able to correct Adam's statement that Haraldr went to the East before the death of Óláfr Helgi, and agrees with the West Norse tradition that he went at the time of Óláfr's fall. Of Haraldr's adventures in the East, Saxo tells only the well-known one of the serpent in his prison. Saxo is less well-informed than Adam, in that he places Haraldr's return after the death of Magnús, but, whereas Adam knows only that there was a protracted war between Haraldr and Sveinn, Saxo is able to describe the battle of Niz from Danish tradition, and also a battle in the Dyrsá which is unknown to the

¹ This is a verse attributed to Thjóthólfr Arnórsson, and quoted by *Heimskringla*, *Magnús saga Góða*, chap. 23, and by *Fagrskinna*, p. 207. It records how Sveinn and Magnús swore oaths, but that their peace was not to be lasting. Adam of Bremen, III, 11, Schol. 62, records that once, during the war of Sveinn and Magnús, the former, discouraged by defeat, concluded peace, *et factus est homo victoris, faciens ei sacramentum fidelitatis*. If this be true, Thjóthólfr's verse would fit the occasion perfectly, and accordingly, it is not conclusive evidence that Sveinn was in the service of Magnús before the war began.

West Norse tradition. Saxo had, no doubt, before him Adam's note of the fall of Haraldr in England and the death of Harald of England just afterwards, but, like the West Norse sources, he also tells how Haraldr Harthráthi and his men were caught without their heavy armour in their last fight. It may be said that, in this period, Saxo is able to correct and amplify Adam of Bremen from traditional accounts of the wars of Haraldr Harthráthi in Denmark and England, and, while he is far more brief than the West Norse Sagas which cover the period, he does not conflict with them on any matter of fact. It should, however, be observed, that he does not regard Sveinn Úlfsson as a popular monarch, whereas his popularity is always stressed in the Sagas. This is very significant, for the character-drawing of the Sagas is to be regarded as of even more questionable historicity than their incidents. One need instance only the manner in which the characters of Óláfr Helgi and Magnús Góthi may be seen undergoing manipulation when the earlier and the later versions of the Sagas concerning them are compared. Accordingly, Saxo's view of Sveinn's character has as good a claim to consideration as that in the Sagas.

Early in this paper, I proposed two questions. I am confident that the first, whether Saxo's history of the tenth and earlier eleventh centuries draws on tradition as well as upon Adam of Bremen, has been conclusively answered in the affirmative. The second question concerned the relationships of the Danish and West Norse historical traditions. I have shown that, when these diverge, the Danish is often to be preferred to the West Norse, and that, therefore, when neither probability nor independent evidence conclusively support the one against the other, the literary superiority of the Sagas should not lead the historian to prefer them. I have emphasised that the West Norse tradition is often divided against

itself. I have sometimes spoken in this paper of a Danish historical tradition. One last and familiar question arises. How far are the traditions which we find in Saxo and to some degree in Sven Aggesøn to be regarded as Danish, and how far are they derived from West Norse oral sources? If Saxo had been found generally to agree in his traditional matter with West Norse sources, it would be possible to argue that he does not draw on a fully independent tradition. But, in the portion of his history that has been studied above, he has so often been found to diverge from familiar elements in the West Norse historical tradition, that contact with that tradition need not be suspected in that part of his work. Saxo's agreements with Sven Aggesøn point to the existence of a body of tradition upon which they both drew, for these, while striking, are not sufficiently close to be attributed to the use by Saxo of Sven's book as a source for the history of the period under discussion.¹ I would finally claim that the check upon the West Norse historical tradition provided by Saxo's account of the period 925-1066 is scarcely to be over-valued, not only for the study of the Sagas to which it can be directly applied, but as a warning against the assumption that any Saga represents the only version of a story which was known to tradition, or that, faced with divergent traditions, the writer of a Saga will necessarily choose the one nearest to historical truth.

APPENDIX: SAXO AND SVEN AGGESØN.

The view expressed above, that Saxo and Sven Aggesøn knew independently a certain amount of historical tradition, seems to me to explain sufficiently the relationships of their accounts of the period 925-1066. It is true that Saxo's account of the fall of Haraldr Blátönn, and of Sveinn's subsequent capture by his enemies and release, might be regarded as modified from Adam of Bremen's

¹ See however the Appendix below.

version, with details added from Sven (and incidentally a trace of the *Annals of Roskilde*, in that Sveinn is captured three times by his enemies, instead of once as in Sven, or twice as in Adam). Saxo might be regarded as rejecting Sven's story, that Haraldr founded Jómsborg after he fled before Sveinn, because he had already introduced the story of Styrbjörn, in which the existence of Jómsborg is dated back to the time of that prince's exile from Sweden. It is also true that Saxo's account of Knútr's Norman and Italian expeditions might be regarded as developed from Sven's and that the story of Magnús' fall from his horse might be taken directly from Sven (with the hare which caused it added as an ornament). Other agreements of the two writers in this period are negative or insignificant. Sven, however, has, in his account of the period before Haraldr Blátönn, a long story of how Queen Thyri built the Danavirki. Saxo does not give this story, but when he comes to the Othonian invasion he makes the building of the Danavirki by Queen Thyri a consequence of it. Here again Saxo might be assumed to have taken the tradition of Thyri's association with the Danavirki from Sven, and to have fitted it in where it best suited his purpose. Nevertheless, Saxo has so much good traditional matter which does not come from Sven, that there seems no reason why he should be assumed to be indebted to Sven for the few stories which he has in common with him, stories which are, moreover, often handled quite differently by the two writers. The point, however, does not affect my main argument that Saxo uses Danish historical tradition in his history of the period with which I am concerned. It is immaterial if some of this reached him by way of Sven's book. The relationships of Sven and Saxo in their accounts of Uffo and in their texts of the *Lex Castrensis* lie outside the scope of this paper.

MABINOGI AND EDDA.

By PROFESSOR GWYN JONES, M.A.

I PRESUME that of the many who are expert in Snorri's Edda, few have deep knowledge of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi; and of the few who are expert in the Four Branches, still fewer have deep knowledge of the Edda. Whether this state of affairs should breed confidence or trepidation in one who, like myself, is expert in neither, must be left to time and charity to determine.

Let me begin by reducing the giant verges of the theme. Both the Edda and the Four Branches are the hunting ground rather than the *plaisance* of the philologist, the archaeologist, the mythologist, and all the other -ologists who make medieval studies tender to the feet of students. In so far as I find it possible, I should like to consider both these delightful and impressive works as literature, and establish in our minds such points of comparison, contrast, and contact as lie unforcedly in the nature of the subject. But before I attempt this attractive task, it will be necessary to explain, very briefly, what these works are.

To speak of the Edda first. We know its author and its provenance, though we remain respectfully uneasy about the meaning of its title. The name "Edda" is given to a treatise on skaldic art written by Snorri Sturluson about 1220. It is neatly divided into three sections, the first, *Gylfaginning*, offering a conspectus of Old Norse mythology, the second, *Skáldskaparmál*, a discussion of skaldic diction and figures of speech, enlivened by a number of narrative passages, the third, *Háttatal*, an illustrated commentary and guide to the skaldic metres. The word *edda* to some people is an Icelandic way of spelling "Ars

Poetica," to others it means "of Oddi," and to many over a long period of time it has meant "great-grand-mother,"—which makes the so-called "Elder Edda" the most elderly book title in literature. To me, I admit, *edda* represents a book, more specifically visualized in a blue-cloth-bound edition by Finnur Jónsson, and I am unhesitatingly grateful to the nameless benefactor who gave it so convenient if enigmatic a title.

The Four Branches of the Mabinogi are to be found in full in two Welsh collections, the White Book of Rhydderch (*Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch*), written down about 1300-25, and the Red Book of Hergest (*Llyfr Coch Hergest*), of the period 1375-1425. Some passages of two of the Four Branches are preserved in MS. Peniarth 6, written down about 1225. There have been as many attempts to give a meaning to *mabinogi* as to *edda*, but by common consent of Welsh scholars to-day, the word is equated with the Latin *infantia* and the French *enfance*. It meant first "youth," then "a tale of youth," and finally little more specific than "tale" or "story." Thus a Branch of the Mabinogi is a "portion of the story." It would be a long story of its own to elaborate a theory why the term *mabinogi* should be confined to what the White and Red Books have to say of Pwyll, Branwen, Manawydan and Math, but I refer the curious to the writings of Professor W. J. Gruffydd or to the introduction to Professor Ifor Williams's *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*, where they will find the last word on the subject. It is curious that an earlier attempt to explain *mabinogi* produced an attractive but illusory comparison between the two works which are the subject of this paper. It was expounded and maintained by Sir John Rhys, Professor Loth, Ivor B. John and Alfred Nutt, and was thus summarised in the words of this last: "The literary class in Wales, the Bards, formed a close corporation, admission to which was only gained by a long apprenticeship. The bardic

apprentice was styled a *Mabinog*, the traditional material – mythical, heroic, genealogical—which he had to acquire *Mabinogi*, that is, appertaining to the craft of the *Mabinog*. This explanation reveals the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* as a digest of a body of romantic tradition with which the bard was expected to be familiar.”¹ As John says, this, if true, “not only enables us to perceive that the *Mabinogion* must, at the outset at least, have had another object beyond recreation; it also enables us to equate the Welsh collection with another famous medieval work, the *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*.”² Unfortunately for our present purposes, it is not true; there is no Welsh great-grandson for the Icelandic great-grandmother; and other grounds of relationship must be sought.

In *Gylfaginning* Snorri did a most remarkable thing. He was, of course, a Christian. (He married a wealthy priest’s daughter to prove it). Christianity had come to Iceland two-and-a-quarter centuries before, and in the thirteenth century heathendom was as dead officially as, officially, it is dead to-day. Now Snorri was a number of things together. He was a politician, though not a general, of Marlborough’s stamp; if not “as proud as hell, and as greedy as the prince thereof,” he was none the less a man of affairs, in every sense of that richly connotative word, and “childlike” and “naive” are the last epithets I should apply to him. To offer one example only: his biographers are still debating whether it was virtue in him to betray his promise to betray his country. A man of parts, clearly. He was also a historian, an antiquarian, and an artist. By artist I mean that he not only wrote a very fine prose (he had one of the finest prose styles of the Middle Ages), but that the turn of his mind in other than political and economic matters was towards

¹ *The Mabinogion*, 1910, pp. 330-31.

² *The Mabinogion*, 1901, p. 4.

harmony and proportion. It is this feeling for the shape and materials of history which makes him by general agreement the greatest historian of the North during the Middle Ages. *Heimskringla*, the Lives of the Norse Kings, was not a masterpiece by accident, but by design; and he had already shown his powers of design, his selectivity and good taste, in the mythological portions of his Edda. Artists of Snorri's kind, I believe, do their best work when their emotions are not too strongly engaged; when they can cultivate a detachment from some of the implications of their subject; when they are at one remove from it. I have said that Snorri was a Christian: this was invaluable to him when as part of his "Art of Poetry" he made a survey of the myths which must be more or less understood if either Snorri's pupils or we, with our disadvantageous lag in time, are to comprehend the poetic heritage of the Germanic North. His disbelief in the divinity of Óðinn and Thór saved him from moral over-earnestness, from sentimentality and enthusiasm (in the eighteenth-century sense), from the need to propagate a faith and be improving, and all those other temptations of the too-devout which for one *Pilgrim's Progress* have littered the libraries with ten thousand Tuppens. On the other hand, Snorri was not antagonistic to the old beliefs. He was not the man to ask, like Alcuin, "What has Christ to do with Ingeld?" and then fit Ingeld out with horns and a tail. His attitude towards the gods of the old cosmogony was one of appreciation, tolerance, and irony. The appreciation and tolerance he shared with many of the sagamen—the authors of *Vatnsdæla Saga* and *Hrafnkels Saga* come at once to mind—the irony was his own. In one sense he was a modern mind, in another a fin-de-siècle product; he was always commendably free from prejudices prejudicial to his own interests and enjoyment. Now it is clear that for a thinker and writer of Snorri's type there can be no mere reproduction of his sources of

information: he will select, modify, expand, contract and mould. And not only will he be concerned with the shape of his work, its outlines and contours, he will give it an air, an atmosphere, the colouring of what is best in his own mind. It is significant that many students of the Old Norse religion and mythology consider that Snorri, far from clarifying, has confused the issues he presents with such evidence of loving care. In other words, he has gone one better than his originals. If I am right, what Snorri produced should nowadays be considered primarily as a work of art, and not as an educational treatise, as the re-creation of a body of myth rather than a blue-print for poetasters. Because of the art, because of the re-creation, Snorri as an author is as alive as Ólaf Hvítaskáld is dead. The thirteenth century produced a mushroom growth of treatises on the art of composition; I hope I am not being unjust to some very worthy gentlemen if I say I have never considered Snorri as plying the same laborious oar with Geoffroi de Vinsauf, Gervais de Melkley, Everard the German, or the English John of Garland.

But what of the Mabinogi? Here we have an author unknown, but an author *de facto*. His material was traditional, Celtic tradition, whether Brythonic or Goidelic or common to both being nothing to our present purpose. This author, and by that I mean the man who gave it the shape in which it is now preserved, was the heir of bards and story-tellers unnumbered. The material on which they had worked for many, many centuries, accreting, rejecting, explaining, smoothing, re-pointing, goes back to the childhood of the Celtic West. The foundation of the Mabinogi was Celtic mythology, just as the foundation of the Edda was Germanic mythology: in the one case as it formed in the minds of those Celts who eventually were to speak the Cymric or Welsh tongue, in the other as it developed in a Scandinavian and more specifically Icelandic context. But there is one tremendous difference

between the Edda and the Mabinogi as we have them. Snorri dealt with gods and goddesses, human though many of their attributes were; the Mabinogi deal with men and women, godlike though many of their characteristics are. Snorri's personages inhabit the gleaming halls, the wide meadows of Ásgard; those of the Mabinogi the courts and townships of Wales, in Dyfed and in Gwynedd. The difference is so fundamental that I propose to sketch in short space the process which produced it.

We may begin with Arnold's well-known and much-quoted words. "The first thing that strikes one, in reading the Mabinogion,³ is how evidently the medieval story-teller is pillaging an antiquity of which he does not fully possess the secret; he is like a peasant building his hut on the site of Halicarnassus or Ephesus; he builds, but what he builds is full of material of which he knows not the history, or knows by a glimmering tradition merely; stones 'not of this building,' but of an older architecture, greater, cunninger, more majestic. In the medieval stories of no Latin or Teutonic people does this strike one as in the Welsh." What is memorable here is the sympathy and insight of a poet and critic, himself half a Celt; though it will be well to forget the notion that the *cyfarwydd* who set down the Four Branches in their present form was any kind of peasant building a hut, however gorgeous his stone, however proud his mortar. But that such personages as Bendigeidfran and Manawydan, the sons of Llyr, Gwydion son of Dôn, and Rhiannon (to name but a few) are in both the literary and

³ The term *Mabinogion* was used by Lady Charlotte Guest as the title of her translations from the Red Book, whose publication began in 1838. The word *mabynnogyon* occurs once only in the Red Book, and is almost certainly a scribal error. The term *mabinogi* can in any case apply only to the Four Branches, and not to the other contents of either the White Book or the Red. Contemporary opinion in Wales is divided between regret that this corpus of tales should be known by a misnomer, and satisfaction that it is so convenient a misnomer.

mythological sense of divine origin, is so conclusively to be proved both from the *Pedeir Keinc* themselves, and from their rich and extensive Irish analogues, that it would be pushing at an open door to pursue the subject here. Even now they remain invested with a physical and moral grandeur that bespeaks their godlike state and superhuman nature. They are great by virtue of more than kingship and magic. Math is just and magnanimous, Manawydan forbearing and chaste, Bendigeidfran is conciliatory, generous and benign; but all three can act with irresistible power and unanswerable wisdom. When the men of the Island of the Mighty cross over to Ireland, they are borne there by ships, but Bendigeidfran goes wading, with the minstrelsy on his back. When they need a bridge to cross the Shannon: "'What is thy counsel as to a bridge,' said they. 'There is none,' said he, 'save that he who is chief, let him be a bridge (*a uo penn bit pont*). I will myself be a bridge,' said he. And then, after he had lain him down across the river, hurdles were placed upon him and his hosts passed through over him." It is rather corollary than analogue that there should be a passage in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* which shows how its narrator, or compiler, was at least confusedly aware of the mightier dimensions of the men of old compared with the mannikins of his own day. It is that part of the dream where Rhonabwy and his two warrior-friends have fallen in with Iddawg the Embroider of Britain, and are led by him into the presence of Arthur. "'God prosper thee,' said Arthur. 'Where, Iddawg, didst thou find those little fellows?' 'I found them, lord, away up on the road.' The emperor smiled wryly. 'Lord,' said Iddawg, 'at what art thou laughing?'. 'Iddawg,' said Arthur, 'I am not laughing; but how sad I find it that men as mean as these keep this Island, after men as fine as those that kept it of yore.'"

But that large utterance of the early gods was muted—

when, no one can say. The mythology, one might almost say the theology, of which they were the personified presentment, changed slowly but inevitably with the revolutions and permutations of humanity itself, and with it was mingled something of legend, something of folklore, something of a new vision. It may even be that we should boldly style some of these new ingredients history or pre-history, for unmistakably other than divine exploits are now blended with the oldest material. And presumably it was now that the gods moved over the surface of earth, euhemerised as they were, and the stories received a local habitation and a name. As Gruffydd puts it: "The material possibly remained for centuries in this form, gradually, like good wine, growing mellow and mellow, and allowing the sour dross to sink to the bottom. It was now that it received that indefinable charm of local atmosphere, when the lights and shades became for ever fixed, when the colours which it reflected from the complex minds through which it passed, became its own for all time. And who may tell what hopes and fears, what love and hatred, what misty cosmogonies it now holds as it were in solution? It must be that it keeps, as an integral part of an indissoluble whole, some portion of the personality of each and every mind through which it passed, so that when it went forward to its next stage, it was a complex living organism, heir to all the ages that had gone before. This is why no historical novel, however accurate, can ever reproduce the times it describes—the historical novel is made, not born. Folklore will ever communicate to us all the essence of the past, though such a suggestion will be unconscious, and though we can never trace the path along which it travels. It is, in fact, what separates the natural from the literary epic, and for this reason, the *Mabinogion* are, in all essentials, the epic of Wales."¹

¹ 'The *Mabinogion*,' in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* 1912-13, pp. 47-48.

Then comes the stage whose full development we behold in the MSS. The wandering story-teller or minstrel, the professional bard, carried from court to court tales and romances adapted to the tastes of his particular audience. His performance, of course, was oral, and there is no reason in the world why we should not compare the references to Gwydion as a story-teller in *Math* with such famous episodes in the sagas as Thorgrím's telling a saga in Greenland, or Sturla the historian entertaining King Magnus's men, and later his queen, with the tale of Huld. When, for example, Gwydion and his eleven companions set off for Rhuddlan Teifi, to trick Pryderi, they travelled in the guise of bards. " ' Why,' said Pryderi, ' gladly would we have a tale from some of the young men yonder.' ' Lord,' said Gwydion, ' it is a custom with us that the first night after one comes to a great man, the chief bard shall have the say. I will tell a tale gladly.' Gwydion was the best teller of tales in the world. And that night he entertained the court with pleasant tales and story-telling till he was praised by every one in the court, and it was pleasure for Pryderi to converse with him." The evidence of the Four Branches certainly does not permit us to think of the bards as men whose tales were necessarily in verse; besides, the triads and other later verse, Nennius and Geoffrey of Monmouth, and once more the Irish analogues, make it certain that Wales had a rich corpus of prose narrative, of which the White Book and the Red preserve precious fragments—alas, too few! It is reasonable to suppose that the story-tellers were men of varying ability and differing purpose. This *cyfarwydd* was good; that was better; and surely he whose master-hand has left its print on the magical disjected fragments of the Four Branches was best of all. For at last we mark the transition from spoken to written stories; the book which was once in the head is now in the hand; we are at the stage of literary

composition. It is our good fortune that just as Iceland produced Snorri at the very time when he might make a minor masterpiece of his survey of a hundred shifting myths and stories, so in Wales one of the masters of his native tongue, probably at the beginning of the second half of the eleventh century, gave shape and unity and artistic purpose to the many times redacted tales of gods grown men. How many such have been lost we may speculate and deplore. That a few survived, great riches in a little room, is our present comfort.

I have said a little of Snorri the man. Naturally, one can say less of the author of the Mabinogi. But they had literary genius in common. So far as one can judge by the admittedly perilous test of his remains, the author of the Mabinogi was of a penetrating and subtle mind, amply dowered with lore and learning, agreeably tolerant, and of wide human sympathy. Like Snorri he wrote beautiful prose, like Snorri he was an artist who could impose unity on apparently heterogeneous material. Since our concern with him is as author, it really matters little that we know neither his name nor his way of life. If such things can happen, I doubt not that he and Snorri know each other very well by this time in whatever elysian sphere or infernal circle Hár and Jafnhár and Thríði have reserved for the world's *makars*.

It would be a fascinating task, but one beyond my purpose as my powers, to discuss the "sources" of both the Edda and the Four Branches. Both works would lend themselves, under the eye of omniscience, to a new kind of "Road to Xanadu." That both authors were notably learned men is demonstrable; that they knew everything and understood everything is not to be believed. That there were "influences" as well as "sources," who can doubt? But sources and influences for men of genius are not invariably as many excellent and well-intentioned students conceive of them—or students

would themselves be men of genius. The true sources and influences of the author of the Four Branches bear much the same relationship to the folk-motifs which it is both proper and profitable to detect in them, as do the warm pulsating wings of the great Red Admiral butterfly, infused with sunshine and flowers, to his dimmed and dusty relics spiked by an infamous pin to a vile white card in a dirty showcase in a grubby museum. It is because Gruffydd seems strongly to have felt this, that his brilliant reconstruction of the earlier versions of the Math story,¹ although in the nature of the case unprovable, impresses one as not only exciting in itself but as an approach to truth. Truth, let me say, as she queens it in the courts of the imagination rather than the forbidding handmaiden of the courts of law.

There is hardly any question to which an otherwise well-educated man will return a less correct but a more confident answer than: What are the qualities that distinguish early Welsh writing? For if there is a Celtic Twilight, it drenches with its mists and half-tones some other landscape than the Welsh; its haze and melancholy must be sought elsewhere than in the writings we are now considering. However filled with light and shadow, with humour, pathos and magic, we discover them to be, all is clean and sheer and shaped by the fine dry hand of a craftsman. But the popular Ossianic notions of the subject suggest that many still underwrite a conception of old Welsh literature no more accurate than early eighteenth-century conceptions of the blood-swilling viking, skulls, snake-pits and all. The Four Branches are not wind-filled, obfusc, gloomy, extravagant, whimsical, stuffed with sentiment, or garnished with romance. They are at once delicate and strong, rich in emotion but devoid of emotionalism, magical yet

¹ In *Math Vab Mathonwy*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press Board, 1928.

matter-of-fact, and their atmosphere is that of rainbow-hued Dyfed and Gwynedd. They are as remote from mysticism as from realism. They show a great love of colours and contrasts, so that at times the texture of narrative appears impregnated with a purity and soft brilliance of greens, blues, reds and yellows. Above all they are strong and translucent.

If now I praise Snorri for the clarity of his style, for the charm which accompanies his precision and resilience, I shall be puzzled to express adequately the difference that every reader will find between the Welsh writer and the Icelandic. The Icelandic's page is lit with a dry intellectual light; the Welshman's is refulgent with imagination. What in Snorri is a clear beam, in his fellow is a warm glow. That we need not be concerned to apportion the laurels between them will be apparent when we compare them in passages where they are doing the same kind of thing. For example, both Edda and Mabinogi deal in magic, and one kind of magic is the disappearance of the seeming solid. Thus when Thór has heard from Útgardaloki of the illusions practised upon him, "He gripped at his hammer and raised it aloft; but when he would swing it forward he saw Útgardaloki nowhere at all. And then he turned back to the stronghold, and was minded to destroy the stronghold. Then he saw there a field wide and fair, but no stronghold. Then he turned back, and went his way, till he came home to Thrúdvangar." Or again, when Gangleri had heard all that the gods intended him to know, "Thereupon Gangleri heard great uproar all around him, and looked about him; and when he looked further about him, he was standing out-of-doors on a level plain; he saw no hall and no stronghold. Then he went his way thence, and came home to his kingdom." But here is the same kind of thing from *Manawydan*. "And after their return Pryderi and Manawydan feasted and took their ease.

And they began a feast at Arberth, for it was a main court, and thence began all honour. And after the first sitting that night, whilst the attendants were at meat, they arose and went forth and proceeded all four to Gorsedd Arberth, and a company with them. And as they were sitting thus, lo, a peal of thunder, and with the magnitude of the peal, lo, a fall of mist coming so that no one of them could see the other. And after the mist, lo, every place filled with light. And when they looked the way they were wont before that to see the flocks and the herds and the dwellings, nothing of such could they see: neither house nor beast nor smoke nor fire nor man nor dwelling, but the houses of the court empty, desolate, uninhabited, without man, without beast within them; their very companions lost, without their knowing aught of them, save they four only. 'Alas, lord God,' said Manawydan, 'where is the host of the court, and our company too, save for this? Let us go and look.' Into the hall they came: not a soul was there. Into the bower and the sleeping chamber they went: not a soul could they see. In mead-cellar and in kitchen there was naught but desolation. They four set them to feasting, and they hunted and took their pleasure. And they began each one of them to wander through the land and the dominion, to see if they might descry house or habitation, and nothing of such could they see, only wild beasts. And when they had finished their feast and their victuals, they began to live on the meat they hunted and on fish and wild swarms. And in this wise they passed a year pleasantly, and a second. And at last they grew weary."

Is it fanciful to consider, with the sagas in mind, that Snorri's way is Icelandic to the last syllable; and, remembering the other contents of the White Book and the Red, that his fellow-artist's is indubitably Welsh? Snorri reduces his scene to its bare and effective narrative essentials; the other fills in his outline with his characters'

feelings and reactions. The comparison may become clearer if we set the story of Baldr against a portion of *Branwen*; not to praise one at the expense of the other, but to examine two nearly related and yet subtly differentiated narrative forms.

THE DEATH OF BALDR.

“ That is the beginning of this story, that Baldr the good dreamed dreams mighty and ominous for his life. And when he told the gods his dreams, then they took counsel together; and what was done was to ask peace for Baldr from perils of all kinds. And Frigg took oaths to this end, that fire and water, iron and metals of all kinds, stones, earth, trees, sicknesses, beasts, birds, poison and snakes should spare Baldr. And when that was done and made known, then was it sport for Baldr and the Æsir that he should stand up at the Thing, and all the others should some shoot at him, some hew at him, and come cast stones. And whatsoever was done, he got no hurt, and that seemed a great gain to them all. But when Loki Laufeyjarson saw that, it pleased him ill that Baldr got no hurt. He went to Fensalir, to Frigg, and turned himself into the likeness of a woman. Then Frigg inquired whether that woman knew what the Æsir were doing at the Thing. She said that all were shooting at Baldr, but that he got no hurt. Then said Frigg: ‘ Weapons nor woods will hurt Baldr; I have received oaths from them all.’ Then the woman asked: ‘ Have all things taken oaths to spare Baldr?’ Frigg answered: ‘ A certain plant grows west of Valhöll; it is called Mistletoe. That seemed to me young to ask an oath from.’

Thereafter the woman turned away; but Loki took Mistletoe and tore it up, and went to the Thing. And Hödr was standing on the outer edge of the ring of men, for he was blind. Then Loki said to him: ‘ Why dost

thou not shoot at Baldr ? ' He answered: ' Because I do not see where Baldr is, and besides, for I am weaponless.' Then said Loki: ' Even so, do thou like other men, and show Baldr honour like other men. I will guide thee to where he stands. Shoot at him with this wand.'

Hödr took Mistletoe, and shot at Baldr by Loki's guidance; the missile pierced him, and he fell dead to earth. And the greatest of mishaps has come to pass for gods and men. When Baldr had fallen, words failed all the gods, and hands likewise to lay hold of him. And each looked at the other, and they were all of one mind as to who had done this deed, but none might avenge it, so great a sanctuary was there. And when the Æsir attempted to speak, then it happened first that tears burst forth, so that none might tell the others in words of his grief. But Ódinn felt the hurt worst, even as he had most awareness of what damage and loss there was to the gods in the death of Baldr. But when the gods recovered themselves, then Frigg spoke and asked who there might be among the Æsir would wish to earn all her love and favour, and ride will he on Hel-way and seek whether he may meet with Baldr, and offer Hel ransom if she will let Baldr fare home to Ásgard. And he whose name was Hermód the Bold, son of Ódinn, offered himself for that journey. Then Sleipnir, Ódinn's horse, was taken and led out, and Hermód mounted the horse and galloped away.

But the Æsir took the body of Baldr and bore it to the sea. Hringhorni was the name of Baldr's ship; it was the greatest of all ships. The gods wished to thrust it out, and prepare there for Baldr's funeral journey, but the ship moved nowise forward. Then that giantess was sent for into Jötunheimar, whose name was Hyrrokin; and when she came, riding on a wolf, and having vipers for reins, then she leapt from her steed, and Ódinn called upon four berserks to look after the steed, but they could

not hold it except they threw it down. Then Hyrrokin went to the prow of the boat, and sent it forward at the first thrust, so that fire started from the runners and all the lands trembled. Then Thór grew angry, and gripped his hammer and wanted to break her head, before all the gods bade peace for her.

Then the body of Baldr was borne out on to the ship, and when his wife Nanna Nep's daughter saw that, then she broke her heart with grief and died; she was borne to the pyre, and fire laid thereto. Then Thór stood by and hallowed the pyre with Mjöllnir. And before his feet ran a certain dwarf, whose name was Litr; and Thór kicked at him, and thrust him into the fire, and he burned. And to this burning there came folk of many a kind: first to be told of is Ódinn, how with him went Frigg and the valkyries and his ravens; but Frey drove in his chariot with the boar which is called Gullinbursti or Slídrugtanni; and Heimdallr rode the stallion which is called Gulltoppr; and Freyja drove her cats. Thither came also a great company of Frost giants and Mountain trolls. Ódinn laid on the pyre the gold ring which is called Draupnir; this is the nature attending it, that every ninth night there dropped from it eight gold rings equally heavy. Baldr's horse was led on to the pyre with all its trappings.

But it is to be told of Hermód that nine nights he rode deep vales and dark, so that he saw naught, until he came to the river Gjöll and rode on to Gjallarbrú; that is roofed with bright gold. Módgud is the maiden's name who keeps the bridge; she asked him his name and kin, and said how the day before five companies of dead men rode across the bridge—' But the bridge resounds not less under thee alone, and thou hast not the hue of dead men. Why ridest thou here on Hel-way? ' He answered that, ' I must ride to Hel to seek Baldr. And hast thou seen aught of Baldr on Hel-way? ' And she said that Baldr had ridden there over Gjallarbrú,—' But netherwards and

northwards lies Hel-way.' Then Hermód rose until he came to Hel-gate; then he dismounted from his horse and tightened his girths, remounted and dug in the spurs, and the horse leapt so strongly, and over the gate, that he came nowhere near it. Then Hermód rode right to the hall, and dismounted from his horse and went into the hall, and saw Baldr his brother sitting there in the high seat; and Hermód stayed there overnight. But in the morning Hermód prayed Hel that Baldr should ride back with him, and told what great weeping was amongst the Æsir. But Hel said it should be tested thus, whether Baldr was so beloved as was said: 'And if all things in the world, quick and dead, weep for him, then shall he fare back to the Æsir, but he must remain with Hel if any one speak against it or will not weep.' Then Hermód arose, but Baldr conducted him out of the hall, and took the ring Draupnir and sent it to Ódinn as a remembrance, and Nanna sent Frigg linen and further gifts, and a gold finger-ring to Fulla. Then Hermód rode his way back, and came to Ásgard, and told all those tidings he had seen and heard.

Thereafter the gods sent messengers throughout the whole world, to pray that Baldr be wept out of Hel; and all things did that, men and beasts and earth and stones and trees and all metals; even as thou wilt have seen that these things weep when they come out of frost and into heat. When the messengers were faring home, and had sped well with their errand, they found in a certain cave where a giantess sat; she gave her name as Thökk. They bade her weep Baldr out of Hel. She answered:

Thökk will weep with dry tears

Baldr's funeral-faring.

Alive or dead, I care naught for Karl's son.

Let Hel hold what she has!

But men think this, that Loki Laufeyjarson was there, who has wrought most ill among the gods."

THE DEATH OF BRANWEN.

The preliminaries of the *Branwen* story are necessarily much longer. She is wooed by Matholwch king of Ireland, and they sleep together at Aberffraw. But her brother Efnisien, angered because his consent was not sought to the marriage, mutilates Matholwch's horses. Peace is restored, however, and Matholwch and Branwen cross to Ireland, where her son is born. "And then in the second year, lo, an uproar in Ireland, on account of the insult which Matholwch had suffered in Wales, and the shameful trick played on him over his horses. For his foster-brothers taunted him therewith, and that without concealment. And, lo, an uprising in Ireland, till there was no peace for him unless he avenge the disgrace. The vengeance they took was to drive away Branwen from the same chamber with him, and compel her to bake in the court, and to cause the butcher after he had been cutting up meat to come to her and give her every day a box on the ear. And thus was her punishment carried out." But she sent a starling back to her brother Bendigeidfran at *Caer Seint* in *Arfon*, and the men of the Island of Britain set out to avenge her wrongs. Efnisien slays two hundred Irishmen in the hall, but the truce becomes peace, and the kingdom is conferred on Gwern, Branwen's son.

"And then, when peace was concluded, Bendigeidfran called the boy to him. From Bendigeidfran the boy went to *Manawydan*, with all who saw him loving him. From *Manawydan*, *Nisien* son of *Euroswydd* called the boy to him. The boy went to him in friendship. 'Why,' said Efnisien, 'comes not my nephew, my sister's son, to me? Though he were not king of Ireland, gladly would I show love to the boy.' 'Let him go, gladly,' said Bendigeidfran. The boy went to him gladly. 'By my confession to God,' said Efnisien in his heart, 'an enormity the

household would not think might be committed is the enormity I shall now commit.' And he arose and took up the boy by the feet, and without delay and or ever a man in the house could lay hold on him, the boy went headlong into the blazing fire. And when Branwen saw her son burning in the fire, she made as though to leap into the fire from the place where she was sitting between her two brothers. And Bendigeidfran grasped her with one hand, and his shield with the other. And then they all rose up throughout the house; and that was the greatest tumult that was ever by a host in one house, as each man caught up arms. And it was then that Morddwyd Tyllion said: 'Dogs of Gwern, beware of Morddwyd Tyllion!' And while each man reached for his arms, Bendigeidfran supported Branwen between his shield and his shoulder.

And then the Irish began to kindle a fire under the cauldron of rebirth. And then the dead bodies were cast into the cauldron until it was full, and on the morrow they arose as good fighting men as before, save that they were not able to speak. And then when Efnisien saw the dead bodies, without room being found anywhere for the men of the Island of the Mighty, he said in his heart, 'Alas, God,' said he, 'woe is me that I should be the cause of this heap of the men of the Island of the Mighty. And shame on me,' said he, 'if I seek no deliverance therefrom.' And he crept in among the dead bodies of the Irish, and two bare-breeched Irishmen came to him and cast him into the cauldron as though he were an Irishman. He stretched himself out in the cauldron, so that the cauldron broke in four pieces, and his heart burst also.

And it was because of that that such victory as there was came to the men of the Island of the Mighty. Even so, there was no victory but for the escape of seven men; and Bendigeidfran was wounded in the foot with a poisoned spear. The seven men who escaped were Pryderi,

Manawydan, Glifieu Eil Taran, Taliesin and Ynawg, Gruddieu son of Muriel, and Heilyn son of Gwynn Hen.

And then Bendigeidfran commanded his head to be struck off. 'And take the head,' said he, 'and carry it to the White Mount in London, and bury it with its face towards France. And you will be a long time upon the road. In Harlech you will be feasting seven years, and the birds of Rhiannon singing unto you. And the head will be as pleasant company to you as ever it was at best when it was on me. And at Gwales in Penfro you will be fourscore years; and until you open the door towards Aber Henfelen, the side facing Cornwall, you may bide there, and the head with you uncorrupted. But from the time you have opened that door, you may not bide there; make for London to bury the head. And do you cross over to the other side.'

And then his head was struck off, and they set out for the other side, these seven, and the head with them, and Branwen the eighth. And they came to land at Aber Alaw in Talebolion. And then they sat down and rested them. Then she looked on Ireland and the Island of the Mighty, what she might see of them. 'Alas, Son of God,' said she, 'woe is me that ever I was born: two good islands have been laid waste because of me!' And she heaved a great sigh, and with that broke her heart. And a four-sided grave was made for her, and she was buried there on the bank of the Alaw."

I have said that the Edda tells of gods and goddesses, and the Mabinogi of gods declined to godlike men. The significance of this difference for our present purpose is, I believe, at once apparent. It is surely this which accounts for the sharper pathos of the story of Branwen. Neither the silence nor the tears of the gods for Baldr, nor the bare stroke that Nanna broke her heart with grief and died, is so affecting as Branwen's passionate words. "Alas,

Son of God, woe is me that ever I was born ! ” They are as old as Job, and perhaps as Adam before him; they are as new as the latest heartbreak, and since they are of no time and fashion will move posterity as surely as they move us. For all the grandeur of her brothers, Branwen is woman first and foremost, and an unhappy woman. Baldr is ever the god, and a god becomes pathetic, and his fate poignant, only in so far as he becomes flesh and blood. Now the author of the Four Branches never fails to explore the feelings and the individuality of these people of his. Rhiannon, half contemptuous of, half pitying the lying women who accuse her of destroying her own son; the brisk fierceness of Cigfa when mere villeins dare to plot against Manawydan; even Blodeuedd, who betrayed Lleu Llaw Gyffes with Gronw Bebyr, and “ under pretence of the importunity of love ” drew from him, like Dalilah from Samson, the one means whereby he might be slain—they are all individuals, separate, invested with breath and passion. Of Snorri’s personages I incline to rate Útgardaloki highest as a piece of character-drawing. It is, of course, easier to give an edge to Útgardaloki than to a god like Óðinn—unless he be the Óðinn who found a dog tied to the bedpost of Billing’s daughter. Or the explanation may be that Útgardaloki’s assumed attitude towards Thór and his fellow-travellers to Útgard was not so very different from Snorri’s own. His note is humorous tolerance. “ Good heavens,” he keeps saying, “ so this little fellow is Thór after all ! I should never have thought it possible ! ” It is this unparalleled treatment of the gods, ironic, mock-genial, and genially mocking, which makes him more of an individual than any god. Thór has about him much of a hot-headed, good-natured yet quarrelsome schoolboy, not overblessed with brains for all his three treasures; Baldr Snorri invests with sweetness and light; and Loki has the natural attraction of the wicked for those of us

who are not ourselves wicked. His neat pen-pictures of the gods and giants, Thór, Baldr and Surtr in particular, remind one strongly of similar pictures in the Welsh *Culhwch and Olwen*; in the list of beings whom Culhwch invokes at Arthur's court (surely the queerest retinue of any court in the world), there are many who, either as fantastics or personifications, resemble such figures as Heimdall, who could hear the wool growing on a sheep's back, or Hel's retainers (I am thinking in this last connexion more particularly of the sons of Cleddyf Cyfwlch, grandsons of Cleddyf Difwlch); the doughty trio Logi (Wild-fire), Hugi (Thought), and Elli (Old Age), who out-eat, out-run, and out-wrestle Loki, Thjálfi and Thór at Útgard, belong to the same genre as Clust vab Clustfeinad (Ear son of Hearer), Ól vab Olwydd (Trail son of Trailer), or Sgilti Ysgawndroed (Lightfoot), who "when the whim to run his lord's errand was in him, never sought a road so long as he knew whither he was bound; but so long as there were trees, along the tops of the trees would he go, and so long as there was a mountain, on the tips of the reeds would he go; and throughout his life never a reed bent beneath his feet, much less did one break, so exceeding light-footed was he." Útgardaloki himself, Chief Giant and shape-shifter, defending himself with illusions and magic, not untouched either with giant humour or Snorri's light shafts of irony, is easily remembered when we read in *Math* of Gwydion son of Dôn, or in *Culhwch* of Ysbaddaden Benkawr, Chief Giant and task-setter. But to stray into *Culhwch* would be fatal; it is one of the most fascinating narratives of the Middle Ages, and I can imagine no lover of Edda or saga who would not wish to get it by heart.

In what I have said, and in anything I yet may say, about certain correspondencies in the Welsh and Icelandic arts of prose narrative, and about undoubted similarities here and there in motive, episode and characterisation, I

would not for a moment be understood to argue that either had appreciable or indeed identifiable influence upon the other. Nutt has contended¹ that the story of Branwen offers remarkable analogies with that of Gudrun, and the author of *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* evidently knew the difference between the men of Norway and the men of Denmark,² though genealogists of the Northlands may find it unhelpful that as prince of the White Troop he named March son of Meirchawn, and as prince of the Black, Edern son of Nudd. The Danes had command of the Irish Sea throughout the ninth and tenth centuries, and he would be a bold man who claimed that there was no traffic there in ideas as well as slaves, no other giving and taking than of land and cold steel. But the Four Branches are Celtic, and Snorri's Edda Teutonic; the Four Branches are Welsh, the Edda Icelandic. Similarities in their art have little or nothing to do with influences of one upon the other. They are to be accounted for by circumstances common to a much wider range of early literatures. And above all by the circumstance that prose narrative was a highly developed art in both countries.

If we consider the Death of Baldr as a short story (and we might with equal validity be considering half-a-dozen other tales in the Edda), we observe that it is of the first class. It is told with memorable art; it begins arrestingly, proceeds smoothly and rapidly but with the most subtle gradations of emphasis as between pathos, nobility, fantasy and awe, and ends with that raising and dashing of hope which never wholly fails even in the hands of a novice, and in the hands of a master illumines while it saddens with an awareness of the frailty and brittleness of our hopes, our longings, our aspirations. No wonder it appealed to Arnold: it is the most Virgilian thing in Snorri. The proportions could hardly be bettered: the

¹ In 'Branwen' (*Folk-Lore Record*, Vol. V, 1882).

² See B. G. Charles *Old Norse Relations with Wales* (1934), pp. 81-3.

plotting of Loki at the beginning of the story is beautifully rounded off by his deadly verse at the end; he is woman to begin his plot, he is giantess to conclude it. Nothing could be more persuasive: though the setting is in three worlds, we move untroubled in one magic dimension. Nothing could be more concise: there is no word we wish away, no sentence we wish added. Nothing could be more craftsmanlike: the sharp sentences of delineation, the well managed dialogue, and the unfailing tact which decides between direct and reported speech; the unforced control of every element which can contribute to a known and planned-for effect. If it be granted that the scale is right, then the architecture is perfect. So with the story of Branwen: the same skilled management of dialogue, the same reserve and control, the same shifts between tenderness and cruelty (though the extremes are here wider apart), between the gentle and the grotesque, the same sustained yet delicately varied pace of narration. To say that Snorri's prose is the purer is only to say that the Welshman's style is, both literally and metaphorically, more colourful. That the Welsh story is as well-shaped as the Icelandic is on the surface doubtful—but on the surface only, for there can be no real comparison between a part and a whole. That the Four Branches of the Mabinogi are an incomparably more coherent work than the three parts of the Edda is not a matter for dispute—even if we excuse Snorri the hackneyed prologue; that a given portion of one Branch (Pwyll's courtship of Rhiannon—or was it Rhiannon's courtship of Pwyll?—for example, or Manawydan and the mouse, or the tale of Lleu) will not yield in virtue to the most shapely portions of *Gylfaginning*, I should welcome a prolonged opportunity to prove.

Instead, I conclude by stressing that both Snorri and the author of the Mabinogi were heirs of a fine tradition, whose characteristics I have indirectly indicated. The

advantages of working in a fine tradition are obvious; but no tradition of itself makes a fine artist. So to emphasize the conventions of prose narrative within which they worked in no way detracts from the performance of our authors. The importance of many of these is technical: the *incipit* and *explicit*, the onomastic elements, the explanatory comment (often by way of gloss), the indications of a verbal telling before the stories were committed to script; such things are common in different degree to both. So with the similarities of treatment and subject matter; the surprising thing would be if these did *not* exist. But there is one other result of our authors' sense of tradition which it would be a serious omission not to mention. Their good taste and aristocratic quality are part of that tradition. Both show a natural or inherited refinement which is not in the least embarrassed by the rougher portions of their material. And it is right to remember that neither the Four Branches nor the Edda were written for children in the nursery. They were written for the maturest, the best informed, and the best judging audience of their time. How free they are from ugliness, grossness, or levity—just as they are free from cant and humbug. They know neither prurience nor hypocrisy. The Edda presents a conspectus of more than mythology; the more effectively because Snorri does not preach, it makes its comment on life and values. The Four Branches, for all their supernatural quality, are serene and noble. It needs some fine conception as well as technical skill to produce great literature. The Edda and the Mabinogi are great literature for precisely that reason. They have the skill, they have the conception. They are often called "romantic" in one of the looser usages of that loose word. Paradoxically, I know no un-mechanical definition of "classical" which can exclude them. That is less statement than claim, and with that claim I end.

REVIEWS.

THE *Terfinnas* AND *Beormas* OF OH THERE, by Alan S. C. Ross. *Leeds School of English Language Texts and Monographs: Number VII.* 1940. Pp. 63. 3/-.

Students both of Old English and Icelandic will be grateful to Mr. Ross for this concise and well-planned book. It is the first detailed examination available to English readers of the location and identity of Ohthere's *Terfinnas* and *Beormas* and of the *Bjarmar* of the Icelandic sagas. There has been much confusion among English writers on the subject, particularly over the identity of the *Beormas*. This is even less excusable than Mr. Ross suggests, since some of the results of Smirnov's and Sjögren's researches—including the identification of the *Beormas* as Karelians—were accessible in English, in J. Abercromby's *Pre- and Proto-Historic Finns*, as early as 1898, ten years before Sweet's eighth edition of his *Anglo-Saxon Reader*. Mr. Ross's book should end the confusion which there has been, for it has the authority of wide scholarship, and facts and arguments are set out with precision.

The evidence of the Germanic sources is given fully: the texts of both MSS. of Ohthere's Northern Voyage are printed, with a translation; a translation or summary is given of practically every reference to *Bjarmaland* in Icelandic sources, and the text of references in Saxo and the *Historia Norwegiae*. (To these might be added, for the sake of completeness, the fictitious adventures in *Bjarmaland* in the *Andvarímur*, published at Víðeyjar Klaustur, 1834). The location of *Bjarmaland* in early maps is also given.

The greater part of the book is concerned with the *Beormas*. The *Terfinnas*, who are only mentioned by Ohthere, present a smaller problem, which is mainly philological. Their name must relate to that of the land they inhabited on the Kola Peninsula, but the relation of the forms, O.E. *Ter-* to *Turja* of the *Kalevala* and Lappish *Tarje*, is difficult. Mr. Ross develops the problem more fully than Vasmer. The collected evidence on the *Beormas* is illuminating. The other sources confirm Ohthere's evidence and that of the sagas that there were *Bjarmian* settlements both on the West and the East of the White Sea. The identity of the *Beormas* is a much wider problem. Though the *Beormas* have given their name to the East-Finnish tribe of *Permians*, they cannot themselves have been a *Permian* people. The very interesting evidence of the Scandinavians, which shows that they must have been a West-Finnish-speaking people, is supported by Karelian place-names in the White Sea area; according to Sjögren, the south coast of the White Sea was called the Karelian Coast by the Russians as late as the fifteenth century.

It is impossible to do more here than indicate the main problems Mr. Ross has dealt with; he has touched on many others. Throughout, the thoroughness of comment and reference is remarkable, yet the discussion is always pointed and condensed. At times the economy of explanations is perhaps too severe for readers unable to approach the specialist literature themselves.

Mr. Ross's article on the *Dvina* (mentioned p. 43), which was not published when this monograph was written, appeared in the *Modern Language Quarterly*, Vol. ii, No. 2, June, 1941.

U. B.

AU TEMPS DES VIKINGS; LES NAVIRES ET LA MARINE NORDIQUES D'APRES LES VIEUX TEXTES, by André Manguin. Paris: J. Peyronnet et Cie. 1944. Pp. 289.

In this closely-packed and varied volume, M. Manguin presents a labour of love, homage and Norman patriotism. It seems that his previously published work has been confined to whalers and whaling, but that enthusiasm for the Scandinavian antecedents of his people has led him to a long and careful study of early Icelandic literature. The author makes it quite clear that his work is not intended as a scholarly investigation, but as a general survey to arouse interest in the peoples and ancient literature of the North—"ouvrons donc les volumes de la vieille littérature du Nord" (p. 29). He thereupon copies out the Classification of Works and Authors prefixed to Vigfússon's Dictionary, translating the bare headings. Schematic information of this kind is of little value, but the main body of the book is assembled with considerable skill and grace. The material is expressly confined to literary allusions and descriptions, although references to the main archaeological discoveries are given: the twenty-seven plates, representing this side of the subject, are both attractive and instructive.

The author constantly pays tribute to the work of Le Pontois, preserved in thirty-four MS. notebooks in the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève. Most of the sagas quoted are given in the translation of this scholar, whose achievement must have been considerable. The translation is in the main accurate and fluent. Although M. Manguin deplors the backwardness of French scholars in these studies (p. 27), he has revealed something of the treasury of unpublished material, and has himself ardently carried forward the tradition.

The book is confused and inexact in detail. There is no critical evaluation of the sources used, scarcely a suggestion of the distinctive contributions made to the subject by different records. A lexical list of ship-names, for instance, has items from the metrical jumble given as *skipa heiti* in five MSS. of Snorri's *Edda*, side by side with ordinary terms for ships, native and borrowed. The habit of retaining O.Icel. words (without italics, and frequently misspelt) in the translation leads to some strange confusions. On p. 217, we find: "en voilà un qui tient bon sur les sox" (*þessi gengr fast fram í soxin*); the rendering is idiomatic enough, but the alien term is made no clearer by a foot-note: "Sox, pluriel de sax." The note continues: "Onund trefsts: Onund jambe de bois," although the nickname *tréfótr* does not appear in the text above. On pp. 188-89, a quotation from the laws of Sveinn (*Heimskringla, Ól. Helg.* ch. 239) is given as an example of ancient laws in general, and those governing maritime expeditions in particular. Next follows a quotation from *Egils Saga* ch. 14, describing one of the special privileges granted to Þórólfr Kveldúlfsson on his second journey to Finnmark; it involves "la loi des kvaenir" (no capital, no contextual explanation). The spelling of Icelandic words is in general an ugly feature of an otherwise agreeable book. A few examples are enough: the famous ship of Olaf Tryggvason is repeatedly called *Tranin* (p. 52 et al.); "autsmadr" represents *austmaðr* (p. 36); on p. 254 are both *Fraedharberg* and *Froedarberg*; others are *Ultuna* for *Ulltuna* (p. 252), *Konungs Skuggsgga* (p. 162, footnote) *Aus saga bogoveigis* (p. 253 et al.).

The scrap-book method followed is often apt and pleasing, but it does not always do justice to the material. The final chapter, on ship-burial, clearly shows this deficiency. After transcribing a few chronological indications from *Osebergfundet I*, M. Manguin enumerates some striking examples of ship-funerals, taken from Family Sagas, Kings' Sagas and *Fornaldar Sögur*

indiscriminately. All are inhumations, except for the description of Haki in his blazing ship, from *Ynglinga Saga*. No attempt is made to group these instances in an evolutionary series; nor are such customs referred to their mythological background. The author proceeds simply "au hasard des sagas feuilletées."

The bibliographical index offers a wide conspectus on life and letters in ancient Scandinavia: surely the fullest on such a subject yet given by any French writer, as the Marquis de Saint-Pierre claims in his introduction, for it is by no means confined to shipping. Many of the works cited are antiquated, and the selection is very restricted, since only books in English and French (originals and translations) are included, with a sprinkling of standard archaeological publications in Norwegian. Thus the authoritative German treatises on ships and seafaring in the ancient North by Vogel (1907) and Falk (1912) find no place. Even the convenient English resumé given by Shetelig, Falk and Gordon (in *Scandinavian Archaeology*, 1937) does not seem to be known to M. Manguin, nor yet the "Notes on Shipbuilding" by E. Magnússon (*S.B.V.S.*, IV, 1906), although other articles from this journal are noticed.

But the limitations of the book are immediately obvious, and they do not seriously affect its purpose. In an easy and familiar way, the author has welded much disparate material into a smooth-flowing narrative. The width of his reading and his ready appreciation are alike remarkable, and it may be hoped that his example will bring fresh life to Northern studies in France.

J.E.T.P.

THE SAGA OF HRÓMUND GRIPSSON AND ÞORGILSSAGA.

By URSULA BROWN.

THE saga of Þorgils and Hafliði, which forms part of the composite *Sturlungasaga*, contains a description of a marriage feast which was held at Reykjahólar in 1119.¹ It is the fullest and most circumstantial description of an Icelandic feast that we possess. The company was entertained on this occasion by the recital of stories, as well as by dances and wrestling matches, and two stories which were told are mentioned in particular. The priest and poet Ingimund Einarsson told the story of Orm the poet of Barrey, with "numerous verses and a clever poem, which he had composed himself, at the end of the story." A well-to-do farmer from Skálarnes, called Hrólf, who has previously in the saga been spoken of as a skilful poet and story-teller,² recited the story "about Hrǫngvið the viking and Ólaf King of Fighting Men, and about the rifling of the grave of Þráin the berserk, and about Hrómund Gripsson; and the story contained many verses." The writer of the saga adds that Hrólf himself had composed (*samansett*) this story and that it was once recited before King Sverri, and he said that "fictitious stories like this were the most amusing of all."

The mention of the recital of stories for entertainment is not uncommon in the sagas,³ but these are generally stories of historical events, which their tellers could honestly claim to be true accounts, like the story of Harald Harðráði which was recited to himself by one who

¹ Chapter 10. *Sturlungasaga* (ed. Vigfússon), p. 19.

² Ch. 3, p. 8.

³ A number of references are collected by F. Jónsson, *Litt. Hist.* (1923), II. 198 ff.

had learnt it from an eyewitness,⁴ or of Ari Músson's voyage to Hvíttramannaland, which Icelanders heard told by "Þorfinn in the Orkneys."⁵ It is never said that these stories were "composed" by any person; that would have been a contradiction of their claim to be true reports. We do not know whether Ingimund Einarsson's story about Orm the poet of Barrey was fictitious or not; two extracts from Orm's verses are quoted in *Skáldskaparmál*,⁶ but no saga about him survives. The story Hrólfr told, however, can hardly have been a historical narrative. Hrómund Gripsson was probably a historical person, a native of Þelamork, living in the first half of the eighth century,⁷ for he is mentioned in *Landnámabók* as great grandfather of the first settler Ingólf Arnarson;⁸ but it is impossible that true traditions about his life survived in the twelfth century. There is extant a fictitious story about Hrómund Gripsson of which Hrólfr's story may well be the ancestor; the extant story contains the same characters—Hrøngvið the viking, King Ólaf⁹ and the berserk Þráinn—and the episode of the robbing of Þráinn's grave. Its fantastic quality would amply justify King Sverri's description of the story as a *lygisaga*.

The story of Hrómund Gripsson must have been very popular, for several versions of it are extant; it is found in Icelandic rímur¹⁰—the *Griplur*—written probably in the first half of the fifteenth century, and in a prose fornaldarsaga¹¹ which is based upon the rímur (see the appendix to

⁴ *Morkinskinna*, ed. F. Jónsson (1932), p. 199 f.

⁵ *Landnámabók*, ed. F. Jónsson (1900), p. 165.

⁶ *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, ed. F. Jónsson (1931), pp. 114, 116.

⁷ Cf. Jónsson, *Litt. Hist.* II, 802.

⁸ *Landn.*, p. 131.

⁹ The name *liðsmannakonungr* attributed to Ólaf in *Þorgilssaga* is not found in any of the extant versions, but that it also occurred in a version of the story of Hrómund is suggested by the appearance of the name in *Grimssaga loðnkinna* (ch. 3; ed. G. Jónsson and B. Vilhjálmsson, *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, Reykjavík (1943), vol. I, 277. All references to fornaldarsögur will relate to this edition). According to B. K. Þórolfsson (*Rímur fyrir 1600*, p. 354 f.), the writer of *Grimssaga* must have taken the name from a written *Hrómundarsaga*.

¹⁰ Ed. F. Jónsson in *Rímnasafn*, S.T.U.A.G.N.L. No. 35, p. 351. On the date of composition, see Andrews, *Modern Philology* VIII, 540.

¹¹ *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, Vol. II, 273.

this paper) and is only extant in MSS. of the seventeenth century or later. A short Icelandic poem, *Hrómundarkvæði*,¹² which was first recorded by Árni Magnússon, also contains a version of the story similar to the *Griplur*. There are ballads deriving from the Hrómund story in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish, of which the earliest versions, the Danish (deriving from a lost Norwegian version), are extant in MSS. of the sixteenth century.¹³ In the ballads the names and episodes of the Icelandic story are often altered and obliterated, but they all contain a fight with a monster of some kind and a love-story of the hero (who is variously called Rambolt, Ranild, and Ramund), and a princess; their relationship with the Icelandic story is clearly recognisable. Although all extant versions of the story of Hrómund Gripsson are late, the fact that a thirteenth-century writer should have included a reference to it in his saga of Þorgils and Hafliði suggests that it was a well-known story in his day, and that he expected his contemporaries to be interested in a record of the recital of the story, and of its composer and its reception by King Sverri.

The account of the recital of *Hrómundarsaga* in 1119 is the earliest mention we have of the recital of a fornaldarsaga which is still extant,¹⁴ and the account is in itself so remarkable and so valuable that some scholars, notably Kaalund¹⁵ and Leroy Andrews,¹⁶ have doubted whether

¹² Printed by Andrews in *Mod. Phil.* VIII, 540 f. The poem has slight differences from the *rímur*. Þórólfsson points out (*op. cit.* p. 363, note) that Árni Magnússon must have copied the poem from a MS., not from memory.

¹³ See Andrews, *Mod. Phil.* IX, 371 ff.; and Þórólfsson, *op. cit.*, p. 363.

¹⁴ In *Skarðsárbrók* (*Landn.* ed. 1843, p. 326), a Norwegian merchant is said to have told a story about Vatnar, son of the legendary king Víkar, but this story has not survived: cf. Jónsson, *Litt. Hist.* II, 784; also Heusler, *Anfänge der isländischen saga*, p. 31 f.

¹⁵ *Aarbog for nordisk Oldkyndighed*, 1901, p. 284.

¹⁶ *Mod. Phil.* IX, 386 ff.

it can be genuine and part of the original text of *Þorgilssaga*. They suspect it of being a late and even frivolous addition by the compiler or a reviser of *Sturlunga*, although nowhere else does the compiler show a tendency to insert false records in his text. Andrews considers that the passage is of no value as evidence of the composition of *Hrómundarsaga* much before 1300, and he attempts to show that the *Hrómundarsaga* whose contents are preserved in the *Griplur* and the ballads, and referred to in *þorgilssaga*, is an "entirely fictitious production of the last half of the thirteenth century." In his view, what he calls the "purely fictitious Icelandic saga" cannot be traced much further back than this date.

There is no need here to refute at any length the opinion that the reference to *Hrómundarsaga* is an untrustworthy interpolation: that has in the main been done by Heusler in his study of the origins of the Icelandic saga.¹⁷ If it had been the convention to record the names of the authors of sagas, we could understand a writer inventing an author for *Hrómundarsaga*; but the fact that authorship is here recorded in defiance of convention strongly suggests that the writer has incorporated a piece of true information. The writer of *Þorgilssaga* was evidently interested in the poetic achievements of Ingimund and Hrólfr; he twice speaks of Ingimund's skill as a poet,¹⁸ mentions that Hrólfr was a "sagnamaðr" and "composed skilfully," and includes a number of verses in the saga, some by Ingimund himself. It is not unlikely, therefore, that he would know traditions of other verses and stories composed by Ingimund and Hrólfr, and include a brief mention of them. Since no convincing explanation has yet been offered why any later writer should have interpolated the reference to the recital of *Hrómundarsaga*, we are justified in considering it a trustworthy record.

¹⁷ *Anfänge*, p. 21 ff.

¹⁸ Ch. 3, p. 8; ch. 10, p. 16.

The reference in *Þorgilssaga* to the saga of Hrómund Gripsson has been taken as important evidence of the development of the prose-saga in the early twelfth century;¹⁹ evidence that by then fictitious episodes were being put together to form stories or histories of heroes of the viking period. If this is so, we are faced with a seeming paradox in the development of the fornaldarsaga, —a paradox which Leroy Andrews disliked and which made him question the authority of the reference in *Þorgilssaga*, and led even Heusler to some very unconvincing conclusions. The fictitious saga of Hrómund Gripsson was composed about fifty years before the first historical sagas began to be written and about a century before the art of the prose-saga reached maturity. The account in *Þorgilssaga*, moreover, makes it clear that *Hrómundarsaga* was an artistic work, composed by a man renowned for his skill in verse and reciting stories, and no mere “stepmother-story told by shepherd lads.”²⁰ In their written form, however, the fornaldarsögur are a subsidiary development of the historical saga. They are evidently later works than the historical sagas, for they have acquired their literary technique from them.²¹ Not only are their stories presented as if they were historical, with concise, factual accounts of the persons, their family and country and their character, but they have a polish and a stereotyped simplicity of style which are marks of sophistication and the outcome of a long tradition of prose writing.

Few MSS. of fornaldarsögur are earlier than 1400, and it is probable that, with the exception of *Ynglingasaga*, the fornaldarsögur were not written down until the second half of the thirteenth century.²² The earliest mention of

¹⁹ Heusler, *op. cit.* p. 27; Meissner, *Strengleikar*, p. 7, note.

²⁰ Cf. Odd Snorrason's preface to his saga of Ólaf Tryggvason (ed. 1853, p. 1); also Jónsson, *Litt. Hist.* II, 785.

²¹ Cf. Heusler, *op. cit.*, pp. 16, 66.

²² Cf. Jónsson, *Litt. Hist.* II, 786 f. The language of the fornaldarsögur is, in almost every case, more modern than that of the historical sagas.

a written fornaldarsaga is in *Íslendingasaga*,²³ where it is told that in 1263 the Norwegian Queen summoned Sturla Þórðarson to recite to her, telling him to "bring with him" the saga of Huld the witch: the Queen's message could only apply to a written saga.²⁴ By the end of the thirteenth century the art of writing historical sagas was dying, as if the confidence of the writers and their will to contemplate serious themes had died with their country's independence. The fornaldarsögur were taking their place, inheriting conventions of style and expression which the historical saga had shaped. It is, no doubt, an understandable development of saga-writing that when most of the historical stories had been written, men should begin to set down the legends, presenting them as more stories in a familiar style; but there is besides, a degeneration of taste implicit in the growing popularity of the fornaldarsögur such as we are accustomed to associate with the decay of a great artistic period, and which brings with it the debasement of the artistic forms in which that period found expression.

That the written fornaldarsögur are a late, subsidiary development of the historical sagas can hardly be doubted, but what the relationship between the two types of saga was in the oral period, and what form the fornaldarsögur took before they came under the literary influence of the historical sagas, are questions which are much more difficult to answer. Though their style is late, the material of the fornaldarsögur is more ancient than the settlement of Iceland. Viking legends and traditions came with the first settlers and must have lived in the minds and on the lips of the people not only while the history of the land was being made but while the traditions about it were being formed and handed down. The

²³ Ch. 331. *Sturlunga.*, II, 271.

²⁴ Meissner (*Strengleikar*, p. 8, note) contends that the words could apply to a memorised saga; but cf. Jónsson, *Litt. Hist.* II, 786, note.

influence of fornaldarsaga motives is indeed evident in some of the earliest historical writing: the legendary saga of St. Ólaf²⁵ contains incidents reminiscent even of *Hrómundarsaga* itself, such as the story of Hrani breaking into Ólaf Guðrøðarson's grave (upon divine instructions), beheading the corpse and taking the treasure, or Ólaf's fight with Sóti the viking at Sótasker, after which he shows mercy to his defeated enemy.²⁶ Much of Saxo's material for his *Gesta Danorum* was derived from oral legends of kings and heroes current in Iceland in the twelfth century.²⁷ Yet even earlier than this we have evidence that fornaldarsaga motives were attracted to the historical traditions and played a part in shaping them. In the late ninth century the Norwegian poet Þjóðólf composed *Ynglingatal*, a genealogical poem tracing Harald Fairhair's ancestry to the kings of Sweden, and in this poem there was a story about a sorceress Huld, who killed King Vanland of Sweden by her witchcraft.²⁸ When, towards the end of the tenth century, the plagiarist poet Eyvind composed *Háleygjatal*, in imitation of *Ynglingatal* (intending to provide for Jarl Hákon a convincing genealogy which established his right to the sovereignty of Norway, as Þjóðólf had done for Harald), he also incorporated a story about a sorceress Huld, this time in connection with Aðils of Sweden (thirteen generations later than Vanland, according to *Ynglingasaga*). Although this part of *Háleygjatal* is lost, genealogies based upon it²⁹ introduce Huld's name as if she were an important and well-known character. Maurer has pointed out that in *Ynglingatal* the death of Aðils is

²⁵ *Ólafssaga ins helga*: ed. O. Johnsen (1922), p. 2 f.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁷ Cf. Heusler, *op. cit.*, p. 8 ff.

²⁸ Cf. *Ynglingasaga*, ch. 13. The following account of *Háleygjatal* and the traditions of Huld is based upon Maurer's article, *Die Huldarsaga*, Munich, 1894.

²⁹ Maurer, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

attributed to witchcraft,³⁰ and he suggests that Eyvind developed this theme more fully (altering chronology to suit his purpose) in order to emphasise that even in the earliest times there was enmity between the Háleygir and the Ynglingar.³¹ From the references to Huld in genealogies Maurer reconstructs the story of the death of Aðils which would probably have been found in *Háleygjatal*: Huld the daughter of Goðgest of Hálogaland bewitched the horse of Aðils of Sweden so that it stumbled, and threw and killed him. This she did in revenge for the death of her father, which was caused by a horse Aðils had sent him as a gift. The introduction of Huld into these historical traditions points to the existence of a very early fornaldarsaga about her, which was well-known not only in the ninth and tenth centuries but in the thirteenth century also, when Snorri wrote *Ynglingasaga*; for although his brief story of Huld and Valland seems to be based only upon *Ynglingatal*, he refers to Huld as if she would already be familiar to his readers from stories about her. Both the poems *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal* were artistic reconstructions of older genealogies in which other traditional material was used;³² it is perhaps significant that legends which were the ancestors of the fornaldarsögur were even in the ninth and tenth centuries being used and refashioned by the most skilful poets of the day, men who preserved the ancient historical traditions of their race.³³

Although the legends of the *fornöld* must have been

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 273; cf. *Ynglingas.*, ch. 29.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 272, 274.

³³ Maurer considers that the *Huldarsaga* which Sturla Þórðarson recited was probably not related to the ancient story of Huld (*op. cit.*, p. 226; his argument that the witch Huld would not have become "a huge trollwoman," even in popular tradition, is perhaps not very convincing). There are three extant *Huldarsögur*, written probably in the eighteenth century, which can have little relation to the early legend (Maurer, p. 263), although one of these, a learned reconstruction of written sources, also makes the early feud between the Háleygir and Ynglingar the central theme (Maurer, pp. 249 ff., 275).

familiar to the Icelanders from the earliest times, and may have been cultivated in an artistic form, they can hardly have served as a model for the development of the family saga. For the family saga was primarily a sequence of recent events remembered and related in the light of an important and often tragic issue. This circumstance must early have developed in the tellers of the family sagas the sense of the dramatic connection and unfolding of events which was to become their essential characteristic; yet to this the viking saga offered no parallel. The viking world was becoming an idealised and fantastic world, concerned with the wars and raids of kings and their heroic champions, and not, like the Icelandic traditions, with common law and lawsuits. It was, besides, a world whose geography as well as its history was becoming for the Icelanders remote and imprecise. For the tracing of circumstance, the shaping of a vast number of facts—details of events, the exact places where they occurred, and the numerous persons concerned in them—the viking saga can have afforded no precedent. Though not without a certain kinship in spirit with the viking saga, the family saga must have been independent of it in form.

It has been suggested by several scholars³⁴ that the relationship between the viking saga and the family saga was the same in the oral period as in the written period, and that the viking saga was a secondary, derivative type of saga even then. They suggest that the legends of the viking period were, in the early twelfth century, beginning to be moulded in the form of the family sagas. Heusler is inclined to agree with this view. He thinks it probable that the family saga, having developed from chronological and factual material throughout almost four generations, began in the early twelfth century to "include in its scope" the material of the viking legends. He envisages

³⁴ Heusler cites Neckel and others: *Anfänge*, p. 17 f.

this as the work of practised story-tellers (such as Hrólfr of Skálmarnes) who built these new sagas "sometimes from unconnected prose-tales, sometimes from heroic poems, even from stories they had invented themselves, making free use also of saga-motives already well-defined".³⁵ We could wish Heusler had explained in more detail what he meant by "saga-motives already well-defined"; for it is very much open to doubt whether the family saga had, by the beginning of the twelfth century, achieved a sufficiently fixed, not to say conventional, form for material of an utterly different nature to be moulded on the same lines. Any similarity between the *fornaldar-saga* and the family saga is, and must always have been, formal only and superficial, for they differ in essential characteristics of motive, setting, and artistic structure. Would the family saga, which is essentially a narrative of connected events, have suggested the combination of disconnected episodes—such as Hrómund's fight with Hrǫngvið and the plundering of Þráinn's grave—or the elaboration of heroic and humorous scenes, or the use of dramatic verse dialogue, so characteristic of the *fornaldarsögur*?³⁶ The family saga would surely encourage quite the opposite development, for there heroism is tersely portrayed and dialogue concise, realistic and unemotional. Such qualities as the *fornaldarsögur* might be said to owe to the family sagas are mainly literary developments in the family sagas themselves,—realistic (prose) dialogue, smoothness of style and manipulation of plot. It is difficult to find any feature common to the *fornaldarsögur* and the family sagas which could not be attributed to a literary attempt to approximate the two types.

Heusler attached great importance to what he called the

³⁵ *Anfänge*, p. 52.

³⁶ The use of verses in the *fornaldarsögur* is so unlike that of the historical sagas and approaches more nearly that of the Irish sagas, that Heusler even suggests the possibility of renewed Irish influence, c. 1100, assisting the development of the *fornaldarsögur* (p. 53).

“pragmatic bias” of the fornaldarsögur, their realistic approach to essentially romantic or fantastic stories. The stage is set and persons are introduced in the same precise, matter-of-fact way as in the historical sagas.³⁷ Heusler points out that in the Irish sagas heroic and magical themes do not have these hard outlines; this pragmatic quality, he says, must be borrowed from the historical sagas. Such a quality is indeed in keeping with the historical sagas and their concern with human circumstance and practical life, but whether a story is romantic or matter-of-fact in style depends as much on the temperament of the teller as on the theme itself. The growth of the historical saga suggests that a taste for pragmatic detail was inherent in the Icelandic temperament, an impulse to the development of the historical saga rather than a product of it. Many of the factual details in the fornaldarsaga introductions, such as the ancestry and countries of kings and heroes, had been preserved far longer than the historical traditions of Iceland and were not invented in imitation of the historical saga. There is no reason to suppose that the development of the family saga counteracted an existing tendency towards a more romantic and emotional treatment of the viking legends, similar to that of the Irish sagas, as Heusler’s argument seems to suggest. As evidence of the early formative influence of the family saga, the realistic quality of the fornaldarsaga is therefore of little value.

The stories of some of the fornaldarsögur—*Völsunga-saga*, *Hervararsaga ok Heiðreks*, part of *Qrvar-Oddssaga* (ch. 14), and of *Hrólfs saga Kraka* (ch. 41)—are those of old heroic poetic cycles from which poems or fragments of poems in the heroic metres are extant. It is generally thought probable that these poems began to be retold in prose as the old poetic forms became unfamiliar. Heusler suggests therefore that the first fornaldarsögur were

³⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 17.

composed from the historically later legends of the viking period and did not until much later include the stories of the heroic cycles.³⁸ This at once suggests another possibility: that some of the viking sagas themselves may originally have been composed in the form of heroic verse and in their case also retelling in prose may be a secondary development.

On general grounds there is much to support this possibility. It would make understandable the development side by side of two very different traditions of narrative, affecting each other little in any fundamental respect. It would also account for the strong links which the *fornaldarsögur* have with poetic traditions. They share not only the heroic ideals, and the spirit of savagery and fantasy of the heroic poems, but even characteristic features of their style. There are numerous verse dialogues in the *fornaldarsögur*,³⁹ which dramatise episodes as in the heroic poems: flying scenes, often harsh and satirical, between warriors or with trollwomen,⁴⁰ which are reminiscent of incidents in the *Helgi* lays, such as the flying of Guðmund and Sinfjötli,⁴¹ or of Atli and the giantess Hríngerð.⁴² The writing of the *fornaldarsögur* seems indeed to have been the occasion for a revival of verse-writing in the old heroic metres; many of the verses in sagas such as *Friðþjófs saga*, *Hjálmþérssaga*, *Ketilssaga Hængs*, betray in their language and style an origin as late as the thirteenth or even fourteenth century.⁴³ It is as if the writers of these *fornaldarsögur* wished to claim an ancient poetic origin for their story, in imitation of heroic and viking sagas which were known to be ultimately derived from verse narratives. There is

³⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 16 f.

³⁹ Cf. *Ketilss. Hængs*, ch. 3; *Friðþjófs. ins Frækna*, ch. 3; *Hálfss. ok Hálfss-rekka*, ch. 15.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Ketilss.* ch. 5; *Hjálmþérss. ok Qlvis*, ch. 12.

⁴¹ *Helgakv. Hund.* I, v. 33 ff; II, v. 22 ff.

⁴² *Helgakv. Hjörv.* v. 12 ff.

⁴³ Cf. Jónsson, *Litt. Hist.* II, 142 f.

also in many fornaldarsögur a ludicrous, theatrical comedy which finds its counterpart in some of the younger poems of the Edda. In *Hrólfs saga Kraka*, for example, there is a parody of the Volsung story, when Þoðvar makes the coward Hott eat some of the dragon's heart to give him courage, and pretend to kill the already dead dragon before the eyes of King Hrólfr and his court; and in *Hrómundarsaga*, Hrómund dresses up in a grey beard and a wide hat to fight Hrøngvið, for no apparent reason save that of providing a comic picture. Comedy of this kind is found in the Edda, not only in the legends of the old gods, as *Þrymskviða* and *Hymiskviða*, but even in stories of the heroes, as in the second lay of Helgi Hundingsbani, when Helgi is disguised as a bondmaid and grinds corn so powerfully that the stone beneath the handmill cracks. This scene seems to foreshadow the development of the fantastic hero from the tragic, fatalistic hero of the lays.

The similarity in motive and style between the fornaldarsögur and several of the Edda poems suggests that the fornaldarsaga may originally have been developed as a dramatic verse narrative, the verses linked, as often in the Edda poems, by a short prose statement of the circumstances of the story. It would be natural for a later prose-writer, in retelling the story, to expand these prose statements in the conventional phraseology of the historical sagas. Stories about the viking heroes would more readily follow the form of the ancient heroic legends than of the family sagas, for their affinity with them, both in their material and their antiquity, was far greater. There was the same remoteness of scene, and there were the weakening historical traditions, focussing upon only a few outstanding characters. The ancient tragic themes of the heroic poems are not repeated in the viking saga, but the formality of a poetic model lends itself to repetition even though the spirit of the original is lost,

while the early prose-saga, whose structure was in the development of the story itself, could provide no comparable external pattern.

It remains to consider how the saga of Hrómund Gripsson fits into this picture. We have more information about this saga than about any other fornaldarsaga, and no general conclusion on the original form of the fornaldarsaga could be of value which was not borne out by the evidence of *Hrómundarsaga*.

In the earliest mention of *Hrómundarsaga* and of its recital in 1119, we are told that it contained many verses. The extant prose saga contains no verses, but in the rímur, which represent a version of the story closer to the original, there are five references to verses. These references are in almost every case a prelude to dialogue. At the very beginning of the *Griplur* (I, v. 15), there is a general remark that "clever verses have been composed about Grip and his wife Gunnlǫð and their sons." In the first episode of the story, the fight with Hrǫngvið, there is a flyting scene between Hrǫngvið and Kári, one of King Ólaf's captains, in which it is said that Kári "uttered many verses" (I, v. 30). A violent abusive dialogue follows, the opponents speaking in alternate verses, and at the end the poet adds "þeir skeinduz lengi í orðum." When battle is engaged between Ólaf's men and Hrǫngvið's the poet says that "neither blows nor verses were lacking when they encountered" (I, v. 39).

As a prelude to the episode of the robbing of Þráin's grave there is a scene (recalling Ólaf Tryggvason's saga, in *Heimskringla*, ch. 39) in which a peasant rebukes the vikings for stealing poor men's cattle in a *strandhogg*, when they could be robbing Þráin of his gold. In the *Griplur* the peasant is said to address Ólaf's men in verses (II, v. 26). In a later episode (when the story continues beyond those episodes mentioned in *Þorgils-saga*), a speech of Hrómund's is introduced by the words

“ Vella týr (the prince) til vísu tók ” (IV, v. 7). No further mention is made of verses, though dialogue is frequent, but these references are sufficient to show that the *Griplur* poet's original, like the story Hrólf composed, contained many verses. They also suggest that Hrólf's verses may have been used similarly for dialogue and flyting scenes.

One of the most remarkable features of the *Griplur* is the borrowing of incidents from the Helgi cycle of poems. In the *Griplur*, Hrǫngvið's brother, Helgi inn frækni, is the foremost warrior in the host of the two Swedish kings Hadding. He has a mistress called Kára, who is a valkyrie and, in the shape of a swan, flies over him to aid him in battle. In the second lay of Helgi Hundingsbani, Sigrún is a valkyrie who rides above Helgi in battle. At the end of the poem, the writer adds that Helgi and Sigrún are said to have been reborn: “ he was called Helgi, warrior of the Haddings, then, and she was called Kára, daughter of Hálfðan, as is told in the lay of Kára, and she was a valkyrie.” The characters Helgi and Kára in the Hrómund story must have been borrowed from this lost lay of Kára. In the *Griplur* also there is a scene taken from a lay of Helgi, in which Hagal's wife disguises Hrómund as a bondmaid grinding corn, to escape from Blind inn illi, the agent of the hostile king Hadding. Helgi Hundingsbani is similarly disguised by his foster-father Hagal to escape from Blind inn þǫlvísi, the agent of King Hunding. As Kölbing first pointed out,⁴⁴ there are verbal similarities between the *Griplur* and the lay in this scene: the same words are used in both for the bondmaid—*þý*, *ambótt*; for the grinding implements—*kvern*, *mondul*, *lúðr*; and even for the bondmaid's actions—*standa*, *hræra*. Verses very similar to those in the Helgi lay, if not the same, evidently stood in the rímur's

⁴⁴ *Beiträge zur Vergleichenden Geschichte der Romantischen Poesie und Prosa des Mittelalters*, p. 177 f.

original. The prose saga, although it also contains the scenes and characters borrowed from the Helgi lays, does not preserve the striking verbal similarity.

It is difficult to discover what originally provided the link between the story of Hrómund and legends of Helgi Hundingsbani and Helgi Haddingjaskati. The scene in which Helgi is disguised as a bondmaid may have been adopted for Hrómund, as B. K. Þórólfsson suggests,⁴⁵ because some similar action was related in the Hrómund story and recalled the episode in the Helgi lay. Swedish kings Hadding are mentioned in earlier sources than the *Griplur* (in *Hyndluljóð* (v. 23) and *Hervararsaga* (ch. 1) two Haddings are included among the sons of Arngrím and their home is in Sweden), and a link with legends of the Haddings exists in traditions about Svanhvít, the sister of King Ólaf in the *Griplur*, who becomes the wife of Hrómund. There is a story in Saxo (Book II; ed. Holder, pp. 42 ff., and 52) of a valkyrie Swanhwida who is the daughter of Hadding of Denmark. By means of her magic she rescues Ragnar, son of King Hunding of the Swedes, who has been condemned by a jealous stepmother to keep the royal flocks, and surrounded by monsters to prevent his escape. Swanhwida marries Ragnar, and her love is so great that when Ragnar dies, she dies of sorrow. It is thought probable that Svanhvít in the story of Hrómund was originally the same person as Saxo's Swanhwida. The valkyrie name Svanhvít is only found, in old Icelandic sources, in *Völundarkviða*. In this lay, Svanhvít and her sisters are swan-maidens. The appearance of Helgi's mistress, Kára, as a swan-maiden in the Hrómund story may well be a borrowing from old traditions of Svanhvít; like Svanhvít, Kára is also associated with the Haddings. In the *Griplur* there is no counterpart of Saxo's story of Swanhwida's death. A

⁴⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 360.

version of the same story is, however, found in *Andrarrímur*; the writer of the story from which *Andrarrímur* were composed borrowed names and incidents very freely from the story of Hrómund, and since he included in his story an account of the death of Svanhvít from grief at the news of her husband's death, it seems that he knew a version of *Hrómundarsaga* which also contained this sequel to the story of Svanhvít.⁴⁶

Tenuous though the evidence is, it suggests that Svanhvít was the link which began the association of *Hrómundarsaga* with tales of the Haddings and their champion Helgi. The story of Swanhwida in Saxo was probably based on an Icelandic poem;⁴⁷ it consists largely of a dialogue between Swanhwida and Ragnar, which Saxo reproduces in Latin verse, no doubt in imitation of a poetic original. Whether Hrólfr's story of Hrómund contained the romance of Hrómund and Svanhvít cannot be determined; there is no reference to it in *Þorgilssaga*, and it may well have been a later addition to Hrólfr's story. But this romance was part of the story of Hrómund from which the ballads were composed. The heroine of the ballads is a princess who, like Svanhvít, is versed in magic. In the ballads, as in Saxo's story, the hero is meanly dressed and it is the princess who recognises that he is fit for kingship, and by her help that he gets royal clothes or royal rank.⁴⁸ The Hrómund story from which the ballads derived evidently also contained at least some episodes from the story of the Haddings which is found in the *Griplur*. In the Swedish ballad, Ramunder sacks the palace of the "keysar" (who is the princess's father); as Þórólfsson points out, this incident probably is derived from the story of Ólaf's and Hrómund's attack upon Hadding in his hall, which is

⁴⁶ See Þórólfsson *op. cit.*, pp. 356 ff, 423; Andrews, *Mod. Phil.* IX, 394.

⁴⁷ A. Olrik, *Sakses Oldhistorie* II (1894), p. 11 f.; Andrews, *Mod. Phil.* X 609 f.

⁴⁸ Cf. Andrews, *Mod. Phil.*, IX, 607.

found in the *Griplur* (VI, vv. 36-47). Hrómund's fight with Helgi inn frækni must also have been in the ballad's original, for the Norwegian ballad preserves Helgi's name, in the form "Hölgi kvass." *Hrómundarsaga*, therefore, had probably received interpolations from the story—perhaps indeed from a poem—of Helgi Haddingjaskati by the beginning of the fourteenth century, before the story reached Norway and was retold there in ballad form.⁴⁹

There are early poetic analogues of other episodes in the Hrómund story. Icelandic stories of a fight with the occupant of a *haug* have become well-known; one of these stories, besides Hrólfr's, was current in the twelfth century in a poem about two fosterbrothers Aswit and Asmund, and Saxo incorporated it in the *Gesta Danorum*.⁵⁰ In this story, Aswit dies and Asmund, fulfilling his pledge to his fosterbrother, descends into the *haug* with him. Robbers later break into the *haug* and Asmund escapes by climbing up the rope which they lower into the grave. Pale and blood-stained, he tells a harrowing story: how Aswit at night arose and ate first the horse and hound buried with him and then turned upon his friend and tore off his ear. Asmund was obliged to fight and slay the possessed body. Saxo gives Asmund's story in Latin verse, evidently attempting, as in his story of Swanhwida, to reproduce a poetic original. This tale is found again in the late fornaldarasaga of Egil and Ásmund "the Berserkslayer,"⁵¹ and is remarkably similar in detail to Saxo's story, especially in describing the behaviour of the dead man (here called Árán) in the *haug*. On the first night, Árán eats the hawk and hound; on the second, the horse, and on the third, while Ásmund is dozing, he leaps upon him and tears off his ears. It is equally possible that a

⁴⁹ Cf. Andrews, *Mod. Phil.* X, 397.

⁵⁰ P. 162 f.

⁵¹ Ch. 7, in *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, vol. III, and in *Drei Lygisögur*, ed. A. Lagerholm (1927).

poem of Hrólfr's about the encounter between Þráinn and Hrómund should have survived in much of its humorous and grotesque detail in the late version of his story.

The dialogue between Blind inn illi and King Hadding (*Griplur*, VI, vv. 7-33) also finds its closest parallel in verse: in *Atlamál*, Hogni's wife Kostbera tries to dissuade her husband from the fatal journey to Atli by telling him her dreams—of a bear that began to attack their people, of an eagle that flew up in their hall and spattered them with blood. Blind's dreams are similar—of a wolf that devours Hadding's men or a powerful serpent stretched over Sweden. King Hadding, like Hogni, interprets all the dreams favourably; Hogni tells Kostbera that the white bear she dreamed of means a snow-storm from the east; Hadding says that the serpent means only that a treasure-laden *draca* is coming to Sweden.

What conclusion is to be drawn from these poetic analogues of *Hrómundarsaga*? Fornaldarsögur as rich in material and motives from heroic verse as *Hrómundarsaga* may yet never have existed as stories in poetic form. But is it likely that a story composed of such material and motives would have existed in any other form in the twelfth century? In that century, it is thought, the fine poems in *Hervararsaga* were composed,⁵² and the Edda lay of Helgi Hjörvarðsson.⁵³ We can consider the prose statement in the Edda about the lay of Kára and Helgi Haddingjaskati not simply as Andrews does, as evidence of the attraction of incidents from one heroic poem to another because of the similarity of the names of the heroes, but as implying the multiplication of new stories about different heroes, composed in a common poetic form, from a common fund of incident and motive. Heusler's analysis of the lay of Helgi Hjörvarðsson, which he attributes to the twelfth century, would seem to bear

⁵² Jónsson *Litt. Hist.* II, 142.

⁵³ Heusler in Hoops, *Reallexicon*, under *Helgi Hjörvarðsson*.

this out: the lay has four distinct parts which, though incomplete in themselves, together form a single romantic tale; it presents, he says, a remarkable assortment of motives drawn from popular, burlesque poetry, from romance, folk tales, and poems of chivalry, all assembled in the garb of heroic verse. It is "a mosaic of Norse and foreign pieces, . . . the latest-born of the poems of the heroic cycles in the Edda." This description of the last phase of Eddaic poetry can hardly fail to recall Heusler's description of the first *fornaldarsögur* as he imagined them to be in the early twelfth century—composite stories made from unconnected prose tales, heroic poems, incidents invented by the tellers themselves, and conventional saga-motives, presented, in this case, in the form of the family sagas. But is it likely that men were, in the same period, composing stories from identical material in two very different artistic forms? Is it not more probable that *Hrólfr's* story was essentially a poem, in style not unlike the lay of *Helgi Hjörvarðsson*? This is indeed the most natural interpretation of the existing evidence about *Hrómundarsaga*, and it avoids attributing to the twelfth century a degree of sophistication in the recital of prose tales which would be more appropriate to the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Since *Hrólfr's* story is said to have "contained many verses," we cannot suppose that it was entirely a poetic narrative—it may have contained even more substantial prose-links than the *Helgi* lays without differing from them in form—but there is nothing in the structure of the story of *Hrómund*, as told in the *Griplur*, which suggests that there was any developed prose narrative in their original; apart from the conventional circumlocution of the *rímur*, circumstances are briefly stated and treated as in the *Helgi* lays, simply as a setting for the elaboration of incident. It is difficult to imagine that such scenes as the goading of *Þráin* or the recital of *Blind's* dreams were

originally composed in prose; yet such scenes are the heart of the tale, and if they were gone, very little would remain. On such scenes Hrólf would exercise his poetic skill, and his verses might have been recited to King Sverri together with other poems in the heroic style. Sverri was familiar with such poems, for he himself quotes from *Fáfnismál*,⁵⁴ and compared with the heavier didactic poems of the Edda, such as *Fáfnismál*, he may well have considered the story of Hrómund Gripsson one of the more amusing tales of fiction.

There is no reason to doubt that the description in *Þorgilssaga* of the story of Hrómund and of its recital in 1119 is direct and trustworthy evidence that the viking saga was being developed in artistic form already in the twelfth century; but in that development is to be seen the decay of heroic verse rather than the early maturity of the prose saga⁵⁵.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Sverrissaga*, ch. 164 (Fms. VIII, 409); cf. *Fáfnismál*, v, 6.

⁵⁵ I owe many thanks to Mr. G. Turville-Petre for his advice on this article, and for his kindness in reading and correcting the script.

APPENDIX.

The relationship of the prose saga of Hrómund Gripsson to the *Griplur*.

It is important to determine the relationship between the saga and the rímur versions of the story of Hrómund, for the saga lacks certain features, found in the rímur, which are of great value in any investigation of the origins of *Hrómundarsaga*. The saga contains no mention of verses, and, in the scene where Hrómund is disguised as a bondmaid (ch. 8), it has not the verbal similarity with the Edda lay of Helgi that is evident in the *Griplur*.¹ Árni Magnússon believed—or knew—that the saga was written from the rímur; he has written “úr rímunum” on one

¹ MSS. of the saga (except one, which is not the earliest) also have *Haldingjar* instead of *Haddingjar* in the rímur.

MS. of the saga (AM. 601 b, 4to, *pap.*) in contradiction of a statement of the scribe's at the end of the text, that he had copied it from a "saga . . . which was barely legible." Leroy Andrews² and F. Jónsson³ were of the same opinion as Árni Magnússon, but more recently A. G. Hooper has suggested (Leeds Studies in English, No. III, 1934, p. 56) that MS. AM. 601 b., 4to, *pap.* was copied from a saga which served also as the basis for the *Griplur*, but that into this saga the copyist had "introduced from memory parts of the rímur where his original was illegible." A close comparison of the texts of rímur and saga, however, makes it difficult to accept Hooper's suggestion.

The stories of the saga (S) and the rímur (R) are practically identical; where the two versions differ, that of S is inferior, as Kölbing has shown,⁴ giving a less logical and clear order of narrative, and sometimes omitting statements necessary for the understanding of the action. The faulty narrative of S can no doubt be ascribed largely to the illegibility of the MS. from which the scribe copied it.

Apart from these discrepancies between S and R, idiom and vocabulary in corresponding passages are strikingly similar. If both S and R are derived from the same prose saga, it follows that both must preserve very faithfully in many passages the words and expressions of their original. Yet as Andrews has pointed out,⁵ it is hardly likely that R, with its complicated verse-forms, could follow the words of a prose original as closely and consistently as this. Many of the expressions in S betray very plainly underlying verse-forms. The rich alliteration of the rímur is often preserved:

² Mod. Phil. VIII, 539.

³ *Rímnasafn* I (S.T.U.A.G.N.L., 35), p. 351.

⁴ Cf. *Beiträge*, pp. 161 ff. and 178.

⁵ Mod. Phil. VIII, 538.

S. p. 277⁶: Stattu stuðnungslaust á fætr aptr . .
Skríddu af stóli, skálkr argr, sviptir öllu fé.

cf. R. III, v. 24f.: Stattu á fætr stúrulaust,

skríð þú af stóli, skálkrinn latr,
skilinn frá öllu happi.

S. p. 278: Lengi hefi ek lifat í haugi mínum ok lafat
á fé, en eigi er gott at trúa gripum sínum, þótt góðir
þykki.

cf. R. III, v. 50: Svó hef eg lengi loðað á fé
og lifað í haugi mínum,
ei er gott, þó góðir sé,
gripum að treysta sínum.

S. p. 280: Hún gólaði með svá miklum galdralátum at
engi gáði at verja sik.

cf. R. IV, v. 43: Gól hún svó með galdra stig,
gáði engi at verja sig.

The rhyme-words of R can often be seen in S:

S. p. 276f.: Mér mun vera mál ór hauginum, fyrst engi
hamlar, eða hverninn vegnar þér, þú hérna, inn *gamli*?

cf. R. III, v. 14: Oss er mál úr yðrum haug,
eingi trúeg því *hamli*,

Hversu máttu, inn *gamli*?

S. p. 277: Hrómundr kastar þá sverðinu ok *treysti* afli
sínu. Þráinn sá þetta ok *leysti* ofan ketil sinn.

cf. R. III, v. 27: Hrómundr kastar hrotta þá.
handa afli *treysti*,
Þráinn var glaðr, er þetta sá,
þungan ketilinn *leysti*.

⁶ Page references are to *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, Vol. II (Reykjavík), 1943).

In S. p. 277, “ þá tók Þráinn at tryllast, ok fylltist upp haugrinn með illan daun,” the rhyming words of the *rímur*—*fyllast* and *tryllast*—are retained, with slight alteration.

Hooper attributes this close similarity of diction to interpolations by the scribe based on his memory of the *rímur*. If the scribe knew one version of the story of Hrómund so well that he could rely on his memory to supplement the text before him wherever it failed him, it is surprising that he seems to have seriously misunderstood entire incidents in the story, as, for example, the killing of the dog Hrók, which he interprets as the killing of a man.⁷ There is, besides, a correspondence in the more common or prosaic words and idioms throughout the two versions; though considered separately each instance of similarity would not be very significant, taken as a whole they suggest a more consistent relationship between R and S than Hooper supposes. Considering how much shorter the writer of S has made his story than the writer of R, the frequency of parallel phrases at similar points in the story (specifically poetic words often being changed to more common words in S, cf. *rómu*, *orrustu* in the example below) is very remarkable, if there is no written connection between the two versions. Some of these similarities may be quoted briefly, in illustration:

R: hallast . . upp að stafni,	S: hallast upp við stafni;
dólgrinn einn á drekanum stendr,	einn dólgr stóð uppá drekanum;
aldri þvílíkt hogg þegit,	aldri fengit þvílíkt hogg
halda til rómu,	halda til orrustu;
glíman gekk í kjör,	þat hefr gengit í kjör.

⁷ S. ch. 5, p. 279; R. IV, v. 4 ff.

It seems improbable that this steady correspondence of simpler phrases is also due to the saga-writer's memory of R; this correspondence is just what we should expect in a condensed prose version of R, in which the writer would have to omit so much of the poetic diction of his original and would be likely to retain the simpler narrative phrases.

If R and S derive independently from a common original and their original contained verses (as is generally supposed, on the authority of R), the writer of S must have either paraphrased or omitted all these verses. This is surprising since verses are on the whole richly preserved in the *fornaldarsögur*. It is noticeable however that in passages in R where it seems most probable that verses existed in the original (since they follow references to *vísur*), S not infrequently preserves the alliterations or rhymes of R; for example, in the dialogue between Kári and Hrǫngvið (R. I, v. 33 f and S. p. 274):

kom þú á morgun Kári hér .

bauta skal eg á brjósti þér

með brynþvara oddi mínum. (R)

Mitt sverð heitir Brynþvara . . kom þú hér á morgun,
Kári, ek skal slíðra hann í þínu brjósti. (S)

Eg veit ei fyr ofan mold

annan Hrǫngvið verri. (R)

Ek veit engan verri en þik; (S)

and the speech of the peasant Máni (R. II, vv. 34, 39
and S. p. 275)

væri nær að vekja upp drauga,

með verkin sterk að ganga í hauga; (R)

Kvað meiri fremd at brjóta hauga ok ræna drauga
fé. (S)

Þráinn hét sá, er Valland vann og var þar
stillir, (R)

Þráinn, sem vann Valland ok var þar konungr. (S)

A slight but interesting equivalence of phrase occurs also in the words which Hrómund (S mistakes the speaker for the King) addresses to Váli after the killing of Hrók:

R. IV, v. 7: Vella týr til vísu tók:
 “ Vóli, hefr þú deyddan Hrók;
einhværn tíma innig þér
 fyr ǫll þau þorin þú leikur mér.”

S. p. 279 simply has: “ kvaðst hann skyldu launa Vála *einhværn tíma* hans hrekki.” If these passages are ultimately based on verses, it seems likely that all the writer of S knew of these verses was R’s version of them. If such scenes as the goading of Þráin and the discussion of Blind’s dreams were also in verse in the original, as seems probable, the very close verbal similarity (including rhymes and alliteration) between S and R makes it highly unlikely that S should have been derived from any verse account other than that of R (cf. besides earlier quotations, R. III, vv. 21, 23, 28, 47; VI, vv. 13, 17, 24, 27, with the corresponding narrative in S).

In one instance S has a reading which seems to be the misinterpretation of words in R. R. II, v. 60 reads: “ nógt um þókti nadda lesti,” i.e. “ the warrior was almost overpowered ”; S. p. 276 reads: “ var þat á nóttu,” which is obviously wrong because it does not grow dark until later (cf. p. 277: “ Dagr líðr, en kveldar ok gerðist myrkt í hauginum ”). S thus loses the significance of Þráin’s delay in fighting Hrómund: he is waiting until nightfall when his berserk strength comes to him. The reading of S suggests that the writer had before him a blurred text of R, and that in this instance he could only make out a few letters of his original. It is difficult to account for this sentence in S in any other way. Other possible examples of misreading of R might be pointed out in S, for example, p. 278: “ þú munt fæddr vera af Gunnlǫðu. Eru *fáir* þínir líkar.”, cf. R. III, v. 43:

“Gunnloð hefr *ei* Grips í bý getið sér arfa slíkan . . . fylu tel eg þig líkan”; or p. 280: Ólaf is summoned westwards (*vestr*) to Vænis ís, though he comes from Denmark (Norway, R), whereas in R he is told to come *um vetr*. These differences are not in themselves important or conclusive, but in connection with the misreading in S. p. 276 first cited, they may be worth notice.

A close comparison of the texts of S and R suggests very strongly that S is a paraphrase of R. The writer has sometimes abbreviated his text severely and at other times borrowed whole verses, altering only the position or tense of words to disguise the verse-form. He has not included verses in his saga-text because the verses were not distinguished in his original. The order of his narrative differs in a few places from that of the extant complete versions of R but we know that versions of R with a different order of stanzas did exist (e.g. in the fragmentary version in a Wolfenbüttel parchment, c. 1500), as might be expected in long poems handed down in oral tradition.⁸ In any discussion of the development of *Hrómundarsaga Gripssonar*, R may therefore be taken as a version of the story closer to the original than S.

⁸ Cf. Andrews, *Mod. Phil.* VIII, 536 f.

AUDUNN AND THE BEAR.

By ARNOLD R. TAYLOR.

ICELAND is justly famous for the prose which it developed in the Middle Ages. Before any other European country it developed a prose style and a narrative art which can only be paralleled in modern times. This prose is preserved in the Family Sagas, the Lives of the Norwegian Kings, and the various lives of saints and the bishops of Iceland.

In the past it has been customary to attribute the success of these medieval writers to the fact that they had behind them a technique of oral story-telling developed over a period of three hundred years. But, as Mr. Turville-Petre shews in his paper "On the Intellectual History of the Icelanders,"¹ modern scholarship tends to discredit this theory, and stresses the literary tradition. The sagas, therefore, as they exist to-day, are the product of writers who in a greater or lesser degree appreciated both the intricacies of their craft and the excellence of their own art. Few of these writers are known. The Family sagas, for instance, are without exception anonymous. Hence the compilation of a history of the literature of this period is a difficult task. We must approach each work as a single entity and judge it on its own merits.

Nevertheless amongst the greater works there is a remarkable resemblance both in the style of writing and the methods used for the presentation of the story, so that we can, without difficulty, isolate certain elements of an Icelandic saga style. To-day, working as I am in

¹ *History*, XXVII, 1942, pp. 111 f.

translation, it is obviously impossible to dwell upon the prose itself, and I must confine myself to a study of the methods of narrative construction. The main elements are well known and have been pointed out by several scholars and critics, perhaps never better than by W. P. Ker.² May I for a few moments concentrate on reminding you of them?

First of all, reasonably interesting material of a concrete kind is chosen for the story. This is then related in the simplest of terms by an author who is content to allow the story almost to tell itself and to eschew, whenever possible, both description and reflection. By this I mean that the author not only avoids all psychological comment on his people but, by keeping himself and his opinions in the background, does not even venture on moral comment. As a result much of the dramatist's technique is used, and we seem to see our story unfolded before our eyes as on a stage or screen. The dramatic technique is emphasised, in the best works, by the use made of dialogue which arises directly out of the action, furthers the action and is an inherent part of it. The modern novelist, accustomed as he is to the technique which describes his characters from within, laying bare for us their innermost thoughts and feelings, might well despair of producing a convincing story by the above methods. But the Icelandic author is often able to present to us characters revealed by their own actions, and at the same time to give us implicitly all that we need to know of their far from simple emotions.

For it is the characterisation which is the great glory of these medieval prose stories. Those of us who have read *Njáls saga*, *Grettis Saga* or *Eyrbyggja*, find with the passage of time that the incidents of the story often elude us, but not so the characters of such men as Gunnar, Njáll,

² W. P. Ker, *Epic and Romance*, passim.

Skarphéðinn, Grettir, and Snorri the Priest. We cannot forget them.

It is my purpose to-day to examine a short episode, found in the life of Harold Hardrada, in which, it seems to me, the author in the compass of a few pages has painted an unforgettable picture.

The story of Auðunn and the Bear or, to give it its more usual title, *Auðunar þáttur vestfirzka* exists in two main recensions, both of which go back to the same original. The longer and later version is to be found in *Flateyjarbók*, a handsome manuscript from the last decade of the fourteenth century containing the sagas of the Orkneys and Faroe Islands.³ The shorter version is in the thirteenth century *Morkinskinna* (Rotten skin), and is greatly to be preferred on literary grounds.⁴ It is this text which has found its way into most Icelandic readers and which I am to comment on to-day. It is difficult to given any precise date of composition. The editors of the latest critical edition suggest the years 1190-1220.⁵ The *terminus a quo* is fixed by the death of Þorsteinn Gyðason in 1190,⁶ for the story was obviously written after that event. The *terminus ad quem* is suggested by the probable date of composition of the Lives of the Norwegian Kings as preserved in *Morkinskinna*. However Finnur Jónsson has shewn that it is unlikely that the original *Morkinskinna* contained the Auðunn episode.⁷ This would bring the *terminus ad quem* down to about 1250, as the present manuscript dates from the latter half of the thirteenth century. Moreover the literary excellence of the piece favours a date which is not too early. If a theory of mine, which I shall propose to you

³ Ed. by Vigfússon and Unger, Christiana, 1868, III, 410 f.

⁴ Ed. by Finnur Jónsson (S.T.U.A.G.N.L., 1932).

⁵ *Vestfirðinga Sögur (Íslensk Fornrit VI, Reykjavík, 1943)*, ed. by B. K. Þórolfsson & G. Jónsson, pp. cvi-cvii.

⁶ See *Íslenskir Annálar*, Copenhagen, 1947, p. 78.

⁷ *Morkinskinna*, pp. ix-x.

later, is correct, our episode must be younger than the *Hungrvaka*, written shortly after 1206.

AUÐUNAR ÞÁTTIR VESTFIRSKA.⁸

There was a man called Auðunn, whose family was from the western fiords, and he was a man of little wealth. He went abroad from there with the help of Þorsteinn, a good farmer, and of skipper Þórir, who had been staying the winter with Þorsteinn. Auðunn was also with Þorsteinn and had worked for Þórir, and the journey abroad under the care of Þórir was his reward. But before he went on board Auðunn laid aside the greater portion of his wealth for his mother, and it was reckoned sufficient to last for three winters.

Then they left for abroad and had a good journey, and Auðunn stayed the winter with skipper Þórir, who owned a farm in Mærr. The following summer they sailed for Greenland, and spent the next winter there.

Now it is said that Auðunn bought a bear in Greenland; it was of great value and Auðunn paid for it everything he had. When summer came they returned to Norway, and had a good passage. Auðunn brought his animal with him, and thought to go south to King Sweyn in Denmark and make him a present of it. And when he came to that part of Norway where the King was, he left the ship and, taking his animal with him, rented a room for himself.

King Harold was soon told that a bear of great value had been brought there and that it was owned by an Icelander. The King sent for him immediately; and when Auðunn stood before the King he greeted him well.

⁸ I only know of two other translations of this episode into English. One is by G. W. Dasent and was published in *Once a Week*, I, 1859. It was reprinted in 1861 in G. W. Dasent, *The Story of Burnt Njal*, pp. clxxiii-clxxxiii. I was unfortunately not able to make use of this translation as it was not available to me at the time. The other is by J. M. Nosworthy and was published in *The Adelphi*, New Series, Vol. II, pp. 346-50, London, 1936.

There is, in addition, a translation of the second interview between Auðunn and King Harold in R. W. Chambers, *Widsith*, pp. 25-26.

The King returned his greeting and then asked: "Have you a bear of great value?" He answered saying that he had an animal with him. The King said "Would you be willing to sell us the animal for the price that you paid for it?" He answered "No, sire, I would not."

"Would you like me to give you twice the price?" said the King, "and indeed that would be fairer since you gave everything that you had for it." "I would not, sire," he said. The King said "Will you give it to me then?" He answered "No sire." The King said "What do you want to do with it then?" He answered "Go to Denmark," he said, "and give it to King Sweyn." King Harold replied "Are you so foolish that you are unaware of the state of war between us and Denmark, or is it that you think your luck so great that you can manage to get there with your precious gift when others, who have more pressing business cannot make it unharmed?" Auðunn answered "Sire, it all lies in your power, but I cannot agree to anything except what I had formerly planned." Then the King said "And why shouldn't you go, even as you wish? But come before me on your return, and tell me how King Sweyn rewarded you for the bear. It may be that you are a man of good fortune." I promise you that," said Auðunn.

He then sailed south along the coast and into Oslo fiord, and from there to Denmark. And when he arrived there he had used up every penny of his money, and was forced to beg food both for himself and for the animal. He visited King Sweyn's steward, who was called Áki, and asked him for victuals for both himself and his bear, and said "I am going to give the animal to King Sweyn." Áki offered to sell him victuals if he wished. Auðunn told him that he had no money to pay for them "though" he said, "I should very much like to be able to make the King a present of the bear." "I will give you all the food and lodging that you require until you meet the

King, but in return I want a half share in the animal. Think of it this way, that otherwise the animal would die on your hands—for you need a lot of provisions and your money is all spent—and then you can expect to get nothing out of your bear.”

And when he had thought the matter over, it seemed to him that what the steward said was about right. So he arranged to give Áki half the animal, and let the King apportion the reward. They decided to approach the King together; and they went to where the King was and stood before his table. The King wondered who this man, whom he did not know, could be, and spoke to Auðunn. “Who are you?” he said. He answered “I am an Iclander, sire,” he said, “and have lately come from Greenland and just now from Norway. I wanted to make you a present of a bear. I paid for it with everything that I had, but now it is rather difficult for me; I am now the owner of only half the animal.” And he told the King all that happened between him and his steward Áki. The king said “Is it true, Áki, what he says?” “Yes” he said. The King said “And did you think, after I had made a great man of you, that it was the right thing to do, to place difficulties and hindrances in the way when someone was trying to present me with valuables for which he had given all that he possessed? And even King Harold, who is our enemy, thought fit to let him go in peace. Think then how just it was on your part. It would be fitting that you should lose your life. I will not go as far as that, but you shall leave this land and never more come before my eyes. But to you, Auðunn, I am as grateful as if you had given me all the animal. Stay here with me.” Auðunn accepted and was with King Sweyn for a time.

But after a little while Auðunn said to the King: “I should like to go away, sire.” The King was rather slow in his reply—“What is your wish, if you don’t want to

stay with us?" He said "I should like to go on a pilgrimage." "If your intention were not such a good one," said the King, "I should be annoyed at your desire to leave." And the King gave him a great deal of silver, and he went south with the Rome pilgrims. The King arranged his journey for him, and bade him come to see him when he returned.

Now he went his way he until came south to Rome, and when he had stayed there as long as he wished, he began his journey back. He was attacked by a great illness and became very thin, and all the money that the King had given him for the journey was spent; so he took up the way of a beggar and begged for his food. He became bald and looked very down-and-out.

He reached Denmark again, where the King was, at Easter tide. But he dare not let himself be seen and hid in the corner of the church, thinking to present himself to the King as he went to the evening service. And when he saw the King and the splendidly dressed retainers, he dared not let himself be seen. Then, as the King went to the drinking in the hall, Auðunn ate his meal outside, as is the custom of the Rome pilgrims before they have resigned their staff and script.

Again, that evening, Auðunn thought to waylay the King as he went to even-song; but although he had found it difficult enough before, it seemed even worse now as the retainers were drunk. But as they were returning, the King thought he saw a man who seemed not to have the courage to come forward and meet him. And as the retainers went in, the King turned aside and said "Come forward the man who wishes to meet me, for I suspect that is what he wants." Then Auðunn came forward and fell at the feet of the King, who scarcely recognised him. But when the King knew who he was, he took Auðunn by the hand and welcomed him, "You have greatly changed," he said, "since we last met," and he led him

in after him. When the retainers saw him they laughed, but the King said: "There is no need for you to laugh at him, for he has provided for his soul better than you." Then the King had a bath prepared for him and gave him clothing, and he stayed with him.

Now it is said that in the spring the King offered Auðunn a permanent place with him and said that he would make him his cup-bearer and honour him greatly. Auðunn said "May God reward you for all the honour that you are ready to give me; but I am thinking rather of going to Iceland." The King replied "That seems to me a curious choice." Auðunn said "I cannot bear, sire," he said, "that I should be in great honour with you here whilst my mother lives as a beggar in Iceland; for the provision I made her before I left Iceland will now be all consumed." The King replied "That is well spoken," he said, "and like a man, and you will probably be a man of great good-fortune. Such is the only reason for your departure which would not displease me. But stay now with me until the ships are ready to sail." He did so.

One day, later in the spring, King Sweyn went down to the jetty, and ships were being prepared for voyages to many lands to the east or Saxony, to Sweden or Norway. Then he and Auðunn came to one fine ship which the crew were getting ready, and the King asked him "What do you think, Auðunn, of that ship?" He answered "It's a fine one, sire." The King said "I want to give you that ship as a reward for your bear." He thanked him for his gift as well as he knew how.

Now time passed and the ship was all ready, and King Sweyn said to Auðunn "Now that you desire to go away I will not prevent you. But I have heard that the anchorages are not good off your coasts, and that in many places the coast is open and dangerous to shipping. Now should you break up and lose your ship and money, there will be little to shew that you have met King Sweyn

and given him gifts of great value." Then the King gave him a leather bag full of silver "and now you will not be quite penniless though you lose your ship if you manage to keep your hold on this. But it may still be," said the King, "that you should lose this money, and you will have little advantage from your meeting with King Sweyn and giving him presents." Then the King drew a gold ring from his finger and gave it to Auðunn, and said "Though you should be so unfortunate as to break up your ship and lose your money, you will not be penniless if you get to land, for many men carry gold on them in shipwrecks, and if you have the ring it will still be clear that you have met King Sweyn. But I charge you, do not give away the ring unless you think that you owe so much to some noble man—then give him the ring, for it is an honour for distinguished men to take gifts. And now farewell."

Then he put out to sea and came to Norway and had his cargo brought ashore; and it was a much greater business than the last time he was in Norway. He then went to visit King Harold to fulfil the promise that he had made before going to Denmark, and he greeted the King well. King Harold returned his greeting, "and sit down" he said, "and drink with us." And so he did.

King Harold asked "In what way did King Sweyn reward you for your bear?" Auðunn answered "By his acceptance, sire." The King replied "I, too, should have rewarded you in that way. How else did he reward you?" Auðunn answered "He gave me silver to go on a pilgrimage." Then King Harold said "King Sweyn gives many a man silver to go on a pilgrimage and for other reasons, even though they have not given him gifts of value. What else was there?" "He offered," said Auðunn, "to make me his cup-bearer and to do me great honour." "That was well said," said the King, "but he must have given you more reward than that." Auðunn

said "He gave me a merchant ship laden with the best wares for Norway." "That was a magnificent action," said the King, "but I too would have rewarded you so. Did he reward you in any other way?" Auðunn said "He gave me a leather bag full of silver and said that I should not be penniless if I kept it though my ship foundered off Iceland." The King said "That was excellently done, and something that I should not have done; I should have thought myself quit when I gave you the ship. Did he reward you even more?" "He did indeed, sire," said Auðunn, "he gave me this ring, which I have on my finger, saying that it might happen that I should lose all my money, and added that I should not be penniless whilst I kept the ring, and he bade me not to part with it unless I was so much indebted to some distinguished man that I wished to give it to him. And now I have found that man, for you had the chance of taking both from me, the bear and also my life, but you allowed me to go in peace to where no one else could go."

The King graciously accepted his gift, and in return gave Auðunn some fine presents before they parted. Auðunn invested his money in a voyage to Iceland and left for Iceland that same summer, and proved to be a man of the greatest good-fortune.

I want now to reduce our story to its elements and to examine the author's treatment.

Auðunn invests the whole of his money in a Greenland bear. He decides to offer it to King Sweyn in Denmark in the hope of a satisfactory reward. Because of a war between Denmark and Norway he has difficulty in fulfilling his plan, but eventually succeeds. Far from being disappointed in the results of his venture, he returns to Iceland a rich man.

The material is sound and the possibilities of treatment

many. Opportunities are afforded for lively description of Greenland, Norway and Denmark, but not one of these opportunities is taken.

After essential introductory matter has been dealt with the author concentrates all his art on four high-lights—the scene between King Harold and Auðunn before he reaches Denmark, the first interview with King Sweyn, the second on the completion of the pilgrimage to Rome, and the promised visit to King Harold before the successful Auðunn goes home. These high-lights are used by the author in the main to illustrate three characters—Auðunn himself, King Harold and King Sweyn. All four contribute directly to the characterisation of the simple Auðunn, two are concentrated on King Harold and two on King Sweyn, while the latter are further revealed by their reaction to the circumstances in which Auðunn puts them.

In all three studies there is only one sentence of description—it is said of Auðunn on his return from Rome that he was bald and looked down-and-out—yet all three are clearly portrayed.

Auðunn is a simple, honest fellow, but shrewd in his dealings. Does he not back the better horse in King Sweyn? He is a man who plans his actions and, having once made his decision, carries it out. This decisiveness in his character is perhaps only emphasised the more by the few moments of his indecision, when he is made to hesitate before approaching King Sweyn for a second time. Finally, as befits an Iclander of his time, he is a man of honour who may justly reward a king for services rendered, for permission to go in peace with his bear when two nations are at war.

King Sweyn is, perhaps, the most conventional of the three. He is the figure of the noble king who rewards good and despises evil, who is prepared to sacrifice even his own regal pleasure for the greater good of others. But he, too, is individualised by the little incident outside

the church, by his thoughtfulness in doubly rewarding his benefactor, and by his justifiable self-pride which must be made patent to the world in the prosperity of Auðunn.

The greatest character study, as is fitting, for our episode is part of his saga, is that of King Harold. He appreciates, as we do, the comedy of the Icелander and his bear. He begins by living up to his name of a tyrant, but faced with the honourable yet odd obstinacy of Auðunn he succumbs, recognising the inherent nobility of the man and bids him go in peace. King Sweyn, too, recognises in him a fitting opponent. But the finest scene, and it is noteworthy that this scene is presented almost wholly in dialogue, is his second interview with Auðunn. Auðunn is regarded by him as at once insignificant and yet an equal, but, when his kingly virtue of munificence is surpassed by the treatment meted out to our man of naught, his acceptance of defeat is so creditable that he is immediately raised higher on the throne of nobility than before.

The interest of our author lay with his characters. We might even say that he is not telling a story but introducing us intimately to three men. As an additional proof of this contention let us look for a moment at what is omitted, for the literary artist, like any other, thrives on selection. We learn little of Greenland beyond the fact that Auðunn bought his bear there; the whole of his visit to Rome is despatched in a few lines; time and distance are dismissed in a sentence.

Knowledge of Greenland can scarcely have been very much greater in those days than now, but the opportunity of describing the country, the climate, its inhabitants and customs is totally ignored.⁹ How great, too, must have been the interest in Iceland and Norway in a journey to

⁹ The *Flateyjarbók* version does add a few details about Greenland, but insufficient to affect my point. v. *op. cit.*, 111/411.

Rome. Indeed one of the earliest scientific books written in Icelandic contains guide-book material for pilgrims to Rome and the Holy Land.¹⁰ Yet if we return to our text we find: "Now he went his way until he came south to Rome, and when he had stayed there as long as he wished he began his journey back." In my abstract I pointed out that Auðunn was at first unable to take his bear to Denmark because a state of war existed between the two kingdoms, but the difficulties which he encountered are not even mentioned. All the text gives us is one sentence: "He then sailed south along the coast and into Oslo fjord and from there to Denmark." His difficulties, however, must have been many and the time taken long, for we are later told that when he does reach Denmark his money is exhausted. The omission of such detail is all the more praiseworthy when we remember the greatness of the temptation and the justification which the author might have felt in its inclusion.

This power of selection is only brought out more clearly when we consider the use made of it in minor incidents. When Áki brings Auðunn before King Sweyn, the King says: "And did you think, after I had made a great man of you, that it was the right thing to do, to place difficulties and hindrances in the way when someone was trying to present me with valuables for which he had given all that he possessed? And even King Harold, who is our enemy, thought fit to let him go in peace." It is nowhere explicit that Auðunn had told the King that King Harold had furthered his coming to Denmark.¹¹ Nevertheless the King knew. It is as if characters, new to the story, step up from the auditorium and already know all that has gone before. This extreme of economy, which can be

¹⁰ Published in *Alfræði Íslensk* (S.T.U.A.G.N.L., 1908) ed. Kr. Kaalund.

¹¹ It is, however, made clear in the *Flateyjarbók* version that Auðunn had pointed this out to King Sweyn—"I visited King Harold, and he allowed me to leave and go where I wished though I refused to sell him (the bear)." op. cit., III, 412/22.

exactly paralleled in Auðunn's first interview with King Harold, illustrates the author's consideration for his reader, and is only to be found in the best of the saga writers.

Throughout the story, then, we see that the author is constantly studying his material, bringing each of his high-lights to its fullest concentration, and, using each as the foundation for its successor, allows the whole to mount with almost mathematical precision to the glorious crescendo of the final interview between Auðunn and the King.

This almost mechanical concentration on the climax method is to be found not only in the general treatment of the material of the story, but also in its detail. Let us look once more at the picture of Auðunn outside the church, hesitating to approach King Sweyn. The technique is again that of the screen. We see, first of all the church with Auðunn and his fears outside, waiting for the King to return from evensong. We see the approach of the King and his retainers, simultaneously with and almost with the eyes of Auðunn himself, and we shrink back. We see the King hesitate and stop, allow his retainers to enter the hall, and hear, with mingled relief and shame, his call to Auðunn to come forward. This dramatic use of suspense, a favourite device in the achievement of climax, is used again and again. Compare, for example, the scenic nature of the account given when King Sweyn and Auðunn visit the jetty before Auðunn's final departure for Norway.

The frequency of this use of the climax leaves, I think, little doubt in the mind that it is deliberate on the author's part, a feeling which is turned into a certainty when we recall the positioning of the punctuating sentence which occurs so often: "And I think that you are a man of great good fortune." Perhaps the perfect example is once again the final interview between King Harold and

Auðunn. Here we note the increasing value of the reward made by King Sweyn to Auðunn, an increase paralleled not only by the content but also by the author's arrangement of the dialogue and the varying length of the speeches. Auðunn's answers illustrate this best, for compare the first—"In what way did King Sweyn reward you for your bear?" "By his acceptance, sire,"—with the last—"That was excellently done, and something that I should not have done; I should have thought myself quit when I gave you the ship. Did he reward you even more?" "He did indeed, sire," said Auðunn, "he gave me this ring which I have on my finger, saying that it might happen that I should lose all my money and added that I should not be penniless whilst I kept the ring, and he bade me not to part with it unless I was so much indebted to some distinguished man that I wished to give it to him. And now I have found that man, for you had the chance of taking both from me, the bear and also my life, but you allowed me to go in peace where no one else could go."

Finally I should like to turn from this critical examination to the field of speculation. The historical accuracy of the Icelandic sagas is a vexed question, for often we have no independent documents with which to check them.

It has, however, been generally assumed that the story of Auðunn and his bear is authentic.¹² Moreover attempts have been made, and I must admit that the theory has found general acceptance, that a whole series of European folk-tales with variants ranging from Scotland to Finland and from Norway to Bohemia are dependent upon it.¹³

¹² *Vestfirðinga Sögur*, p. C.

¹³ Cf. R. Christiansen, *Kjætten paa Dovre*, (*Vidensk. Selsk. Skrifter* II. Hist.-filos. Kl. 1922, No. 6.

G. Neckel, *Schretel und Wasserbär*, in *Mitteil. der Islandsfreunde* XI, 1923.

J. Bolte, *Das Schretel und der Wasserbär*, in *Zeit. des Vereins f. Volkskunde*, XXXIII-XXXIV, 1924, pp. 33-38.

K. Liestøl, *Kjetta paa Dovre*, in *Maal og Minde*, 1933, pp. 24-48.

S. Einarsson, *Sktrnir*, CNIII, Reykjavík, 1939, pp. 161-171.

The Scandinavian variants are best typified by the story of "The Cat on the Dovrefell," and the continental by the German poem from the closing years of the thirteenth century, "Das Schretel und der Wasserbär" by Heinrich von Freiberg. The opening sentence of Dasent's translation¹⁴ of the Norwegian story best illustrates the points of contact. "Once there was a man up in Finnmark who had caught a great bear, which he was going to take to the King of Denmark." The German poem adds that the gift of the bear is from the King of Norway to the King of Denmark. These details appear only in the prologue of the folk-tale, which normally develops on quite different lines from that of our story. We might, perhaps, summarise the folk-tale as follows—The conductor or owner of the bear accepts the hospitality of a farmer, who warns him that a monster visits the farm and creates great havoc there. The monster, which duly arrives, is driven away by the bear and the farm is thus freed from its visits. As you will see, the connection is slight.

The only other real point of contact is that some of the versions make the owner of the bear a pilgrim, in itself a very common *motif*. Now it is easy to see that one of the main arguments supporting the theory of borrowing is that polar bears were probably unknown in Europe before the discovery of Iceland. But there are many other examples of Icelanders presenting foreign rulers with a captured bear—Ingimundr the Old in *Vatnsdæla saga* and the Book of Settlement,¹⁵ Bishop Ísleifr Gissurarson in *Hungrvaka*,¹⁶ and Einar Sokkason in *Grænlandinga þáttir*,¹⁷ to mention but three. Hence if there is any connection between the episode of Auðunn and the folk-tales, I think its meagreness indicates an oral account of Auðunn's journey rather than this literary and sophisticated one.

¹⁴ G. W. Dasent, *Popular Tales from the Norse*, Edinburgh, 1903, pp. 90 f.

¹⁵ Vogt, *Vatnsdæla Saga*, Halle, 1921, pp. 43 and 45.

¹⁶ Sigurðsson and Vigfússon, *Hungrvaka*, Copenhagen, 1858, p. 61/12.

¹⁷ *Flateyjarbók*, *op. cit.*, III, 446.

Moreover it is certain that the Auðunn episode itself contains many elements derived from folk-tales. G. Jónsson in the *Fornritafélag* edition¹⁸ of our story indicates several of them, for which he is able to produce Icelandic parallels. There is the tale of the poor man who brings his gifts to a king, which is an important theme in *Gautreks saga*.¹⁹ The description of the wretched state in which the poet Máni returns from his pilgrimage recalls that of Auðunn,²⁰ and the story of the evil steward who demands half of the reward in exchange for his help is known throughout the world.²¹ I am therefore tempted to suggest that the prologue to our episode is also based on folk-tale, and am further led to conclude that our story is almost wholly fiction. It is, of course, true that this episode, even though it were fictitious, could still have provided a starting-point for the continental folk-tale, but I prefer to postulate an older common source for both.

The evidence is slight which can be produced in support of the authenticity of the episode. It consists of the statement, appended to both versions, that Þorsteinn Gyðuson, who is often mentioned in *Sturlunga saga*, was descended from Auðunn. But we are not given genealogical details of Auðunn in the usual saga fashion, and we do not even know his father's name. In view of this we are bound to assume that the oral tradition, if such did exist, was slight, and I cannot help but feel that Þorsteinn was introduced solely to create an impression of authenticity.

If, however, Auðunn only existed in the imagination of the author, there remains the difficulty of producing a new basis for the story, and here I should like to put forward a further suggestion. As has already been mentioned *Hungrvaka* tells how Bishop Ísleifr, the first

¹⁸ *Vestfirðinga Sögur*, pp. ciii-civ.

¹⁹ V. Ásmundarson, *Fornaldar Sögur Norðurlanda* III, Reykjavík, 1889.

²⁰ *Fornmanna Sögur*, VIII, 206-207.

²¹ Cf. particularly S. Einarsson, *op. cit.*, pp. 164 f.

native bishop of *Skálholt*, presented a bear to the German Emperor. The account runs: "Later he (Ísleifr) went abroad and south to Saxony, and visited the court of the Kaiser Heinrick Konráðsson, and presented him with a polar bear which had come from Greenland. And this animal was of the greatest value.²² The similarity of situation is obvious, but in addition we have the supporting evidence that the great value of the bear is described in almost identical terms—*görsimi mikil*. This, in my opinion, was the immediate source of the story and, when blended with the traditional folk-tale elements, it gave our author most of his material.

The interesting but rather speculative conjecture made by the *Fornritafélag* editor that Snorri Sturluson was the author of the story can perhaps never be confirmed.²³ The conjecture is based primarily on the connection between Þorsteinn Gyðuson and the Sturlung family. Þorsteinn is considered as a possible transmitter of the oral story, which Snorri recorded as of interest to his family; but no doubt the literary excellence and probable date of the episode were decisive factors. I do not myself think, when we consider the general high standard of saga writing in the thirteenth century, that we can allow literary excellence too much weight.

There is, however, one rather rare trick of authorship in which we might compare this episode with the *Heimskringla*. It is generally admitted that the medieval Icelandic author of the family saga refrains from moral comment, and when he wishes to applaud or censure an action he normally does so by adding the comment of the countryside or the bystanders. There are exceptions to this rule, and on rare occasions the author allows us to hear his own voice raised in approval or disapproval. Snorri Sturluson is led to do so in his *Heimskringla* when

²² See note 16.

²³ *Í'estfirðinga Sögur*, *op. cit.*, p. cvii,

struck by the nobility of the warrior, Egill Ullserkr. After his account of the fall of Egill he adds these final words—"High headstones stand by the grave of Egill Ullserkr,"—and thus records his own estimate of the warrior.²⁴ Similarly in our episode there is one short aside which expresses the approval of our author at Auðunn's richly deserved success. When Auðunn returns to Norway after his stay with King Sweyn, our story runs: "Then he put out to sea and came to Norway, and had his cargo brought ashore;" our author adds: "and it was a much greater business than the last time he was in Norway." But such details can scarcely be decisive.

Probably, unless some new evidence becomes available, it will never be possible to name the author of this short episode, but whoever he was he must rank high amongst the best writers of Icelandic prose and that means amongst the best prose writers of medieval Europe.

²⁴ Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, ed. F. Jónsson, Copenhagen, 1911, p. 86/25.

SIR ALDINGAR AND THE DATE OF ENGLISH BALLADS.

By W. J. ENTWISTLE.

I

THE assembled Vikings may rise to demand an apology from one who introduces a theme precisely impossible in Viking society. It has been, at least, my contention that ballads are not possible in the wide-ranging, high-spirited society which supports mass movements like the Great Migrations and the Crusades. The people who made and enjoyed them first neither understood great things greatly, like the heroic singers, nor little things greatly, like the composers of domestic sagas; but they saw great things in their smaller effects, fragmentarily, communally and with undifferentiated personalities. They did so because they were fixed to the ground, either in the manor under the shadow of the baronial house, or in the little fortresses strung along a frontier. Their occupations and amusements were local, they were self-reliant in their arts and their defence, and they measured all impressive happenings by the scale of their own understanding.

On the other hand and by way of compensation, this theme provides an opportunity to accompany and admire the wide-ranging scholarship of a Viking of the mind, Sven Grundtvig. To his account of *Sir Aldingar*¹ I have

¹ *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser*, i, No. 13: *Ravengaard og Memering*. (Copenhagen, 1853). F. J. Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, No. 59: *Sir Aldingar*. A thesis by Professor Paul Christopherson was presented in the University of Cambridge during the war, and has not yet been published, as it well deserved to be. The Provençal and Catalan parallels are illustrated by Sr. Jordi Rubió, 'Les versions catalanes de la legenda del bon comte de Barcelona i l'emperadriu d'Alemanya,' *Estudis Universitaris Catalans*, xvii, 1932, pp. 250-287.

nothing substantial to add. The occasion for doing so is presented by Sir Edmund Chambers' denial of antiquity to this ballad in *English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1945, p. 154).

2

At this point it is appropriate for 'mine auctour' to exclaim against his material, saying: Oh hard undertaking to date a ballad, which belongs to an international cycle of legends! Most of the important balladries of Europe can be dated by means of their historical pieces, and this is to some extent possible when dealing with the ballads of the Scottish Border. But the strictly English ballads have to be dated by means of conjectures concerning the exploits of an outlaw, some semi-literary compositions, and a story which flourishes in many forms outside balladry. Oh scandal that so many English erudites have left unsolved a matter of such deep English interest! There have been notable English contributions to the discussion of balladry, but they are composed of brilliant intuitions drawn from English material alone, or international comparisons supported by a knowledge of less than the whole of European balladry. The solid work of collection and comparison has been carried out by American scholars, to whom we are greatly indebted. But is it certain that they have, for all their knowledge and pains, been able to catch those whispers of local tradition, those fragments from documents and hints from works of art, which are such a striking feature of Grundtvig's work in Denmark? Is it certain that the problems would have been envisaged quite in the same way upon this spot, and do not the *criteria* of Grundtvig naturally pick out the Scottish rather than the English contributions? And what have we now in England to compare with those bulging shelves of the Danish National

Library, where the *inedita* of Grundtvig, Kristensen, and many others are classified and arranged to throw a torrent of light upon any ballad problem?

Even the title *English and Scottish Ballads* may be a misnomer. The ballads of Aberdeenshire and surrounding counties, with their domestic and Norwegian matter, are a group only loosely related to those of the Borders. The Border ballads are as English as they are Scottish. They belong to the old Northumbria between Forth and Tees, and they have their own cause of being in the common agitations of the frontier. The ballads of Robin Hood and the lost cycle of Randolph Earl of Chester would appear to be Mercian. Normally songs about brigands come late in the history of any country's ballads, but we know that these existed in the fourteenth century, and it is hard to be certain of anything before them. Then there is Southern England, a complex and highly sophisticated region closely allied to France in the relevant epoch. It is hard to show that, for instance, *The Boy and the Mantle* had a life in traditional performance, since its literary associations are obvious; nor can one readily assign antiquity to *Queen Eleanor's Confession*. Literary reminiscences and arbitrary revisions characterize the *chansons populaires* of France, and if we took them at their present values we should classify them as modern and dubiously popular. But for France there exists the testimony of countries in the debt of an older France, and from them we can deduce the former existence of poems now lost (such as one on the Kudrun-theme), and older forms of songs now surviving (as for *Les repliques de Marion*). There is no such wealth of evidence for England, but some may be adduced for the antiquity of *Sir Aldingar*.

Sir Edmund Chambers' opposition to such a view is strongly expressed:

But surely there could be no more gratuitous

hypothesis than an assumption that a poem which, like *Sir Aldingar*, comes to us from the Percy MS. of about 1650 can be identical in style with one known to William of Malmesbury in the twelfth century. This indeed, as far as diction goes, Professor Entwistle in another passage admits. As regards the substance of the narrative, it is true that, as he points out, there is a link of common tradition. William of Malmesbury describes Gunhild's accuser as being *gigantæ moliminis*, and the Queen's champion as *puerulum*, and in *Sir Aldingar* they are respectively 'as big as a ffooder' and 'a little child.' In a Scottish version of the ballad the accuser, here called Rodingham, is 'stark and stoor,' but the champion is merely a knight from the north, Sir Hugh le Blond. In neither is the heroine called Gunhild. In *Sir Aldingar* she is Elinor 'our comly queene,' and her husband is Harry, 'our comlye king.' They are of England, not Germany. Surely this does not come from William of Malmesbury. He was dead before any English King Henry married an Elinor. Probably the ballad-writer had in mind Elinor of Aquitaine, the wife of Henry II. But the false accusation of unchastity against a queen is an ancient story. It was told of the Lombard queen Gundiberga as early as the seventh century, and later of St. Cunigund, wife of the emperor Henry II. In 1338 the *joculator* Herbertus told it at St. Swithin's, Winchester, of Emma, the wife of Canute, and this version may have been known to Langland, who quotes a line *Dieu vous sauve, Dame Emme*, which looks like a refrain. The theme is widespread in Scandinavia, and here the heroine is generally Gunhild. And in one important version, the Danish *Ravengaard og Memering*, the champion is Mimecan.¹

¹ *Op. cit. loc. cit.*

There will be more to say concerning the value of names as evidence, but I should like to make a pause here upon the epithet 'gratuitous.' It would seem to imply that I have done something unusual in associating a text in the Percy manuscript with another four centuries older. Yet nothing is more common or needful in ballad studies. We have to use the text of four Asturian ballads collected this century to restore the ballad of *Conde Dirlos* to the state it had before the arbitrary revision of about 1510, and ballads from Pontus, Cappadocia and Crete recovered as late as 1936 have to be referred to the tenth century. Great changes have occurred in them during a thousand years, but we are required to believe in their substantial antiquity. Ballads are literature of a sort, but they differ in one important respect from printed works. Print is the death of them, and even to write them down is paralysis. The veritable life of *The Canterbury Tales* or *Paradise Lost* begins with the written or printed form by which they secure publication. But the publication of ballads is by oral performance only. They live when recited, and it is a condition of their life that they should hold tenaciously to the core of their being but also suffer such changes as forgetfulness, confusion or adaptation require. The Percy manuscript is a *terminus ante quem* for the ballad of *Sir Aldingar*, but it tells us nothing concerning the origins of this song. Oral tradition keeps more or less up to date in respect of language, and the Percy text shows that there has been revision of incidents and names. The Arbuthnot version shows some of the same changes and some others due to genealogical pride, but it preserves one name which enables us to correct the Percy text.

3

To summarize Sven Grundtvig's doctrine I must state it more dogmatically than he did in his pioneering

investigation. There are five stories which chiefly make up the cycle of tales concerning the guiltless wife, accused of adultery and vindicated at last. These few motives are enough to point the comparison with the tale of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. When Calderón availed himself of a similar theme he called his heroine a female Joseph. On the other hand, when the heroine is exposed to the assaults of a monster and miraculously freed by the avenger, she is not too distant kin from the classical Andromeda. The motifs thus far stated, however, are too general to serve to define any branch of the family. This definition enters with the mode of the vindication. To the five modes correspond the names of the heroines: Gundiberga, Cunigund, Crescentia, Sibilia and Oliva. These names are not invariable, but they do not lightly change, and they can safely be called characteristic. The stories under their names remain essentially distinct, but are prone to interference the one with the other. This sort of interference has occurred in the history of the ballads we are about to study, and it constitutes a reason for characterizing the members of the group.

The differences, then, lie in the mode of the heroine's vindication. In the Gundiberga series it is *iudicio duelli*. A champion arises, unexpected because of his puny physique or his remote residence, and kills the slanderer. The other names in this group include those of Gunhild, Gudelinda, Mathilda and Elinor. Next comes the tale of St. Cunigund, justified *iudicio ferri*. She walked on glowing ploughshares. According to the *Vita sanctæ Cunigundis* she walked on seven of them, an Icelandic ballad says that she bore iron nine times and trod steel ten times. Emma, wife of King Canute, was accused of illicit intercourse with Ailwin, Bishop of Winton, and trod upon four glowing ploughshares for herself and five for her co-respondent. Richarda or Richardis, wife of Charles the Fat, cleared her reputation *aquino iudicio* or

iudicio ignis. Judith, granddaughter of Duke Henry of Bavaria, demonstrated her innocence by taking the sacrament from the altar, and another Judith, wife of Charles the Pious, when accused of adultery with the chamberlain Bernard, purged herself *legali præscripto modo*, though Bernard offered to stand battle.

Crescentia was falsely accused by one Diderik to another, and was bound and thrust into a river. She had many adventures before she had the good fortune to find both Dideriks afflicted with leprosy and to cure them and justify herself with the help of St. Peter. Hildegard wife of Charles the Great, a king of Hungary's daughter married to Octavian in Rome, Osanne wife of Thierry (Diderik), and Florentia, who was saved by a Thierry, are other heroines of this story-group.

Next comes the Sibilias group. The particular features of this family of tales are: that the villain manufactured evidence against the lady by laying a sleeping dwarf in her arms. The lady is driven out into the woods, and a dramatic incident is afforded by the way in which a hound unmasks the villain. Sibilias was yet another of Charlemagne's wives, and the villain was called Macaire. The name easily became Marshal in other versions, as in the folk-book of the emperor Octavianus, and Hans Sachs' drama *Die Königin aus Frankreich mit dem falschen Marschalk*. *Sir Triamour* is a romance within this family, which also includes the story of Sigurd's mother Sisibe in the *Vilkinasaga*, and Genoveva, wife of the Palatine Count Sigurd.

The fifth story is that of Oliva, daughter of Pepin and sister of Charlemagne. Evidence was laid against her by setting a negro in her bed. All sorts of barbarous trials were proposed for her, but were rejected on one pretext or another. At last, after many adventures, she was imprisoned in a tower and rescued by her son Landres.

All these stories are given by Grundtvig, and he remarks

how often they have become entangled with the omnivorous cycles of Charlemagne and Theodoric the Great.

4

Of these five families, *Sir Aldingar* belongs to the first. It is a vindication *iudicio duelli*. The fabrication of evidence in the extant ballads is due to contamination from Oliva or Sibilia. Entry into the Diderik cycle in the Danish ballads is a result of the omnivorous appetite of that body of romances. The use of the *iudicium ferri* in Icelandic and Faeroese is a result of comparison with the legend of St. Cunigund. In England this legend was attached to Emma, but the vindication by battle belonged to her daughter Gunhild in the older tradition, and to Elinor in the younger.

The legend takes form under the name of Gundiberga. According to Paulus Diaconus, writing about the year 800, she was the wife of the Lombard king Rodoald, and was vindicated by her servant Carellus. Carellus is a diminutive, and possibly represents a diminutive person. More relevant is the alternative story related by the monk Aimoin, writing *de gestis Francorum* (iv, 10). His Gundiberga was the wife of the Lombard Arioaldus. Accused by a certain Adalulf, after he had failed to break her chastity, of illicit intercourse with the Duke of Tuscany, she was shut into a tower. It was on the representations of Lothair of France that King Hariowald agreed to a test by battle. This was somewhat oddly contrived, since her cousin Aribertus did not himself undertake her defence, but sent as representative a certain Pitto, who was victorious. The name is again a diminutive, and according to the formula arranged with the Lombard King he could be considered as *familiarium reginæ aliquis*, one of the queen's attendants. What distinguished this version from that of Paulus Diaconus is the entry of national pride, represented by the

nationality of the deliverer. The story is French and he is French. When the story is English the deliverer Mimecan is English, and when it is Catalan the deliverer is the most famous of the Counts of Barcelona.

After the ruin of Desiderius the Lombards lost intelligibility among the peoples of northern Europe, and a new identification was made. The number of Carolingian ladies who were put to the trouble of defending their honour was ground enough for identifying the heroine as an Empress of Almayn. So she remains in the greater number of stories in this family. It is found, however, in two main branches, the one conserved in ballads (so far as we know) and the other in a romance. The difference lies in the unexpectedness of the avenger. In the ballads he is small in person and low in estate. In the Provençal and Catalan romance, which ultimately gave the ballad of *Don Ramón Berenguer and the Empress of Almayn*, he is of high estate but living at a vast distance. These two branches of the Gundiberga story do not interfere with each other, even though the more courtly form is found in the medieval English *Earl of Toulouse*. Identification with Judith and Bernard is due to an addition to Aimoin's chronicle (v, 12-13).

We have reached the point in the evolution of the *Aldingar* story at which the heroine was no longer a Lombard queen, but an Empress of Almayn. For Gundiberga a more familiar name was found in Gunhild and, I suspect, in Harry for Hariowald. This is how the story was sung in the streets and crossways in twelfth-century England, and continued to be sung with immense success until the fourteenth century. The relevant passages from William of Malmesbury, Matthew Paris, and John Bromton too well known to need citation here, and they are not in dispute. I would only underline one or two points.

It is perfectly plain from a comparison of the texts that

Matthew Paris in the thirteenth century is aware both of William's text in the twelfth and of the poem to which it refers. He gives the same details, but with amplifications. The story consisted of two main parts. First there was the wooing and sumptuous wedding of Canute's daughter Gunhild to the Kaiser Henry III. It was upon the nuptial pomp that the English singers insisted, and had insisted for some time before William of Malmesbury wrote. It was 'nostro adhuc seculo etiam in triviis cantitata.' This theme had not lost its charm for the contemporaries of Matthew Paris, since it was celebrated 'usque in hodiernum diem in conviviis et tabernis' by 'histriones et tibicines instrumentis et canticis.' The point was to underline the profuse wealth of the *English* kingdom of King Canute, when the nobles and the treasury vied in pouring out their gold and gems, horses and precious stuffs in honour of so great a lady. The interest was *English*, not Norman nor mixed, and the performances were traditional in as much as the minstrels were so far masters of the text as to vie with each other in developing this passage. The next scene followed at Speyer. The queen was falsely accused by a gigantic antagonist, who terrified all her supporters, except a *puerulum* among her servants. Matthew says that he was a dwarf, 'et propter corporis parvitatem Mimecan dicebatur.' John Bromton agrees that the name was Mimicon, if his *Municon* be a slip of the pen. He says the accuser was named Roddyngar. Concerning this part of the story I have to urge that the interest is again *English*. The avenger is English, and his name is a diminutive explicable in English. His valour is typically English (as we would like to think) in its willingness to undertake gigantic odds, and it is characterized by English practicality when he cuts through the giant's knees in order to reduce him to a fitting size.

For the next part of the story we must go to Denmark.

The oldest text is taken from Karen Brahe's manuscript of the middle of the sixteenth century. It is not unnatural that the supposed history of one of Canute's daughters should interest his Danish countrymen, and there was no difficulty about retaining her name, since Gunhild is a common Scandinavian name to this day. But there are a number of traditional alterations in the Danish text of the sixteenth century which bear witness to considerable evolution. The gorgeous introduction is reduced to a very simple formula. Lady Gunhild sits in Speyer and sends out messengers to invite suitors from south, west, north and east. Yet there is memory of the profusion of wealth of which the older English singers were so proud. Memering says that Gunhild's father gave gold and other cups to many men, and to the accuser he gave the best gifts of all. In the Faeroese versions, Gunhild, after passing the *iudicium ferri*, gave away gold to some and cups to others and a red-gold ring to the slanderer himself. As originally imported into Denmark, it is clear that this ballad still had some portion of the old English opening scene.

The other slips in the story are readily understood. For Danes of the later middle ages the most interesting Henry was he of Brunswick. If he came from Brunswick, then the mention of Speyer could only mean that Gunhild was at home there. The name of Mimecan, which Sir Edmund mentions as present in a Danish ballad, had actually no interest or intelligibility for Danes. They had a hero of their own in a neighbouring ballad which begins

Mimering vor den mindste mandt,
som fødd vor paa Karl kongens landt.

He fought on equal terms against the great hero Viderik Verlandsøn, who was the peer, save in dignity, of Diderik himself. The association of names naturally led the Faeroese and Icelandic poets, who were not so interested in Brunswick as the Danes, to give the name of Diderik to

Gunhild's husband. He had been, as they knew, the husband of a lady with a very similar name, Gudelinda.

Moreover, the Danish version is made to turn upon a question of swords, Aadelring against Saadering or Sudde-wind. I suspect Mimering himself of being a personified sword, like the Spanish Durandarte. However that may be, this competition between swords is characteristic of Nordic story-telling, and so is the ingenious use of an oath legitimately to deceive an opponent. Since all this has its place in other adventures, we need not consider it indigenous in the ballad of *Ravengaard og Memering*.

If we allow for evolution on Danish soil, it is clear that we have the same song as was known to William of Malmesbury and Matthew Paris. There was a scene of gift-giving, possibly much reduced. The names of Gunhild and Roddingar remained, but that of Mimecan gave way to a more Danish one, Memering, which was fairly close in sound. Henry remained, but was associated in Denmark with another province, and by a further lapse became Diderik. Play with swords and oaths took the place of the miracle known to William of Malmesbury, which Matthew Paris stated to have been the trick of cutting the giant down by the knees. That device had been used by the Danes in *Orm Ungersvend og Bermer-Rise*, where there is also trickery concerning the sword Berting. The interference of the Cunigund legend (*iudicium ferri*) in the Icelandic and Faeroese ballads is obvious. It could be due to the association of both Gunhild and Cunigund with Speyer, or of Gunhild and Emma in Canute's household.

We have, then, an English song which flourished in England from the twelfth to the thirteenth century, and which was transmitted to Denmark and passed through a period of evolution before the mid sixteenth. It continued to live vigorously enough to be found in Jutland,

the Faeroes and Iceland on the lips of the people in the mid nineteenth century. The bracket covers whatever time is needed for the ballads in Child's collection.

These ballads show development, since that is of the nature of traditional literature. The name Gunhild had gone out of use, and there was little interest in German Harries, the last of whom died in 1313. That race could not sustain comparison of interest with 'our comlye king' Harry, and consequently with 'our comly queen' Elinor. For the matrimonial difficulties of this pair there was the evidence of *Queen Eleanor's Confession* (Child, 156). It was a small matter that the queen's infidelities were falsely asserted in the one case and truly in the second; the datum sufficed. The name of the accuser remains in the Scottish version as Rodingham. Between *Rodingham* and *Roddyngar*, if handwriting entered into the matter, the difference is only between a tick and a tittle. *Sir Aldingar* is explained by haplography (*r* *R*) and *l* for *d*. By the seventeenth century the name *Mimecan* was no longer intelligible in England as a synonym for dwarf, so the ballad has continued *puerulum* as 'a little child.' In the blank space the Arbuthnots of Fordoun found a place for their own eponymous hero Sir Hugh le Blond. The first part of the old song has disappeared, as so often in the history of balladry, so as to concentrate upon one scene, but this has been amplified by taking the episode of the 'lame lazarus' or 'leper-man' from the story of Oliva. That was a story which circulated in English about the year 1285, when it was translated as *Landres-Páttr* in the *Karlamagnus-saga* by the Norwegian Bjarne Erlingsson of Bjarkø. It also has given a ballad: the Faeroese *Óluvu kvæði*.

and what kinds of things we do not know concerning the song which William of Malmesbury heard in the crossways about the middle of the twelfth century. We know that it was in the tradition of Gundiberga, Hariowald and Pitto, and that the new names Gunhild, Harry and Mimecan were distinctively English. We know that Gunhild, Harry and Mimecan passed as persons of a ballad into Denmark as Gunhild, Henrik (of Brunswick) and Memering, and that the changes can be easily understood. We know that *Sir Aldingar* and, more remarkably, *Sir Hugh le Blond* are ballads not in the debt of Scandinavia, but represent an English tradition. The accretion of the incident of the lazar is due to a romance extant in English in the thirteenth century. The names Elinor and Harry and the loss of Mimecan are explicable by English tradition. So far as we know the Gunhild story it is by ballads, and there is no evidence that it ever had any other form. The 'gratuitous hypothesis' or 'assumption' must surely be that which predicates some other form in the twelfth century. There would be no difficulty in supposing that Matthew Paris and John Bromton were quoting a ballad.

'Ballad is form' as the late W. P. Ker so wisely said; but the metrical forms of ballads vary and their contents and language slowly change. The inner form of a ballad is more permanent than its externals, and this is connected with ballad performance. But what William of Malmesbury describes is emphatically one or more ballad performances. He makes it clear that the poets were masters of their material and sang it with variations, that they sang to the populace at the crossways, while Matthew Paris adds that they were accompanied by flute-players and performed in taverns and at feasts. The spirit of the performance was overwhelmingly English, and the language must have been English if the name Mimecan was to be understood. This old song had a brilliant

opening scene which pleased the imagination of Englishmen, but is weakly represented in the Scandinavian parallels and was at length forgotten in England. The Scandinavian versions are enough, however, to ensure that it was still part of a ballad at the time of borrowing. Since both *Sir Aldingar* and *Ravengaard og Memering* have taken in episodes from other sources, there is no need to believe that the song heard by William of Malmesbury differed in length from the modern ballads.

How much more remains to prove that what he heard was a ballad, that is, 'a short traditional narrative poem sung (in this case), with accompaniment, in assemblies of the people'? There is nothing said in this definition about 'ballad metre'; I am not bound to prove metre. The metres of ballads vary, though they all have the 'inner form' of extreme simplicity. Yet even the metre may have been one normal among ballads. We cannot know, we can only cite the extant forms. *Sir Aldingar* is in quatrains, but the Karen Brahe manuscript shows two distichs, and its quatrains are made up of two distichs each. In the Faeroes and in Iceland the ballad is in distichs. Were English distichs impossible in the time of William of Malmesbury? Whether we class *Judas* as a ballad or not, it gives us distichs in the thirteenth century, and the song of the monks of Ely, recorded about 1120, gives distichs with a refrain:

Merie sungen the muneches binnen Ely
tha Cnut ching reu ther by.

Roweth cnites noer the land

And here we thes muneches sæng.

The passage from distichs to quatrains is a well-known event in the history of French folk-songs in the fifteenth century, and French fashions affected the rest of Europe. England lay well within the track of French musical influence, though Scandinavia, especially in its remoter fringes, was partially exempt. I see nothing adventurous

in the hypothesis that William of Malmesbury may have heard a song in assonating distichs such as those in which this story is expressed in the Far North. It would be more arbitrary to assume that the metre he heard was unlike that of the whole Gunhild-tradition. But we do not have to prove metre. A ballad is a ballad by virtue of its performance, and what William of Malmesbury and Matthew Paris describe is a typical ballad performance.

With the date of *Sir Aldingar* goes the dating of the ballad *genre* in southern England. It is isolated, as we know, but not impossible. There are carols which approach it in antiquity, and we have to remember that the record of a ballad is a sign of its end, not of its birth. I would end by reminding you of the peculiar difficulties about accounting for traditional poetry in the south of England. It was even in William of Malmesbury's time a profoundly self-conscious cultural unit, scarcely less so than France; one in which the line between popular and literary works was faint and fleeting, and in which tradition may have expressed itself less by conservation than by a continual reshaping of the material. Southern English folk-songs like those of France kept up to date or died. We have only the relics of that traditional literature before us—relics the collection of which began long after the bloom was off English balladry. The survivors are imperfect, disappointing, and strangely modern; but let us not suppose on that account, that our twelfth-century ancestors were dumb.

JÓLAKÖTTUR, YUILLIS YALD AND SIMILAR EXPRESSIONS: A SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE

By ALAN C. S. ROSS

AFTER I had written this article (*Saga-Book*, xii, 1-18), my attention was drawn by my wife to a phrase in Scots dialect, which is clearly modelled on *Yuillis yaud* 'one who has no new clothes for Christmas.' This is Alexander Smart's *Peace-yaud* 'one who has no new clothes for Easter'—with *peace* (< *pask* < Old French *pasche*¹) substituted for *yuill*. I cite stanzas xxviii and xxxi of his poem "Recollections of Auld Langsyne" (*Rambling rhymes* (1834) pp. 89, 90):—

xxviii

What lively raptures wad it raise,
When spring brought back the sunny days,
An' sprinkled gowans ower the braes,
Wi' laughin' face,
When we gat on our summer claes,
A' new at Peace!

xxx1

Ah! wae's me for the poor Peace-yaud,
Wha naething braw to boast o' had;
While some frae tap to tae were clad,
New hose an' shoon,
Wi' cloutit breeks, made some as glad
As birds in June.

The currency of the term is attested by the entry in the 1808 edition of J. Jamieson, *An etymological dictionary of the Scottish language* s.v. *Paysyad*, s.: "A contemptuous designation conferred on a female, who has nothing new to

¹ For *peace*, *pase*, *pays* 'Easter,' see NED s.v. *Pace*, sb.², EDD s.v. *Pace*, sb.

appear in at Easter; originating from the custom which prevails with those adhering to the Episcopal forms, of having a new dress for the festival, *S.B.* [i.e. Northern Scots].”

THE ENGLISH CONTRIBUTION TO THE EPISTOLARY USAGES OF EARLY SCANDINAVIAN KINGS

By FLORENCE E. HARMER
(President of the Society)

IN Scandinavian¹ lands letters and seals appear only late upon the scene—not earlier than the early eleventh century, and therefore much later than in England, France and Germany. But on their first appearance these Scandinavian letters and seals can be seen to have incorporated ancient traditional usages, usages which there as elsewhere can be traced back ultimately to antiquity, and which on the other hand have not disappeared from use even at the present day. The use of the wax seal in Western Europe can be traced back to Roman times; the particular method of representing the monarch which appears on early Scandinavian seals can be found as early as the fourth century after Christ; the greeting formula with which these early Scandinavian letters begin is also ancient. But, of course, it is not possible to trace back a line of development reaching uninterruptedly from Scandinavia in the eleventh century to the Roman Empire. The kings of Norway, Denmark and Sweden, when they adopted these usages, were borrowing from their neighbours. The clerks who wrote their letters and the craftsmen who made their seal-dies were imitating usages already current elsewhere. The terminology too is borrowed; Latin *insigillum*, ‘seal,’ was borrowed into Anglo-Saxon in the forms *insigle* and *insegel*, and the Old Norse *innsigli* is a loan-word from Anglo-Saxon; similarly Old Norse *bréf*, ‘letter’, is a loan-word from Medieval Latin *breve*.

¹ I employ ‘Scandinavian’ here in the sense recognised by the NED, to cover Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

The contributions made by Scandinavian settlers in England to English social and economic organisation, to personal and place-name nomenclature, and to English art, have been fully acknowledged by English scholars. But comparatively little has been written in this country² concerning the contribution made by Englishmen to the civilisation of Scandinavian lands—a contribution perhaps more fully recognised in Scandinavia than here.³ The influence of English ecclesiastics, who played so important a part in the establishment of Christianity in Scandinavian countries, is, however, to be traced in many directions in the early stages of the development of the national churches of Denmark, Norway and Sweden; in church organisation, for instance, possibly in forms of the liturgy, in the religious vocabulary of the Scandinavian languages, in some cases in church architecture.⁴ Attention has also been drawn to the adoption by Scandinavian rulers, by the beginning of the eleventh century, of a currency modelled on that of England, and to the fact that some of the first moneyers known to have worked in Scandinavia bore English names.⁵ The object of this paper is to throw open for further discussion a subject which seems to have been neglected hitherto in this country, namely the foreign, and in particular the English, contribution to the epistolary usages of Scandinavian kings. Foreign, that is to say German and English, influence exhibited

² See however F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1943), passim.

³ Among the outstanding books dealing with this subject the following should be mentioned: H. Reuterdaahl, *Svenska kyrkans historia*, vol. i (Lund, 1838); K. Maurer, *Die Bekehrung des norwegischen Stammes zum Christenthume*, vol. i (Munich 1855); A. D. Jørgensen, *Den nordiske Kirkes Grundlæggelse og første Udvikling* (Copenhagen 1874-78); A. Taranger, *Den Angelsaksiske Kirkes Indflydelse paa den Norske* (Christiania 1890); Ellen Jørgensen, *Fremmed Indflydelse under den Danske Kirkes tidligste Udvikling* (Copenhagen 1908); H. G. Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia* (Harvard 1921); K. Gjerset, *History of the Norwegian People* (New York 1927), vol. i.

⁴ A. W. Clapham, *Romanesque Architecture in Western Europe* (Oxford 1936), pp. 189ff.

⁵ Stenton, p. 535.

in the type of seal adopted, and in the epistolary formulas employed, by Scandinavian rulers, was the subject of brief discussion in 1918 by the great German scholar H. Bresslau in an article⁶ to which I am greatly indebted; whilst the American scholar L. M. Larson had at an earlier date called attention in passing to traces of English influence in the Norse (Norwegian) chancery in the Middle Ages, and in particular to the striking similarity between some of the documents issued by the Norse chancery in the thirteenth century, and the Old English writs drawn up by Anglo-Saxon clerks two hundred years before.⁷ But neither in England nor in Scandinavia does the general question of the possibility of English contributions to the epistolary usages of the rulers of Scandinavia appear to have been discussed. I make no claim to have dealt exhaustively with the subject, nor can I hope to have avoided error in exploring so vast a field. I have merely attempted to provide a basis for further investigation and discussion.

The term 'seal' is used loosely in English; it can stand for the matrix (or seal-die), used for making the impression on wax or metal, or it can stand for the impression itself. Signet-rings have been known at all events from Roman times onwards (to confine our attention here to those regions which may ultimately have influenced Scandinavian usage). Thus the Emperor Augustus authenticated his edicts with his signet; his first bore a sphinx, his second, a head of Alexander engraved, his third, his own head, and this last was employed by all subsequent emperors with one exception down to Pliny's day (A.D. 79).⁸ From signet-rings that have been found it would

⁶ 'Internationale Beziehungen im Urkundenwesen des Mittelalters' *Archiv für Urkundenforschung*, vi (1918), 19-76.

⁷ *The King's Household in England before the Norman Conquest* (Madison, Wisconsin 1904), pp. 197f.

⁸ *Companion to Latin Studies*, ed. J. E. Sandys (Cambridge 1910), par. 864.

seem that already in the fifth century signet-rings were known to the Germanic peoples;⁹ and the signet-ring of King Æthelwulf of Wessex, King Alfred's father, and of King Alfred's sister, can still be seen.¹⁰ Again, engraved gems have been widely used from ancient times, for making an impression on wax; they often bore the image of some deity, Jupiter, perhaps, or Minerva, or possibly of a Roman emperor. They were extensively used by Frankish rulers; thus the Emperor Charles the Great (800-14) employed for one seal a gem engraved with a head of the Emperor Antoninus; for another a head of Jupiter Serapis¹¹; whilst in England a head of Jupiter Serapis appears on the counter-seal, made perhaps before the Norman Conquest, of a seal of Durham Cathedral.¹² Further, a leaden seal of King Coenwulf of Mercia closely resembles a coin.¹² But I am not concerned here with any such seals as these. I am concerned solely with seals of wax which bear the representation of a ruler enthroned in majesty—let us call this the *majestas*-portrait. The earliest seals of this type now surviving from English kings are seals of King Edward the Confessor (1042-66)¹³; they are the impressions only, for no seal die of this type of seal has survived from his time. And

⁹ W. Ewald, *Siegelkunde* (Munich and Berlin 1914), p. 187; H. Bresslau, *Handbuch der Urkundenlehre*, 2nd ed., vol. ii, pt. ii (Berlin and Leipzig 1931), p. 548 ff.

¹⁰ Reproduced in R. H. Hodgkin, *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, ii, pl. IV.

¹¹ O. Posse, *Die Siegel der deutschen Kaiser und Könige, 751-1806* (5 vols., Dresden 1909-13), i, pl. i, nos. 4, 5; Ewald, op. cit. p. 184 and pl. 16.

¹² Birch, *Catalogue of Seals in the British Museum* (1887), i, Nos. 2, 2511. Doubts have been expressed as to the authenticity of Coenwulf's seal.

¹³ See Plate 2, from the Confessor's seal, First type, as depicted by N. de Wailly, *Éléments de Paléographie* (Paris 1838), ii. Pl. R. Further, the seal appended to B. M. Campbell Ch. xxi, 5 (much damaged, and repaired), is of the Second type. The seal in Birch, i, Pl. i, 1, 2, is from a cast of unknown provenance. For the fine photograph of the seal of Otto III (Plate, i) I am indebted to the kindness of M. Jean-Charles Biaudet, archiviste-adjoint at the Archives Cantionales at Lausanne, where the document bearing the seal has the reference: Cr^b 4. The remaining seals are from photostats supplied by Cambridge University Library; for full references see n. 45, 52, 59.



I. THE EMPEROR OTTO III.

(see note 13). Diameter 3".

By permission of the Director of the Archives Cantonales Vaudoises, Lausanne.

facing p. 118.

early Scandinavian kings employed seals bearing *majestas*-portraits of the same type. For the first known use of this particular kind of representation of a ruler in Western Europe on a seal, we have a fixed date—the year A.D. 997, when a seal bearing a *majestas*-portrait was first employed by the Emperor Otto III.

These seals of King Edward the Confessor are two-faced hanging seals of wax, with a portrait of the king on either side of the seal. The two-faced seal of wax is indeed supposed to have been first employed in England, as is also the particular method of suspension employed for these seals, namely to one of two strips of parchment cut length-wise parallel to the lower edge of the document, the lower strip acting as a wrapping-tag. The papal chancery and Frankish rulers and some of their successors, in Germany at all events, had employed hanging metal seals rather like a coin, whilst the wax seal employed by Frankish rulers and their successors in Germany and France was a single seal, impressed on the face of the document itself, and without any impression on the back. This new invention, the hanging wax seal, was certainly adopted in Denmark in the eleventh century; it may also have been adopted at this time in Norway and in Sweden, but direct evidence is lacking. It was adopted in France in the late eleventh or early twelfth century, and in Germany a little later still.¹⁴ The suspension of the seal by a strip of parchment cut from the document itself (*sur simple queue*), habitual in England in the Confessor's time, and later, was also adopted in some other countries.

The seal that accompanied a letter was regarded as a means of recognition, that is to say, a method whereby the person receiving the letter could recognise the identity of the sender. The adoption of seals as a means of recognition by Scandinavian kings must have been facilitated

¹⁴ Th. Ilgen, *Sphragistik* (Leipzig and Berlin 1912), p. 25.

by the fact that already by ancient Germanic custom verbal messages had been authenticated by the sending of tokens. Such tokens, called *jartegnir*, or *jarteiknir*, and frequently referred to in literary sources, might consist of a ring, a coin, a knife, a sword, a belt—or some other such object as would be distinctive and easily recognised by the recipient. Many references to 'word and token' appear for instance in *Heimskringla*, where the sending of messengers with verbal messages and tokens of recognition is represented as a common practice. But in course of time the 'word and token' of the king (or other person) is replaced by the 'letter and seal.' That the seal was regarded, as the token had been, as a means of recognition appears prominently in the legend of the earliest known Danish seal:

PRESENTI REGEM SIGNO COGNOSCE CNVTONEM,
'By the present sign (*or* seal) know King Cnut.'

Seals were impressed upon their charters by Merovingian and Carolingian rulers and their successors in France and Germany, whilst in England the use of a letter authenticated by a seal can be carried back to the late ninth century, and probably earlier.¹⁵ And it seems more than probable that the kings of Scandinavian lands issued letters written in the Latin alphabet, and accompanied by seals with a legend in the same alphabet, as soon as they had been brought within the circle of Christendom by their conversion to Christianity. The actual writers of the letters would no doubt have been the bishops and priests at their courts, who had come from abroad, or had acquired their learning in Christian lands, and who would know the usages current in other Christian courts or in ecclesiastical

¹⁵ See the Introduction to my forthcoming edition of *Anglo-Saxon Writs*, and also Bosworth-Toller's *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, s.v. *insegel*.

circles elsewhere. The clergy had after all been accustomed for centuries to write letters. There would then be no inherent improbability in the conjecture that the bishop¹⁶ and other clergy whom he sent for to England, may have written letters for King Hakon the Good of Norway (934-61), who had been fostered in England by King Æthelstan, and who made an unsuccessful attempt to introduce Christianity into his own country. Nor is it at all unlikely that letters were exchanged between King Harold Klak of Denmark and the Emperor Louis the Pious (814-40), after King Harold had in A.D. 826 been baptised with his wife and son and some hundreds of his adherents, had acknowledged the emperor as his overlord, and had taken back with him to Denmark the Frankish missionary Ansgar (afterwards canonised), who preached in Denmark between 826 and 861, and who also preached Christianity in Sweden.¹⁷ But no letters have come down to us from these kings. Correspondence between the papacy and these convert-kings can almost certainly be taken for granted; whilst the letters, in the eighth century, of St. Boniface, an Englishman, whose missionary labours on the continent are well known, provide merely one instance among many others of epistolary exchanges at an early date. But it would seem that no letters whether official or private of Scandinavian kings have

¹⁶ On the identity of this bishop see William of Malmesbury, *De Antiquitate Glastoniensis Ecclesiæ*, ed. Gale, iii, 325; and especially O. Kolsrud, 'Den Norske Kirkes Erkebiskoper og Biskoper indtil Reformationen,' p. 189, in *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* vol. xvii (Christiania 1913), of which there is a copy in the Cambridge University Library (but not at present in the British Museum).

¹⁷ On Ansgar, see Reuterdaahl, *op. cit.* vol. i, and for a shorter account, see J. Wordsworth, *The National Church of Sweden*, Hale Lectures, 1910 (London 1911), p. 48ff. On the mysterious *literæ regia manu more ipsorum* (i.e. *Sveonum*) *deformatæ* brought back from Birka by Ansgar to the emperor as evidence of the king's good will (Rimbert, *Vita S. Anscharii*, cap. 18 (alias 11)), see Reuterdaahl, i, 205. It seems to be supposed that it is a question of the king's monogram or some other means of identification. See also for Ansgar, O. H. May, *Regesten der Erzbischöfe von Bremen* (Hanover, 1937) i. pp. 6 ff.

survived from a period earlier than the early eleventh century, the earliest being the sealed letters (writs), now extant only in copies, of Cnut the Great, King of England and Denmark.

Between A.D. 960 and 1008 three Scandinavian kings were converted to Christianity, and these monarchs, who with varying success laboured to introduce Christianity with all its benefits into their own lands, would henceforward no doubt have desired to correspond as equals with other Christian rulers. King Harold Gormsson (Bluetooth) of Denmark was baptised in A.D. 960, King Olaf Tryggvason of Norway before, or in, the year 994, when he received the sacrament of confirmation in England, and King Olaf Skattkonung (Tax-king) of Sweden in 1008; and although in Scandinavia as elsewhere Christianity overlapped for a long time with paganism, these are the significant dates for our enquiries. Both Olaf Tryggvason of Norway and Olaf Haroldsson (c. 1016-30)—later canonised, and in England venerated as St. Olave—are said to have been attended in Norway by bishops and priests from England, the names of some of whom have been recorded;¹⁸ and it is important to observe that English influence is to be traced in the earliest original letters (of the thirteenth century) of Norwegian kings. The probability that English influence was from the first paramount in Norway after the conversion to Christianity of her kings, is strengthened by the fact, among others, that Norwegian handwriting was based on the Anglo-Saxon handwriting of the

¹⁸ Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiæ Pontificum*, ed. J. M. Lappenberg, 2nd ed. Hanover, 1876, ii, c. 35, 55. On the introduction of Christianity into Norway, see especially Maurer, *op. cit.* For an analysis of the considerable body of writing produced in Scandinavia during the last 100 years or more concerning the identity of these bishops and priests (few of whom bore names indicating English origin) and of the conflicting theories propounded by the leading Scandinavian writers on ecclesiastical history, see O. Kolsrud, *op. cit.*



2. KING EDWARD THE CONFESSOR.
(see note 13). Obverse. Diameter approx. $2\frac{7}{8}$ ".
From Wailly. (Photostat C.U.L.)

eleventh century.¹⁹ English influence in Norway 'remained predominant until after 1290'.²⁰ Whether in Sweden ecclesiastics from England were to be found, after his baptism, at the court of King Olaf Skattkonung of Sweden (at least four of whose moneyers must have been of English origin,²¹ and the letters on whose coins are of the Anglo-Saxon type) seems uncertain;²² but 'English missionaries from Norway chosen by the kings reinforce the German and Danish missionaries' in Sweden.²³ A certain Gotebald was called by King Swein Forkbeard (985/6-1014) from England to be bishop in Scania (then part of Denmark), 'qui aliquando in Suedia, saepe dicitur euangelizasse in Norvegia',²⁴ and the names of Englishmen appear on the Swedish roll of martyrs.²⁵ Concerning Denmark we are in some directions better informed.²⁶ Though Christianity had up to the time of the conversion of King Harold Bluetooth in 960 come to the Danes mainly through German missionaries—for the Englishman St. Willibrord (died c. 740) had preached the Gospel to the Danes without success—and therefore German influence upon Danish life and thought was strong, the relations between England and Denmark

¹⁹ For details of the Norwegian national hand, see E. V. Gordon, *Introduction to Old Norse* (Oxford 1927), pp. lxii ff.

²⁰ See Leach, pp. 85 ff. for further details.

²¹ Stenton p. 535.

²² I have not seen C. J. A. Oppermann's *The English Missionaries in Sweden and Finland* (cf. D. Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England*, p. 67, n. 2).

²³ Wordsworth pp. 59, 71ff. For the names of these missionaries, see Reuterdahl, i, 307-14, and Kolsrud's lists, passim. See also Leach p. 83 f.

²⁴ Adam of Bremen ii, c. 39, Schol. 27. On Gotebald, who died before 21 August 1021, see Kolsrud, p. 191. The name seems to be Old German *Godbold*; see T. Forssner, *Continental-Germanic personal names in England in Old and Middle English times*, Diss. Uppsala, 1916, 118. It appears once in Domesday Book, i, 148, as *Godbold*, and as *Godeboldus*, *Godebaldus* in twelfth-century lists in the *Liber Vitae of New Minster and Hyde Abbey*, ed. Birch (1892), pp. 40, 41. On other English bishops preaching in Sweden, see Adam iv, Schol. 130. For further details concerning Godebald, see A. Campbell, *Encomium Emmae Reginae* (Roy. Hist. Soc. 1949), liv, n. 2.

²⁵ Leach p. 84.

²⁶ See Maurer i, 465 ff.

from the ninth century onwards made Anglo-Saxon influence in Denmark inevitable. This influence has been traced in several spheres, for instance, in the adoption of English saints, the dedication of churches, the introduction of Anglo-Saxon words into the religious vocabulary of Danish, as also of Norwegian and Swedish.²⁷ Relations between the Danish and the English church were naturally closest in the reign of Cnut the Great, who after the death of his father King Swein Forkbeard of Denmark, who had made himself king of England, began a campaign of conquest on his own account, and by 1017 had compelled his recognition as king; a year later he became king of Denmark, ruling both countries until his death in 1035. In Norway, where he ruled as overlord from 1028, Cnut set up as regent first the Norwegian Earl Hakon (whose name as earl of Worcestershire, where Cnut, his uncle, had appointed him to office, appears in a writ, which may be authentic, addressed by Cnut to a Worcestershire shire court);²⁸ and after Hakon's death Cnut appointed in his place as regent of Norway his own son Swein, who ruled the country for some years, till 1035, under the guardianship of his mother Ælfgifu (Alfifa) of Northampton. It seems safe to conjecture that the epistolary traditions (derived no doubt from England) established in Norway by the two Olafs would have been maintained there in the time of Earl Hakon and of Cnut's son Swein. Although he visited Denmark from time to time Cnut regarded England as his home, but many nationalities were represented at his court.²⁹ Whereas in earlier times missionaries labouring in Denmark (such as Poppo, Esiko, Rudolf, and the two Odinkars, most of whom became bishops, and some of whom preached also in Sweden and

²⁷ For an exhaustive investigation see Ellen Jørgensen, *op. cit.* See also Leach, pp. 76 ff.

²⁸ No. 48 in my forthcoming edition of *Anglo-Saxon Writs*.

²⁹ L. M. Larson, *Canute the Great* (New York and London 1912), p. 261.

Norway) were mainly of German descent,³⁰ in the time of Cnut the Great the contribution to Danish life of priests and bishops brought from England becomes important.³¹ Concerning these ecclesiastics brought from England by Cnut we read:

Quia in Dacia ecclesiae novella extitit plantatio, multos pontifices et presbyteros secum adduxit (i.e. from England), quorum alios penes se detinuit, alios ad praedicandum delegavit. Hi per universam Sveciam, Gothiam atque Norwegiam dispersi, nec non ad Islandiam transmissi, verbi divini semina propagantes, multas animas Christo sunt lucrati.³²

Of these bishops and priests some were no doubt Anglo-Saxons, but those who rose to prominence in Denmark and were appointed to bishoprics there, such as Gerbrand, Bernhard and Reginbrand, bore names which seem to indicate a continental origin; but there was after all no reason why ecclesiastics should not move from one country to another in search perhaps of learning, or possibly to gain office or preferment, or for any other cause.^{32*} In Denmark English epistolary usages can scarcely have failed to become known through the medium of sealed letters sent by Cnut from England. But to what extent were Anglo-Saxon formulas and methods of sealing (which were different from those employed at the time by German rulers) adopted in Denmark? German influence undoubtedly remained strong in Denmark in Cnut's time as before, and in the politico-religious sphere Cnut was obliged to come to terms with the powerful archbishop Unwan of Bremen regarding the prerogative of the see of Bremen over

³⁰ On these persons see Maurer i, 485.

³¹ Ellen Jørgensen, ut supra.

³² Sven Aggesøn, *Compendiosa Regum Daniæ Historia*, in Langebek, *Scriptores Rerum Danicarum Medii Aevi*, vol. i (Copenhagen 1772), 55. See also Adam of Bremen ii, c. 53.

^{32*} See, for instance, Adam of Bremen, i. Schol. 26, on one of the two Danish missionaries named Odinkar: 'Ille Odinkar in Angliam ductus est a rege Cnut ibique eruditus litteris. Deinde Galliam discendo pervagatus, sapientis et philosophi nomen accepit'.

Danish bishops.³³ Cnut himself, who bore the German baptismal name of Lambert, was admitted to confraternity at Bremen,³⁴ as he was also, soon after his accession, admitted to confraternity at Christ Church, Canterbury.³⁵ The mingling of traditions seems to be illustrated in the career of Bishop William of Roskilde, an Englishman in spite of his Norman name, who died in 1074³⁶ and was afterwards canonised. Saxo Grammaticus speaks in terms of praise of Bishop William, whom he describes as having been writer and priest to Cnut:

Wilhelmus, quo Kanutus Maior et scriba et sacerdote usus fuerat, genere quidem Anglus;³⁷

but whether William served Cnut in this capacity in England or in Denmark or in both, Saxo does not say.³⁸ William may of course have accompanied Cnut on his journeys as chaplain and secretary. But in a later reign, William became a member of the *familia* of Archbishop Adalbert of Bremen (1043-72), for Adam³⁹ writes as follows of William's consecration to the see of Roskilde in 1044:

Archiepiscopus vero de suis clericis ordinavit . . . in Seland Willelmum.

In Denmark this Englishman had a successful career as bishop. He was on familiar terms of friendship with King Swein Estrithson, whose mother Estrith made a grant of land, 50 *mansi*, to his cathedral church at Roskilde, 'quos prescriptus episcopus sigillo et privilegio

³³ Larson, *Canute*, p. 191; Leach p. 77; Stenton p. 457.

³⁴ Adam of Bremen, Schol. 38.

³⁵ H. Wanley, *Antiquae Litteraturae Septentrionalis Liber Alter*, 1705 (=bk. ii of Hickes' *Thesaurus*), p. 181.

³⁶ Gams, *Series Episcoporum Ecclesiae Catholicae*, Ratisbon 1873.

³⁷ Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, ed. J. Olrik and H. Ræder (Copenhagen 1931), i, p. 304.

³⁸ Larson, *Canute*, p. 261, supposes it to have been in Denmark. Bresslau, *Archiv f. Urk.* vi, 52, n. 9, appears to regard Saxo's statement as a contribution to the history of the royal secretariat in England.

³⁹ Op. cit. iv, c. 3.

*ecclesiae confirmavit.*⁴⁰ But neither the *privilegium* nor the seal of Bishop William seems to have survived, nor can we associate him with any one of Cnut's sealed letters. Nothing written by his hand is known to exist, but there is still extant a letter written to him by Bishop Adalbert of Bremen, c. 1065, which employs an ancient and widespread greeting formula (with *salutem*), well-known in England as in Germany.⁴¹ To discriminate between German influence and English influence in the early stages of Danish institutions is indeed a matter of the utmost complexity. It would seem probable that Cnut as king of Denmark issued the same kind of letters and employed the same type of seal as he employed as king of England; but although the earliest known Danish royal seal, of King Cnut the Saint, is most probably descended from the (lost) seal of Cnut the Great, the charter to which this seal of Cnut the Saint was suspended is constructed on a German rather than an Anglo-Saxon pattern, as will be shown below.

With the letters in English issued in England by Cnut the Great—the earliest Scandinavian king to have issued letters that are still extant, and the earliest Scandinavian king known to have employed a seal (though no seal of his now survives)—we can fortunately, so far as the texts are concerned, leave the realm of conjecture. King Æthelred II (the Unready) of England issued letters authenticated by his seal, and Cnut on his accession to the throne of England inherited or imitated the epistolary formulas, and probably the seal, of Æthelred (though at a later date he most probably adopted a seal of German pattern).

⁴⁰ *Anonymi Roskildensis Chronicon Danicum* in Langebek, *Scriptores*, i, 378. On Bishop William's cathedral church and other stone churches at Roskilde and elsewhere for which he was in part responsible, and in which there may be traces of English influence, see A. W. Clapham, *Romanesque Architecture in Western Europe*, pp. 189 ff; see also the above-mentioned *Chronicon*, loc. cit. In my view *ecclesiae* here means 'to the church' and not 'of the church'.

⁴¹ For text, see p. 154 below.

But unfortunately the nature of Æthelred's seal is unknown to us, nor does any seal survive of Cnut the Great or of his father King Swein. Evidence of Cnut's use of a seal comes to us from English and Icelandic sources.⁴² In the Saga of St. Olaf it is related that Cnut, considering that he had a hereditary right to the throne of Norway, sent messengers from England to Norway to King Olaf with letters and seals (*bréf ok innsigli*) to try if he would give up the kingdom.⁴³ Again, we are told that Cnut's wife, Queen Emma, got hold of her husband's seal by guile, and had a letter written ordering the Danes to make her son king of Denmark, and had the seal set on it, and sent this letter (with the seal) to Denmark where it was publicly produced at the 'thing'; and further we learn that Harthacnut on his submission fell at his father's feet and laid on his knees 'the seal on which the king's name was inscribed' ('þat er konungs nafn stóð á').⁴⁴

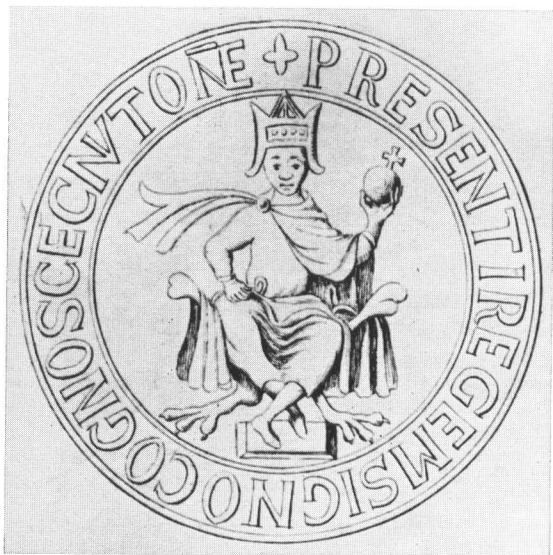
We turn now to the seals of early Scandinavian rulers, and it must be said again that there are no seals surviving of so early a date as those of England, France, and Germany. The earliest Scandinavian royal seal known is a two-faced hanging wax seal once attached to a charter of King Cnut the Saint of Denmark, of A.D. 1085, for the cathedral of Lund; the original was burnt in a fire in 1692, but fortunately a drawing had been made by Peringskiöld.⁴⁵ In all essential points this seal is in the

⁴² For the English evidence, not quite conclusive, see my forthcoming *Anglo-Saxon Writs*.

⁴³ *Heimskringla*, S. of St. Olaf, c. 131 (ed. F. Jónsson, ii, 284 ff.).

⁴⁴ *Fagrskinna*, ed. Jónsson, p. 187; *Flateyjarbók*, ed. Vigfússon and Unger, ii, c. 210; *Heimskringla*, ut supra, c. 148 (ed. Jónsson, ii, 354 ff.).

⁴⁵ *Åttartal for Swea och Götha Konungahus* (1725), p. 71. Reproduced by Thorkelin, *Diplomatarium Arnemagnæanum* (Copenhagen 1786), i, pl. i, no. 1; also in *Dania et Norvegia in sigillis seculi xiii*, a reprinting of the above. See also *Danske Kongelige Sigiller*, 1085-1559, collected by H. Petersen, ed. A. Thiset, (Copenhagen 1917), pl. I, no. 1 a, b. For other references see n. 88 below. Seal in Plate, 3, from Thorkelin.



3. KING CNUT THE SAINT OF DENMARK.

(see note 45). Obverse. Diameter $3\frac{1}{4}$ ".

From Thorkelin. (Photostat C.U.L.)



4. KING KARL SVERKERSSON OF SWEDEN.

(see note 52). Obverse. Diameter $3\frac{1}{4}$ ".

From Hildebrand. (Photostat C.U.L.)

true tradition of the *majestas*-portrait, though it deviates from it in some particulars; it is most unfortunate that the original has not survived. In the true *majestas*-portrait the ruler, in frontal pose, is seated crowned in majesty upon a throne or stool, full length, with his feet upon a footstool; he holds in either hand the insignia of power: a sceptre surmounted by a fleur-de-lis, or by a bird, or with some other device; a globe (orb) often surmounted by a cross (the 'globus cruciger'); a sword. These insignia are ancient in their origin, and some can be traced back to antiquity.⁴⁶ So also can the chlamys, or ceremonial cloak, often worn by the monarch on the seal, fastening on his right shoulder with a brooch. But on the seal of King Cnut the Saint the dress is different, (Plate, 3); the feet are crossed — a posture which I have not observed before on seals; and though Cnut holds a 'globus cruciger' in one hand, his other hand (exceptionally) rests upon his body. On the reverse of his seal, King Cnut is represented on horseback holding on his wrist a falcon, a representation which, again, differs from the conventional equestrian portrait of the monarch dressed in full armour, holding his lance, with his shield on his left arm, or according to another convention, brandishing a sword. The legend on Cnut's seal reads on the obverse:

PRESENTI REGEM SIGNO COGNOSCE CNVTONEM,
and on the reverse:

HIC NATVM REGIS MAGNI SVB NOMINE CERNIS.^{45*}

^{45*} Magnus was the byname of St. Cnut's father Swein Estrithson.

⁴⁶ See Hoops, *Reallexikon*, ii, 597, 'Insignien des Königtums'; K. von Amira, 'Der Stab in der germanischen Rechtssymbolik' in *Abhandlungen der Münchener Akademie*, vol. xxv (1909); P. E. Schramm, *Das Herrscherbild in der Kunst des frühen Mittelalters*, in *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg*, vol. ii (Vorträge, 1922-3), Leipzig, Pt. i, pp. 190 ff.; A. Grabar, *L'Empereur dans l'art byzantin* (Publ. de la Fac. des Lettres de l' Univ. de Strasbourg, fasc. 75, Paris 1936) *passim*; A. Alföldi 'Insignien und Tracht der römischen Kaiser,' *Röm. Mitteil.* vol. 50 (1935), 1 ff.

The seal (now lost) of a somewhat later Danish King, King Eric Lam, of 1140, is nearer to the traditional *majestas*-portrait in posture and insignia: King Eric holds in his right hand a sceptre surmounted by a fleur-de-lis; in his left a 'globus cruciger.'⁴⁷ A century later, in the thirteenth century, Danish kings are still employing the same type of seal. The 'globus cruciger' and the sceptre with the fleur-de-lis still appear on the seal of 1232 of King Eric Plough-Penny⁴⁸ (so named from his tax of a penny on the plough). And similarly one Danish king after another is represented on his seal in the traditional posture of the *majestas*-portrait, with only minor variations: King Cnut, for example, on a seal of c. 1190 adopts a more elaborate type of throne,⁴⁹ but King Christopher I is seated on a backless stool.⁵⁰ The latest seal with the *majestas*-portrait reproduced by Thiset seems to be one of King Christian III of 1556;⁵¹ so that the *majestas*-portrait in Denmark remained in use at all events from the eleventh to the sixteenth century.

From Sweden the oldest king's seal now surviving is an (imperfect) seal of King Karl Sverkersson of 1164-7, a two-faced hanging wax seal in the true tradition of the *majestas*-portrait, appended to a charter of Archbishop Stephan of Uppsala the witnesses to which included the king, whose seal was appended together with that of the archbishop.⁵² The king, with crown and mantle fastening

⁴⁷ Thorkelin, i, Denmark, pl. I, no. 2; Thiset pl. I, 4a. Here and elsewhere in this article I have adopted for the seals and the documents the dating of the editors.

⁴⁸ Thorkelin, i, pl. 1, no. 3; Thiset pl. 3, 10a.

⁴⁹ Thiset pl. 1, 5a.

⁵⁰ Thiset pl. 4, 15a.

⁵¹ Thiset no. 122 a.

⁵² On this charter, described by Hildebrand as 'the oldest Swedish original document,' see n. 89 below. For the text see *Diplomatarium Suecanum*, ed. Liljegren, vol. i (Stockholm 1829), no. 51. For the seal see B. E. Hildebrand, *Svenska Sigiller Från Medeltiden*, vol. i (Stockholm 1862), pl. 1, no. 1, 2. Seal 'i rött vax på gula silkestrådar brutet i två delar, med flera stycken bortfallna.' H. Reuter Dahl, *De äldsta svenska sigillerna* (Lund 1843) has not been accessible to me (Brit. Mus. copy destroyed); but the seals appear in his *Svenska Kyrkans Hist.* vol. 2, pl. 1. Seal in Plate, 4, from Hildebrand.

at the throat, is seated on a backless stool or throne, with a 'globus cruciger' in the left hand. The sword in the king's right hand, which appears in Peringskiöld's drawing of this seal, is marked as conjectural by Hildebrand and omitted by Reuterdaahl; later kings bear a sceptre with a fleur-de-lis (Plate, 4). On the reverse he is depicted on horseback, bearing lance and shield. The inscription, completed by Peringskiöld, on the obverse, runs:

[SIGILLVM] KAROL[I SVEONV]M [REGI]S

and on the reverse:

H[IC] IDEM [SVMMVS G]OTH[O] [RVM DVX]

Later Swedish royal seals, as for example the seal of King Eric Knutsson of 1210-6, are in the same tradition,⁵³ and so on into the fourteenth century.

The use of seals in Norway can definitely be carried back into the twelfth century by a reference in the chronicle of William of Newburgh to the inscription on the seal of King Sverri (1184-1202):

Titulus autem sigilli ejus talis fuisse dicitur: SUERUS REX MAGNUS, FERUS UT LEO, MITIS UT AGNUS;⁵⁴ and there can be no doubt that seals were in use in Norway at a much earlier date. At a later period it was indeed supposed (perhaps rightly) that letters and seals were employed in the eleventh century by King Magnus the Good (died 1047) who ruled over both Norway and Denmark: 'after he had possessed himself of Denmark, he sent messengers west to England; they went to King Edward and brought him King Magnus' letters and seal.'⁵⁵ It seems more than probable that Magnus in this respect was continuing a tradition established by his predecessors;

⁵³ Hildebrand, vol. i, pl. 2, no. 6.

⁵⁴ *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, ed. H. C. Hamilton (London 1856), iii, c. 6, p. 231, a reference for which I am indebted to Mr. Turville-Petre.

⁵⁵ *Heimskringla*, S. of Magnus the Good, c. 36 (ed. F. Jónsson, iii, 71). For other references, see Storm no. 12 (cf. n. 100 below).

but no Norwegian seals have survived from this early period; the earliest surviving royal seals in Norway date from the thirteenth century.

There is evidence that a seal was originally appended to a charter or letter of King Philip of Norway, of 1207-17;⁵⁶ and again seals were once attached to a letter of Skule Jarl, brother of King Ingi of Norway, to be dated 1225, for the cathedral chapter of Nidaros.⁵⁷ Other documents of this period also exhibit evidence of sealing.⁵⁸ But the earliest surviving Norwegian royal seal in a good state of preservation is a seal of King Hakon Hakonsson of 1250, and on it we find the familiar *majestas*-portrait, though with differences in dress and surroundings.⁵⁹ In his right hand the king holds a sword, and in his left, a sceptre surmounted by a more elaborate form of the ancient 'patriarchal' cross (Plate, 5). The legend runs:

SIGILLVM DOMINI HACONIS ILLVSTRIS REGIS
NORVVEGIE

and

REX HACO PRAECLARVS PROBVS ARMIS
PECTORE GNARVS;

and it is worth noting that the first of these: SIGILLVM etc. is in the form employed two centuries before by King Edward the Confessor, namely, SIGILLVM EADWARDI ANGLORVM BASILEI. Seals of Hakon's son and successor Magnus the Law-Mender are also in the tradition, except for details of dress and insignia. But

⁵⁶ On this charter see p. 147 below. Text, Thorkelin, ii, 19; *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, ed. Lange and Unger, Christiania, vol. 1 (1849), no. 3. Facsimile of text, *Palæografisk Atlas*, Oldnorsk-Islandsk Afdeling (Copenhagen 1905), no. 48: 'Et segl ses at have været vedhængt.'

⁵⁷ *Dipl. Norveg.* i, no. 8; *Pal. Atlas*, no. 49; 'Ved brevet hænger to beskadigede vokssegl.' Of these seals, one was of the chapter, the other of the jarl. On this letter see p. 148 below.

⁵⁸ See, for example, the undated letter of King Hakon Hakonsson of ? 1224; for references see n. 105.

⁵⁹ Thorkelin, ii, Norway, pl. 1, No. 2. Seal in Plate, 5, from this.



5. KING HAKON HAKONSSON OF NORWAY.
 (see note 59). Obverse. Diameter 3".
From Thorkelin. (Photostat C.U.L.)

a few years later, after 1280, King Eric Hakonsson issues seals⁶⁰ on which the dress reverts to the ancient pattern of the chlamys fastening on the right shoulder, which also appears on the seals of his Danish contemporaries King Eric Glipping and King Eric Menved of about the same date. And similarly he rejects the forms of the insignia employed on the seals of his immediate predecessors, and the insignia on his seals resemble in general those of the Danish kings from Eric Lam of 1140 onwards. But whether the seals of the Norwegian King Eric were actually imitated from Danish seals, or from some other pattern, must remain an open question, in view of the widespread employment of the type.

When we compare the representation of the monarch on early Scandinavian royal seals with that on the Great Seal of the kings and queens of England we see at a glance that they are in all essential respects identical. On all these seals, Scandinavian or English, the monarch is depicted crowned and enthroned in majesty, holding in his hands the insignia of power. And in fact from the time of King Edward the Confessor to the present day, the representation of the monarch on the English Great Seal has been the same, except of course for the inevitable changes of fashion in dress, and alterations in the background and surroundings. The English monarch is depicted seated in majesty on a throne, wearing a crown and royal robes, and holding two sceptres, or a sceptre and a globe, sometimes a sword,⁶¹ so that in England the *majestas*-portrait on the royal seal has been in use for at least nine hundred years. It has been employed in other countries too, though not for so long a period. In the Scandinavian countries, as we have already seen, there is

⁶⁰ Thorkelin, ii, Norway, pl. 2, nos. 1, 4.

⁶¹ Birch, *Cat. of Seals in the British Museum*; A. B. and A. Wyon, *The Great Seals of England* (London 1887).

evidence of its use from 1085 onwards, but it may well have been employed earlier. In France it appears under Henry I (1031-1060) and continues in use there up to the French Revolution; it is subsequently used by Napoleon.⁶² In Germany it appears in 997, and continues in use for centuries. It was also employed at one period or another in the kingdom of Sicily, by the kings of Jerusalem, in Spain, in Portugal, in Bohemia, in Hungary, in Poland, in Serbia, as well as in England and in Scotland.⁶³

The earliest English seal bearing the *majestas*-portrait is, as I have already said, the seal of King Edward the Confessor^{63*}; but by his time the *majestas*-portrait was already ancient. Representations of the emperor in a rigidly frontal pose, enthroned in majesty, and bearing the emblems of regality, can be traced back to the fourth century after Christ, if not earlier. In the art of late antiquity the notion of majesty was conveyed and emphasised by the central position assigned to the emperor as the supreme object of interest, and by the frontal pose in which he is depicted—frontality in composition being a well-known and conspicuous feature of late

⁶² Ewald, pl. 21, no. 3.

⁶³ Many of these are in Birch, op. cit.; see also Bresslau, *Archiv f. Urk.* vi, 26. See also J. Pijoan, *History of Art*, 2nd ed. (London 1933), ii. pl. xlvi for seals of Charles of Valois and Martin of Aragon. For seals of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, see Schlumberger, *Sigillographie de l'Orient Latin*, (Romans 1943), pl. 1.

^{63*} The figure of King Edward the Confessor enthroned in majesty, holding sceptre and 'globus cruciger', which appears on coins of this king of the so-called 'sovereign' type (Types ix, x), and to which Sir Frank Stenton kindly drew my attention, is not in the true tradition of the *majestas*-portrait which appears on the seals. Here the ruler faces full front, whereas on these coins his head is turned to the right. Nevertheless this representation on the coins of the king full length, crowned and enthroned, was a new departure in English coinage, and must be in some way connected with the adoption by the Confessor of the *majestas*-portrait on his seals. For examples, see H. A. Grueber and C. F. Keary, *Cat. of Engl. Coins in the Brit. Mus.*, Anglo-Saxon Series, vol. ii (1893), xcvi, and pl. xxiii, no. 2, xxiv, no. 10, xxvi, nos. 4, 8; G. C. Brooke, *English Coins* (London, 2nd ed. 1942), pl. xvii, no. 11.

third- and fourth-century art.⁶⁴ Thus at about the turn of the third and the fourth century Diocletian and Maximian appear together on a gold medallion, enthroned to the front, each crowned by their divine patrons, and each holding a globe; and similarly, in the fourth century, Constantine I, Constantius II, Magnentius, and others, appear on medallions, frontally enthroned, with insignia, as does also Galla Placidia in the following century. Again, representations of emperors in this posture, bearing insignia, appear in the reliefs on the early fourth-century Arch of Constantine in Rome, that is to say, in the two imperial statues identified with Marcus Aurelius and Hadrian, and in the representation of Constantine I himself in the *congiarium* scene. *Roma* enthroned frontally in majesty, with attributes, also appears in the art of the fourth century, and later.⁶⁵ Moreover in the second half of the fourth century the frontal representation of the emperor enthroned in majesty was adopted by the Christian church, and representations of Christ enthroned in majesty are abundant in medieval (and later) art. For example, the late fourth-century mosaic composition (extensively restored) decorating the apse of the church of Sta. Pudenziana on the Esquiline at Rome depicts a group of persons (apostles) in friendly conversation, with Christ seated in the midst in majesty on a *cathedra*.⁶⁶ A powerful influence in the spread and preservation of this type of representation, appears in the

⁶⁴ E. Strong, *Apotheosis and After Life* (London 1915), pp. 31 ff.; C. R. Morey, *Early Christian Art* (Princeton 1942), pp. 26 ff.; J. M. C. Toynbee *Roman Medallions* (American Numismatic Soc., Numis. Stud. no. 5, New York, 1944), p. 175; H. P. L'Orange, *Apotheosis in Ancient Portraiture* (Oslo 1947), pp. 122 ff.; J. B. Ward Perkins, *J. Ro. Stud.* vol. 38 (1948), pp. 76 ff. I am indebted for these references to Dr. J. M. Hussey.

⁶⁵ See J. M. C. Toynbee, *Medallions*, p. 175 and plates; H. P. L'Orange and A. v. Gerkan, *Der sputantike Bildschmuck des Konstantinsbogens* (Berlin 1939), Text and plates; for *Roma*, Toynbee, *J. Ro. Stud.*, vol. 37 (1947), pp. 135 ff.

⁶⁶ See O. Wulff, *Allchristliche und byzantinische Kunst*, i (Berlin, 1914), 328; Pijoan, ii, 35.

ivory diptychs, first mentioned in a law of A.D. 384, which as late as the sixth century were still being made to commemorate the year of office of the Roman consuls in their succession.⁶⁷ The consul is seated in majesty in the familiar posture, bearing in one hand a sceptre possibly surmounted by an eagle or a globe or a portrait of the emperor or some other device; in the other he holds the *mapa* which, by the custom of his office, he threw down as a signal for the opening of the official games. The same type of representation is also found in the picture of an emperor preserved in a copy made in 1620 of an eighth or ninth-century version of the calendar of A.D. 354 of Philocalus. The ruler, depicted in frontal pose, and identified by the editor of the manuscript with the Emperor Constantius II, is seated with his feet on a footstool. On his head, surrounded by a nimbus, he wears a diadem. The sceptre in his left hand is surmounted by a tiny bust, with helmet and shield. From his outstretched right hand there pours to the ground a shower of gold pieces.⁶⁸ Representations of rulers are also to be seen on a great silver disc (*missorium*) which has been dated in A.D. 388 by Delbrueck.⁶⁹ Here the Emperor Theodosius I, seated in majesty in the middle, is handing over to an official the symbol of his office. Two other rulers are seated in majesty, one on either side: his elder son Arcadius, with one hand raised, the other holding a globe; and Valentinianus II, bearing a sceptre in one hand, a globe in the other. The insignia borne by these two rulers are those which appear

⁶⁷ Discussion and plates in R. Delbrueck, *Die Consulardiptychen und verwandte Denkmäler* (Berlin and Leipzig 1929); Wulff i, 196 etc.

⁶⁸ J. Strzygowski, *Die Calenderbilder des Chronographen vom Jahre 354* (Berlin 1888), pl. XXXIV. See also Toynbee, *J. Ro. Stud.* vol. 37 (1947), p. 142, and refs., for this calendar.

⁶⁹ *Consulardiptychen*, p. 235 and pl. 62; Delbrueck, *Spätantike Kaiserporträts* (Berlin and Leipzig 1933), p. 200, pl. 94, 95; Pijoan ii, pl. 13; Wulff i, 197.

constantly in such portraits in the Middle Ages down to modern times; and similarly the chlamys fastened on the right shoulder with a brooch (seen also on coins of Roman emperors), which appears on the seal of Edward the Confessor, appears already here. So also does the backless throne or stool with a cushion on either side, and the projecting footstool, all of which become traditional in such representations. Further, the *majestas*-portrait also appears on coins. For example, on silver and bronze coins of the Byzantine Emperor Justin II (565-78) the emperor and his wife are seated side by side on a double throne, full front, in the usual posture of the *majestas*-portrait, and the insignia which they hold include the 'globus cruciger,' a sceptre with a globular top, and a cruciform sceptre, all of which are found in such portraits on one occasion or another.⁷⁰ On seals of the Byzantine empire, on the other hand, there sometimes appears a figure of Christ enthroned in majesty with hands outstretched; on the other side there may be a portrait of the emperor standing.⁷¹

The *majestas*-portrait, which we find on the seal of Edward the Confessor, can, as I have said above, be traced back to the fourth century after Christ. But the first known instance of its use upon a wax seal was in King Edward's time comparatively recent. The Emperor Otto III⁷² (983 [996]-1002) was the first ruler of Western Europe to have himself represented in this fashion on a seal. He employed a wax seal of this type

⁷⁰ See W. Wroth, *Cat. of the Imperial Byzantine Coins in the Brit. Mus.* (London 1908), i, 77-104; J. Sabatier, *Desc. générale des monnaies byzantines* (Paris and London 1862), i, pl. xxi; Grabar pp. 24 ff.

⁷¹ See G. Schlumberger, *Sigillographie de l'Empire Byzantin* (Paris 1884), p. 418.

⁷² On Otto III see P. E. Schramm, *Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio* (Leipzig 1929), i, 87-187, ii, 3-33; F. Dvorník, *Cambridge Historical Journal*, vol. vii, No. 3 (1943), pp. 142 ff. I am indebted for these references to Dr. J. M. Hussey.

on genuine documents issued by him in 997 and 998 (Plate, 1).⁷³ *Majestas*-portraits of the emperors are not uncommonly found in manuscripts of the Carolingian and Ottonian periods; Otto III himself appears several times in this posture in illuminated manuscripts which have been assigned to the period c. 997-1002.⁷⁴ Similar representations of Otto III and of his father Otto II appeared upon their gold or silver coins; Otto II holds a sceptre of elaborate design with a cruciform top in his right hand, and in his left, a 'globus cruciger,' whilst Otto III holds a sword in his right hand, and his left hand is upstretched.⁷⁵ During Otto III's reign—he died at the age of 22, having been crowned king when three years old on the death of his father, and emperor in 996—five different seals were employed.⁷⁶ The innovation of a full-length standing portrait represented on the third and fourth of these seals, introduced after he became emperor, was discarded. But the other innovation, the representation of the emperor enthroned in majesty on his fifth seal,⁷⁷ was adopted by his successors (with only a few insignificant exceptions),⁷⁸ was widely imitated abroad by other

⁷³ Posse, i, pl. 10, no. 1.

⁷⁴ See P. E. Schramm, *Die deutschen Kaiser und Könige in Bildern ihrer Zeit*, 751-1152 (Leipzig and Berlin, 1928), p. 194, pl. 73, 74 a, b, 75, 78; *Herrscherbild* p. 189 f., pl. 5. See also G. Leidinger, *Miniaturen aus Handschriften der Kgl. Hof- und Staatsbibliothek in München* (Munich 1913), i, pl. 14.

⁷⁵ See Lansdowne MS. 1212, pp. 38, 39, for drawings made c. 1600 by O. de Strada, antiquary of Rudolf II, of coins in the old Imperial Library at Vienna. I am indebted for knowledge of this manuscript to Dr. C. E. Wright. Later emperors too used the same representation on their coins; cf. *ibid.* pp. 51, 54.

⁷⁶ Analysed by Ewald, p. 81; Posse, pl. 9, nos. 3-6, pl. 10, no. 1. These were all wax seals, but from 998 onwards Otto employed metal bulls.

⁷⁷ It is worth noting that what is in question here is not simply the transference of the royal portrait from coin to seal. The details of dress on the coins are different, whereas the chlamys and brooch worn by Otto III on his seal had been a constant feature of earlier wax seals, as for instance, of those of Conrad I, Henry I, Otto I and II.

⁷⁸ His immediate successor Henry II first used the *majestas*-portrait on a seal after his coronation as emperor; before that time he used a portrait which was not full length, merely down to the hips; see Posse, pl. II, no. 1. The next emperor, Conrad II, always employed the *majestas*-portrait on his wax seals.

rulers, and in this country has run a successful course which has lasted till the present day.

To return now to the early Scandinavian seals, which obviously cannot be studied in isolation. The suggestion was put forward by Bresslau,⁷⁹ that the resemblances between the seal of Cnut the Saint of Denmark of 1085, and that of William I of England, whose seal on its obverse is of the same type as that of the Confessor, are best explained by the supposition that they both go back to a common source, that both indeed are derived from the lost seal of Cnut the Great, king of England and of Denmark. Both the seal of the Confessor in England and that of Cnut the Saint in Denmark are two-faced seals, a feature which in the case of the Confessor is peculiarly difficult to explain, for except for the insignia, the two sides of the Confessor's seal are almost identical. Bresslau put forward the hypothesis that Cnut first adopted a double seal to signify his two-fold lordship, of England and of Denmark, and if this is the true explanation of the two-faced seal, this seal would have been appropriate to his son King Harthacnut, who for a time ruled over England and Denmark, and to King Magnus the Good, who ruled over Norway and Denmark. But it is difficult, if this explanation is correct, to find anything to justify the adoption of a double seal in the case of either the Confessor in England or of Cnut the Saint in Denmark. And it is at least a working hypothesis that both inherited a two-faced seal which went back ultimately to the seal of Cnut the Great, of England and Denmark, a predecessor of them both. The reverse of the seal of Cnut the Saint moreover, like the reverse of the seal of William the Conqueror, bears an equestrian portrait (though the two are not at all alike) and further in both cases the legend on the seal is in hexameters. Was

⁷⁹ *Archiv f. Urk.* ut supra, p. 57.

Cnut the Great the first ruler to place an equestrian portrait on the reverse of his seal? And what was the original significance of this equestrian portrait, which in this country at least has been used with only two or three exceptions by all the kings and queens of England from the Norman Conquest (if not from the time of Cnut) until the present day? Could the inspiration have come from the famous antique bronze equestrian statue of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius at Rome, which was known throughout the Middle Ages, and which Cnut would no doubt have seen when he visited Rome?^{79*}

To proceed now to a further hypothesis: If we ask from what sources Cnut the Great derived the seal which, as has been conjectured, formed the model for the seals of Denmark and of England, the most acceptable theory is again that proposed by H. Bresslau, namely that Cnut copied the seal of the Emperor Conrad II. The insignia on the seal of Edward the Confessor resemble those borne by Conrad II more closely than those on the seals of King Edward's contemporaries, who were Conrad's successors. In the year 1027 when Conrad was crowned emperor at Rome Cnut the Great was present at the ceremony; and in a proclamation that he sent home in that year to the people of England Cnut told them of his kindly reception, of negotiations in which he had engaged with the emperor, and of magnificent presents which he had received from him. Some years later, in 1036, not long after Cnut's death, his daughter Gunnhild was married to Conrad's son Henry (afterwards the Emperor Henry III); and we can well imagine that letters authenticated by seals would previously have been exchanged between the two monarchs, in connection with

^{79*} Dr. L. D. Ettlinger of the Warburg Institute kindly informs me that this statue survived the fall of the Roman Empire because it was thought to be a statue of the first Christian emperor, Constantine; and that the statue stood near the Scala Santa till 1538, when it was removed to its present position on the Capitol.

this marriage. There is no difficulty in supposing that the portrait on the (lost) seal of Cnut was derived in its main features from Conrad's first seal as emperor, and this seal of Conrad II was directly derived from that of Otto III.

As to the particular channels whereby the sealed letter itself, and the seal with the *majestas*-portrait, were introduced into the individual Scandinavian countries, we can do no more than speculate; but the crucial period ranges of course from the first introduction of this type of seal in 997 to the date, 1085, of the earliest known Scandinavian royal seal, namely the seal of Cnut the Saint of Denmark. This seal, like that of the Confessor, is a two-faced hanging wax seal—a fact which favours the supposition that Cnut the Saint's seal was derived from English sources, and not from the single-faced seal impressed on the face of the document itself, which was at that time employed by the German emperor—though this German seal similarly bore a *majestas*-portrait of the ruler. Olaf Tryggvason of Norway, and St. Olaf, may have learnt the use of the sealed letter from King Æthelred during their visits to England,⁸⁰ where the sealed letter (whatever may have been the nature of the seal) had been long in use; and in any case the bishops and priests from England who attended them in Norway can scarcely have been ignorant of the epistolary usages of Æthelred's court. Traces of Anglo-Saxon influence in the organisation of the Norwegian court have been noted by L. M. Larson,⁸¹ who thinks it likely that in Norway not only the royal household but also the royal chapel, were organised on Anglo-Saxon lines; and as in England the priests of the royal chapel constituted the king's secretariat, so, no doubt, they did in Norway. An English ecclesiastic like Grimkell (from his name a native

⁸⁰ On these visits see Stenton pp. 373, 396.

⁸¹ *King's Household*, p. 197.

of one of the Scandinavianised parts of England), who is named by Adam of Bremen⁸² among those ecclesiastics from England who attended St. Olaf in Norway, and was appointed bishop there; who moreover appears in the Saga of St. Olaf among the teachers and advisers by whose advice St. Olaf set up the Christian law and who is represented as sitting in the seat next to the king's in the king's high hall,⁸³ may well have had the oversight of the king's correspondence. That Grimkell was employed by St. Olaf for diplomatic exchanges is evident from his being sent on an embassy to Archbishop Unwan of Bremen as St. Olaf's ambassador.⁸⁴ Grimkell was however only one of the ecclesiastics who went to Norway from England with the two Olafs; and some of these no doubt lived on there after the death of these kings. The probability that the Norwegian kings derived their diplomatic formulas (as well as their seals) from the sealed letters of Anglo-Saxon kings, and not from those of the Anglo-Norman chancery (where the writ form continued to be employed), is increased by the fact that, as will be shown below, the extant official letters (charters) of Norwegian kings, unlike those of Denmark and Sweden, are written not in Latin, but in the vernacular speech, and that they employ similar, if not identical formulas. The intercourse between English and continental churchmen, which as Sir Frank Stenton has observed,⁸⁵ had been stimulated by the union of England and Denmark under Cnut, and which is exemplified by the consecration of Bishop Gerbrand, presumably from his name a German, to the see of Roskilde, by Archbishop Æthelnoth of Canterbury, would no doubt have favoured the wider use of the sealed letter; for in England the sealed letter was employed not

⁸² Op. cit. ii, 55; see also Stenton pp. 456 f.

⁸³ *Heimskringla*, S. of St. Olaf, c. 57, 58 (ed. Jónsson, ii, 81 f.).

⁸⁴ Larson, *Canute the Great*, p. 273.

⁸⁵ Op. cit., p. 457.

only by the royal secretariat, but also by prominent ecclesiastics for their correspondence (not only in Latin but also in the vernacular) at all events from the early years of the eleventh century, and no doubt before this. The 'political exchanges between the English court and foreign powers' which 'were more frequent' between the accession of Cnut to the throne of England and the Norman Conquest 'than at any period since the reign of Æthelstan,' would also in the natural course of things have brought to those correspondents of the English kings to whom they were unfamiliar, the diplomatic usages of the English court. Further in Sweden as in Norway, 'details of ritual and organisation in which the English and Scandinavian churches' resembled each other are proof of contact between the ecclesiastics of these countries and English ecclesiastics.⁸⁶ But it must for lack of evidence remain an open question whether in Sweden the adoption of the hanging wax seal with the *majestas*-portrait came directly from English sources or through Danish or other channels. In the formulas of the surviving documents of Danish and Swedish kings (from the late eleventh century onwards) there is, as will be shown below, little incontrovertible evidence of English influence, whether or not indications of such influence would have been found if documents had survived of earlier date. As time went on the fusion under one king of two Scandinavian countries, and the personal contacts and diplomatic exchanges of the kings of Denmark, Norway and Sweden among themselves, as also with the papacy, the emperors of Germany, the kings of England and of other countries, must after all have continually provided fresh opportunities of borrowing and re-borrowing, so that an established tradition

⁸⁶ Stenton, *ut supra*.

might at any time be broken, or discarded usages might be reintroduced.

Let us now turn to the *bréf*, 'letter,' a term strictly applicable to those Scandinavian royal charters which were drawn up in epistolary form, often with a greeting addressed to individuals, or groups of individuals, or possibly generally addressed, and closing with a valediction; but used also to denote those other charters which have rather the form of a notification,⁸⁷ as for instance, the earliest Scandinavian charter known, the charter of King Cnut the Saint of Denmark, of 1085,⁸⁸ concerning the foundation and endowment of the cathedral at Lund. It begins with an invocation of the Trinity, and continues:

Notum omnibus in Christo fidelibus esse cupimus, qualiter ego Cnuto quartus Magni Regis filius . . . ecclesiam Sancti Laurentii que sita est Lunde . . . dotaui etc.⁸⁹

Royal charters of whatever type were in Scandinavian lands as elsewhere drawn up on conventional lines; but whereas English influence is plain to see in the earliest Norwegian documents surviving, it is difficult to trace in Danish and Swedish; for example the witness clause and other clauses of the charter of King Cnut the Saint cited above are quite unlike those employed in this country. If then English influence was ever to be found in such documents, it must have been replaced by that of the imperial (and papal) chancery. In both Denmark

⁸⁷ Thorkelin in his *Dipl. Arnemagn.* uses *litteræ* for both.

⁸⁸ Text, Thorkelin i, 1 f.; for full references, see K. Erslev, *Repertorium Diplomaticum Regni Danici Medievalis*, vol. i (Copenhagen 1894), no. 1; *Diplom. Suecanum*, ed. Liljegren etc. (Stockholm 1829-78) 1, no. 26. On the seal, see p. 128, above and references there.

⁸⁹ The earliest known Swedish charter (*Dipl. Suecan.* i, no. 51), Archbp. Stephan's notification concerning his settlement of a dispute, of 1164-7, is in a similar form; see further p. 130 above.

and Sweden⁹⁰ the form and script of the diploma and of the less formal mandate correspond with those of German royal and princely documents;⁹¹ (but it must also be noted that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and later, documents written on strips of parchment recalling in their shape English writs, frequently appear among the Danish charters).⁹²

In letters, whether private or official, in ancient as in modern times, it was customary to employ conventional opening clauses, and it is in these clauses in Norwegian official documents that English influence is most apparent. Moreover, as has been said above, the earliest surviving Norwegian royal charters (in epistolary form), dating from the thirteenth century, are, like the Anglo-Saxon writs of the pre-Conquest period, written in the vernacular speech;⁹³ and it seems more than likely that the vernacular was employed in charters in Norway from the beginning. Not only in their characteristic use of the vernacular, but also in the actual formulas employed, Norwegian royal charters seem to imitate Anglo-Saxon models. Although in the Saga of St. Olaf, it is said that Queen Emma in her letter to Denmark⁹⁴ (read in the 'thing' and therefore written in the vernacular) 'greeted all the greatest chiefs in Denmark'—a detail which recalls the characteristic greeting clause, with its address to individuals, of letters (writs) of her husband King Cnut—it is difficult to

⁹⁰ For Danish charters see, in addition to those works cited above, *Regesta Diplomatica Historiæ Danicæ*, Copenhagen, 1847 etc.; facsimiles, *Palæografisk Atlas*, Dansk Afdeling, 1903, and *Corpus Diplomatium Regni Danici*, ed. Blatt and Christensen, Copenhagen 1938; and for full references to other works, see *Diplomatarium Danicum*, ed. Afzelius, Blatt and Christensen, Copenhagen 1938 etc. For Swedish charters, see *Dipl. Suecan.* ed. Liljegen (n. 88, above), and *Svenskt Dipl.* ed. Silfverstolpe (1875 etc.).

⁹¹ Bresslau, *Archiv f. Urk.* vi (1918), 59. For an analysis of the structure of Danish charters, without discussion of their origin, see Erslev, introduction.

⁹² See the volumes of facsimiles mentioned above.

⁹³ Latin is however employed by Norwegian kings in correspondence with the authorities of Lubeck.

⁹⁴ See p. 128 above.

trace English influence in royal Danish official letters of a later period (apart possibly from general resemblances of form, and possibly from the presence in some of a penal clause). Whatever degree of English influence may have been apparent in the lost letters of Cnut to his Danish kingdom, there are (as has been said above) scarcely any traces to be seen in the official letters of later Danish kings. These are consistently in Latin, as are also the official letters of Swedish kings. According to Bresslau the earliest Danish royal document in the vernacular surviving in its original form is dated in 1371,⁹⁵ but in Sweden there may be earlier examples.⁹⁶

The earliest letters surviving of any Scandinavian king are the sealed letters (writs) preserved only in copies, issued by King Cnut the Great (1017-35) as King of England—letters concerned with official business, and usually addressed to a number of recipients; but no letter of his to Scandinavia seems to have survived textually. Mention has been made above of a letter of Cnut's wife Queen Emma, and also of the sending by Cnut of letters and seals to St. Olaf; as also of the sending of letters by King Magnus of Norway to King Edward the Confessor.⁹⁷ Further a letter sent in 1139 by King Ingi of Norway to his brother King Sigurðr and his adherents⁹⁸ appears in *Heimskringla*; and we are told in the same source of the sending of letters ('ritsending') by Ingigerd, the daughter of the king of Sweden, Olaf Skattkonung, concerning her projected marriage.⁹⁹ Letters of Scandinavian kings appearing in the texts of literary and historical

⁹⁵ Erslev *Repertorium*, ii, 143, no. 2922; 'Wy Waldemar könnigh dun wetlike dat wy umme' etc.

⁹⁶ See for example the grant of privileges for the people of Visingsö of King Magnus, dated 1286, in the vernacular, but accompanied by a Latin version (*Dipl. Suecan.* ii, no. 920).

⁹⁷ See pp. 128, 131, above.

⁹⁸ S. of K. Ingi, c. 8; (ed. Jónsson iii, 360).

⁹⁹ S. of St. Olaf, c. 91 (ed. Jónsson, ii, 176).

works were brought together by G. Storm,¹⁰⁰ whilst others surviving in their original form or as cartulary copies have been printed in the diplomatic collections of Norway, Sweden and Denmark; and letters of Scandinavian kings to Lübeck and other Hanseatic towns appear in von Bunge's collection of charters.¹⁰¹

We come now to the earliest (according to Bresslau) official letter of any Norwegian king of which the original has been preserved—a letter of King Philip of Norway, of 1207-17, written on parchment, with remains of sealing.¹⁰² In this letter, which is short and to the point, the king forbids the people of Morsdal, to whom the letter is addressed, to do any harm to the property of the monks of Hovedö¹⁰³ (near Oslo) on pain of death or mutilation. It begins with a greeting clause of a type which seems to have become common form at all events by the close of the twelfth century in Norway, and probably much earlier:

Philippus konungr sendir ollum Morsdælom þeim er i lyðni villia vera við oss quæðiu Guðs oc sina.

In fact so conventional had the formula become in its main outlines (the only elaboration here is the clause: 'þeim er i lyðni villia vera við oss') that here and in many other documents the final clause is expressed by abbreviations: 'Q. G. 7 sina,' where Q. stands for *quæðiu* (Icelandic *kveðja*), and G. for *Guðs*. We might take as other examples of the employment of the same greeting formula a letter of King Hakon Sverresson of 1202 preserved in a copy:

Hakon Konungr sendir quedio Eiriki Erkebiskupi ok allum adrum biskupum, lærdom mönnum allum, bondom allum, ok buþegnum allum, Guds vinum ok sinum, sem þetta bref sea æða höyra, quedio Guds ok sina;¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ *Regesta Norvegica*, 991-1263 (Christiania 1898).

¹⁰¹ *Liv-, Esth-, und Curländisches Urkundenbuch nebst Regesten*, ed. F. G. von Bunge (Reval, 1853-1914).

¹⁰² See p. 132 above.

¹⁰³ This was a monastery founded in 1147 by English Cistercians; see Gjerset, *Hist. of the Norwegian People*, i, 345.

¹⁰⁴ Thorkelin, *Dipl. Arnamagn.* ii, 18-19.

or an undated letter of King Hakon Hakonsson of (?)
1224:

H[akon] konongr sun H[akonar] konongs sendir bondom oc buþeignum, ollum Guðs vinnum (*sic*) oc sinum þeim et þetta bref sea eða hœyra a Eikium (i.e. Eker) quæðiu Guðs oc sina;¹⁰⁵

or a letter of Skule Jarl dated 1225:

Skule Jarll bróðer I[nga] k[onongs] sænder lærðom oc lendom, allom verandom oc viðr komandom, Q. G. 7 S. Wer vilium yðr kunnict gera at etc.¹⁰⁶

Towards the end of the thirteenth century, in a letter of 1298, King Eric Magnusson still employs the same essential framework of (i) name and title of sender: (ii) verb 'sends' in third person: (iii) name of recipient(s) in dative: (iv) object of verb 'sends,' i.e. 'quæðiu Guðs oc sina':

Eirkr Magnus med Guds miskunn Noregs Konongr sun Magnus Konongs sendir ollum mannum þeim sem þetta bref sia eða hœyra i Þronðheime oc i bönom Niddarosi Q. G. oc sina.¹⁰⁷

Many other examples of the use of this opening are to be found in letters of kings, prominent ecclesiastics and great magnates in the *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*. The letter of King Ingi of Norway to his brother King Sigurðr, in 1139, is in the same form.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, so firmly established in common use had this formula become that Snorri, probably rightly, represents it as having been in use in the time of St. Olaf, even in verbal messages. Þórarin Nefjólffson, who had been sent by King Olaf to Iceland as his messenger, is made to speak as follows at the Althing:

Ek skildumk fyrir iiii. nóttum við Ólaf konung Haraldzson; sendi hann *kveðju* hingat til landz þllum hofðingjum ok landz-stjórnar-mönnum ok þar með allri alþýðu karla ok kvenna, ungum manni ok gömlum, sælum ok veslum, guðs ok sina, ok þat með etc.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Thorkelin ii, 251; *Dipl. Norveg.* ii, no. 5; 'Efter Orig. p. Perg. . . Seglet i grönt Vox er affaldet.'

¹⁰⁶ See n. 57, above. For other examples see, for instance, *Dipl. Norveg.* i, no. 51, of King Hakon, 1226-54, cited by Larson, p. 198; text and Mod. Germ. rendering by Bresslau, *Archiv. f. Urk.* vi (1918), 61.

¹⁰⁷ Thorkelin, ii, 230.

¹⁰⁸ See n. 98.

¹⁰⁹ *Heimskringla*, S. of St. Olaf, c. 125, ed. Jónsson, ii, 273.

The kings of England also, in the eleventh century and earlier, were employing a set form of greeting in their official letters (writs) and proclamations. A proclamation issued by Cnut the Great in 1020 begins:

Cnut cýning gret his arcebiscepas 7 his leodbiscepas 7 Þurcyl eorl 7 ealle his eorlas 7 ealne his peodscype, twelfhynde 7 twyhynde, gehadode 7 læwede, on England freondlice. And ic cyðe eow þæt ic wylle etc.¹¹⁰;

whilst a writ of the same king begins:

Cnut cing gret Lyfing arcebisceop 7 Godwine bisceop 7 Ælmær abbot 7 Æpelwine scirman 7 Æpelric 7 ealle mine þegnas, twelfhynde 7 twihynde, freondlice.¹¹¹

The pattern of this formula closely resembles the one found in Norwegian royal letters cited above: it contains (i) name and title of sender: (ii) verb 'greet' in third person; (iii) names of addressees in accus.; (iv) adverb *freondlice*. It seems most probable that in England the formula is an adaptation to the native speech of a Latin formula 'X to Y *salutem*' which occurs frequently in English and continental sources and which quite clearly is regarded as its equivalent, for the one is used in rendering the other; for instance 'Ælfric abbot gret Wulfstan bisceop,' will render 'Ælfricus abbas Wulfstano episcopo salutem.' Now the resemblance between the greeting clauses in the Anglo-Saxon and Norwegian letters seems too great to be due merely to coincidence, or to independent rendering of the same widespread and ancient Latin formula; it seems most probable that it was due to imitation in Norway of the Anglo-Saxon formula. If no other evidence were available, one would feel inclined to suppose that the Norwegian 'sendir queðiu Guðs oc sina' was indeed copied from the English pattern, with its 'gret freondlice,' but also to suppose

¹¹⁰ Liebermann, *Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, i (Halle 1903), pp. 273 ff.; A. J. Robertson, *Laws of the Kings of England* (Cambridge 1925), pp. 140 ff.; Larson, *Canute*, p. 341 (Mod. Eng. rendering); cf. also W. H. Stevenson, *E. H. R.* xxvii (1912), 3-8.

¹¹¹ British Museum Royal MS. I D. ix, f. 44b. No. 26 in my forthcoming edition.

that the formula was modified in Norway, perhaps at the time of borrowing. But in fact an immediate parallel can be found for the Norwegian 'sendir queðiu Guðs oc sina', in a letter of King Harold Harefoot of England, reputed son of King Cnut the Great, and half-brother of Harthacnut (who eventually succeeded him in England). In this letter sent to the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury,¹¹² we are told, King Harold 'grette hig ealle *Godes gretincge 7 his.*' And lest it should be thought that this was merely a chance variation, due to some idiosyncrasy of the clerk who wrote King Harold Harefoot's letter, it should be observed that the same greeting is being employed before 1114 by one of the abbots of Westminster in official letters in English.¹¹³ It seems natural then to regard the appearance of this formula in Norwegian letters as evidence of English influence. It may well have been brought into the country by those ecclesiastics from England, who as I have said above, attended King Olaf Tryggvason and St. Olaf; or it may of course have been introduced into Norway at some other period. Further it is tempting to suppose that the penal clause, or sanction, when it appears in Norwegian royal letters, owes something to English models. With the clause in the letter of King Philip cited above (p. 147):

Nu ef nokor maðr verðr sua diarfr at hann gerer þeim nokot spial virki eða lan þum þeira a gaurðum eða grindum eða a þui er til heivir leghet at forno eða nyiu þa skall hann engo fyrir koma nema livi eða limum ef ver meghom na honom,

we may compare the penal clauses in Anglo-Saxon writs.¹¹⁴ Again it is difficult to dismiss the suspicion that

¹¹²A. J. Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, No. 91.

¹¹³J. Armitage Robinson, *Gilbert Crispin*, (Cambridge 1911), p. 37; *Monasticon Anglicanum*, 1846 ed. i, 310.

¹¹⁴For these see Introduction to my forthcoming edition. With the clause above, *verðr sua diarfr*, we may compare a clause in a spurious Ramsey writ of King Edward the Confessor (*Cartularium Monasterii de Rameseia*, R. S. i, 188 ff.), no. 62 in my edition: 'ic hate and beode pæt nan man ne *wurðe swa deorf*' etc. The above text from *Dipl. Norveg.*

notifications in Norwegian royal letters in such forms as 'Ver vilium yðr kunnict gera at' etc. may owe their origin at any rate in part to the 'Ic cyðe eow þæt' etc. in Anglo-Saxon writs. Finally the valediction 'Lif i Guðs gridi,' which sometimes appears in Norwegian letters, is, as Bresslau suggested, closer to the Anglo-Saxon valediction 'God eow gehealde,' than it is to the common Latin 'Valete' with which some Norwegian letters conclude.

It has been argued above that the formulas of Norwegian royal letters are such as could easily have been borrowed from the scriptoria of the later Anglo-Saxon kings, Æthelred, Cnut, Harold Harefoot, Harthacnut, Edward the Confessor. It might of course be suggested that since the Anglo-Norman kings continued the use of the Anglo-Saxon writ form, the borrowing in question might have taken place after the Norman Conquest. The objections to this suggestion are that not long after the Conquest the use of Latin prevailed in the royal chancery in England, and, further, that intercourse between England and Norway was not, after the Conquest, as close as it was in the days when future kings of Norway lived in England in contact with the English court. But as Larson¹¹⁵ observed, even if the Norse chancery did (as seems highly improbable) get its formulas from the chancery of Henry I or II, the origin of these formulas would still, though more indirectly, be found in the Anglo-Saxon writ.

It will of course have been observed that the greeting formulas of the Norwegian royal letters cited above contain some clauses for which no parallels are to be found in Anglo-Saxon writs; such clauses as

allom verandom oc viðr komandom
OR
ollum mannum þeim sem þetta bref sia eda höyra

¹¹⁵ Op. cit. p. 197.

are not to be found there. Such clauses are however to be found in Danish and Swedish letters, in Latin, in the thirteenth century, where, for instance, we find:

Omnibus tam presentibus quam futuris hoc scriptum cernentibus NN salutem,

or

Universis presentes litteras visuris seu auditoris NN, salutem in Domino sempiternam.

The clause 'presentibus et futuris' (with formal variants) in such contexts is ancient and widespread, and can be traced back in Frankish sources to as early as the seventh century. As to the other clauses occurring in Norwegian royal letters which must have been introduced at a period later than the Anglo-Saxon period, Bresslau, while calling attention to the

Omnibus ad quos presentes litteræ pervenerint

of the English Letters Patent, suggested, perhaps rightly, that the compilers of the Norwegian letters in using such clauses were borrowing from the formulas of Danish or Swedish letters. This is a matter on which it is scarcely possible to achieve certainty owing to the late appearance of Scandinavian letters upon the scene; but it is worth observing that the formulas cited as having been found in Danish and Swedish letters were also to be found elsewhere—that they were in general use in England (not to mention other countries) at the period in question. They appear for instance in a collection of writs and charters of William I and his successors and of bishops and other persons, copied into a chartulary of Malmesbury Abbey (B.M. Lansdowne MS. 417), compiled in the reign of Richard II, which forms therefore a source-book for formulas current in England from the Conquest to the fourteenth century. In these English documents we find not only the

Omnibus ad quos presentes litteræ pervenerint
of the Letters Patent, but also

Omnibus Christi fidelibus presentes litteras inspecturis vel audituris,
and

Sciant tam presentes quam futuri,
and also

Notum sit omnibus tam futuris quam presentibus—
clauses which form a reasonably close parallel to the phrases cited from Danish and Swedish royal letters, as also to those in the greeting clauses of the Norwegian royal letters. So close indeed were the links, commercial, political and religious between England and the north in the thirteenth century¹¹⁶ that borrowing from England in these matters is by no means an impossibility; but as I have suggested above, the clauses in question appear to have been in general use, and it seems therefore impossible to determine from what particular source they were introduced into Norwegian royal letters.

The greeting formula which appears in English, Norwegian, Swedish and Danish letters, whatever its variants in form, and whether in Latin or in the vernacular speech, had already in the eleventh century a long history behind it. In English it appears substantially in the opening clauses of King Alfred's well-known letter on the state of learning in England which forms the preface to the English rendering of the *Cura Pastoralis*:

Ælfred kyning hateð gretan Wærferð biscep his wordum lufice ond freondlice; ond ðe cyðan hate etc.

On the continent, we can trace the same greeting form in its Latin equivalent 'X to Y *salutem*' in early diplomas and in mandates of the Frankish rulers, and in the correspondence of ecclesiastics and other persons.¹¹⁷ The formula was used for instance by Archbishop Adalbert of Bremen (1043-72) in his letter to Bishop William of Roskilde, beginning:

¹¹⁶ See Leach, *op. cit.*, pp. 89ff.

¹¹⁷ For full details see Introduction to my *Anglo-Saxon Writs*.

Adalbertus sanctæ Romanæ et Apostolicæ sedis legatus, nec non universarum septentrionalium nationum archiepiscopus, Hammaburgensis quoque ecclesiæ provisor indignus, W. Rochildensi (*sic*) episcopo salutem.¹¹⁸

It is certain that in England its use is very ancient; but at what date it was first employed here adapted to the vernacular speech there is no means of determining. In its Latin form it goes back at any rate to the time of Bede (and earlier); letters in this form are inserted in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. The formula can be traced back ultimately to Roman antiquity. Cicero used it in his letters: 'Tullius Tironi suo salutem'; and it was also used by Roman emperors and provincial governors. But this epistolary formula which has been in use in England for many centuries has not fallen out of use even at the present day; it may still be used for instance in a writ issued by a bishop ordering the sequestration of the revenues of a benefice during a vacancy, or by modern heads of states in their international relations.¹¹⁹ These modern instances and the more ancient examples that I have cited in this article suggest that the persistence in use of the greeting formula, whatever its variants in form, for two thousand years or more, from Roman antiquity to the present day, has been due to the fact that it is readily adaptable to varying circumstances. In details of iconography the *majestas*-portrait is also ancient, though the seal bearing the portrait of the ruler enthroned in majesty has been in use, in this country, for probably not much more than nine hundred years. I have shown that the ancient greeting formula which appears in the letters of early Scandinavian kings and the *majestas*-portrait which appears upon their seals, were employed

¹¹⁸ Adam of Bremen, iii, c. 70; *Dipl. Suecan.* i, no. 22; Lappenberg *Hamburgisches Urkundenbuch*, (Hamburg 1842), no. 86. Calendared: O. H. May, *Regesten der Erzbischöfe von Bremen*, i, p. 72, no. 317, where it is dated: 'um 1065.' For Bishop William see p. 126 above.

¹¹⁹ See for instance the treaty of the king of Siam cited by V. H. Galbraith, *Studies in the Public Records*, (London 1948), p. 34.

by kings of England ; and I have suggested that in the introduction of the formula into Norway and in the introduction of the hanging two-faced wax seal and the *majestas*-portrait upon it into all three Scandinavian countries, English influence most probably played a part.

THE BATTLES AT CORBRIDGE

By F. T. WAINWRIGHT

DURING the second decade of the tenth century a Viking leader named Ragnald arrived in Northumbria and forcibly carved out a kingdom for himself. Although he holds an important place in the history of the north, his career is badly recorded and at some points quite obscure. He is usually identified with the Ragnald who is described in Irish sources as "grandson of Ivar" and "King of the Dubhgall", but recently it has been suggested that this identification should be abandoned and that the two Ragnalds should be kept separate.¹ The problem of Ragnald and his identity is only one of the many problems that arise from our ignorance of events and conditions in Northumbria. A heavy mist hangs over the north. We do not know what happened to the shattered fragments of the Anglian kingdom after the battle at York on 21 March 867; we know little about the Danish kingdom later established, and we know even less about the subsequent relations of the Angles, the Danes and the other peoples of the north. From about 900 onwards Norsemen from Ireland poured into north-western England, and the expedition of Ragnald may well mark the culmination of this movement. Another element was thus added to the racial complex, and though we may speculate on possible repercussions we can be sure only that the arrival of the Norsemen disturbed whatever uneasy political balance then existed.

With a background so confused and so uncertain it is not surprising that doubts surround the battles fought

¹ Alistair Campbell, *The Northumbrian Kingdom of Ragnald* (*English Historical Review*, Vol. LVII, pp. 85-91).

between 913 and 918 at Corbridge on the Tyne. There are several sources of information, not all independent of each other, and the single certain fact is that they cannot be completely reconciled. The central problem in this connexion is whether or not a battle fought in 918 between Ragnald King of the Dubhgal and Constantine King of the Scots should be identified with one of the two battles fought at Corbridge. As Constantine is said to have been present at the first Battle of Corbridge it has been usual to identify this battle with the battle of 918. But such an equation is not permissible, and Alistair Campbell concludes that there were three separate battles involving two separate Ragnalds.² It is unlikely that the obscurity which overhangs the Northumbrian scene will ever permit a final solution to this fascinating problem, but it is supposed to be the historian's duty to reconcile his sources even when, as in the present case, they appear to contradict each other. And, indeed, when our conflicting sources are examined, the most prominent discrepancies seem to lose their jagged edges, and a plausible reconstruction of events becomes possible. It is no more than a tentative interpretation of intractable evidence, but perhaps it deserves to be put forward.

The story of the battles at Corbridge is told, without dates and from a pronounced local angle, by the anonymous author of the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*.³ Ragnald "the king" arrived with a great number of ships and seized the lands of Ealdred *qui erat dilectus regi Eadwardo sicut et pater suus Eadulfus dilectus fuit regi Elfredo*. This was Ealdred of Bamburgh, son of Eadulf of Bamburgh. Ealdred fled northwards and persuaded Constantine King of Scots to join in the opposition to Ragnald. The armies met at Corbridge; the "heathen

² *Ibid.*, p. 90.

³ *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, ed. T. Arnold, Vol. I (1882), pp. 208-210.

king " was victorious, Constantine was driven to flight, the Scots were scattered, and all the English nobles (except Ealdred and his brother Uhtred) were slain. Among the English dead is mentioned a certain Alfred, whose name introduces the story and whose interest for the writer clearly lies in the fact that he was a tenant of Bishop Cutheard. This was the first battle of Corbridge. It was followed by a division of the conquered territory between two Scandinavian warriors.⁴ One of them, described as *filius diaboli*, was especially hostile to God and St. Cuthbert until, after interrupting a service conducted by Bishop Cutheard, he involuntarily joined his Satanic father in Hell, providing an interesting and instructive spectacle for the congregation.

At least three years later—if we may accept as chronologically accurate the sequence of events in the *Historia*—Ragnald again assembled an army at Corbridge and there slew Eadred, another tenant of the bishop, together with a great number of Angles. Eadred's lands he granted to two young English noblemen, sons of Eadred, who had been lusty warriors in the battle.⁵ Thus, somewhat mysteriously, ended the second battle at Corbridge. Eadred and his sons are the only Angles named as having taken part in the encounter with Ragnald, but this again is probably a reflection of the writer's local view-point and limited interest.

Approximate dates can be fixed to these events.

⁴ On this division, its limits, and its significance see F. M. Stenton, *The Danes in England*, pp. 4-5 (*Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. XIII, pp. 204-205).

⁵ *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia, cit. sup.*, p. 210: *Regenwaldus rex . . . totam illam terram quam Edred tenuerat sancto Cuthberto abstulit, et dedit Esbrido filio Edred, et fratri suo Elstano comiti, qui in hoc prælio robusti bellatores fuerunt.*

Ealdred's father, Eadulf of Bamburgh, died in 913.⁶ The first battle, the land-division and the punishment of the sacrilegious Scandinavian warrior all fell within Cutheard's episcopate which cannot be extended beyond 915.⁷ Therefore the first Battle of Corbridge was fought between 913 and 915, and we should not be far from the mark if we put it in 914. The second Battle of Corbridge seems to have been fought in 917 or 918. Chronological considerations alone, therefore, preclude any attempt to identify the battle of 918 (discussed below) with the first Battle of Corbridge. But there is at least no such chronological bar to an identification of the battle of 918 with the second Battle of Corbridge.

In 914 Ragnald "grandson of Ivar" is known to have fought a naval battle off the Isle of Man,⁸ and in 917 he was at Waterford with other Scandinavian forces.⁹ Later in the same year Ragnald "King of the Dubhgall" was involved in fighting between the Irish and the Scandinavians in the country behind Waterford.¹⁰ It seems almost certain that Ragnald grandson of Ivar is Ragnald King of the Dubhgall, and there is no good reason for regarding Ragnald of Northumbria as anyone but the same person. The *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*, it will have been noticed, repeatedly refers to Ragnald of Northumbria as "king", and English chroniclers, unlike

⁶ *Annals of Ulster* (Vol. I, ed. W. M. Hennessy, 1887), *sub anno* 912 *alias* 913: " . . . Etulb King of the North Saxons died." The "alias" dates in this section of the *Annals of Ulster* may be tested at several points and shown to be trustworthy. Æthelweard (*Monumenta Historica Britannica*, 1848, p. 520) uses a complicated system for indicating chronological sequence, but he clearly places the death of Eadulf (*Athulf*) in 913. Æthelweard's chronology for this period is often maligned, but it should be remembered that the marginal dates were inserted not by Æthelweard but by Savile. The death of Eadulf (*Etalbh*) is also mentioned in the *Three Fragments of Irish Annals* (ed. John O'Donovan, 1860, p. 244) in association with events which belong to 913.

⁷ F. M. Stenton, *loc. cit.*

⁸ *Annals of Ulster*, *cit. sup.*, *sub anno* 913 *alias* 914.

⁹ *Ibid.*, *sub anno* 916 *alias* 917.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

their Irish and Welsh contemporaries, are conspicuously careful in their use of such titles. To see here three or even two Ragnalds introduces an unnecessary complication. Ragnald could have sailed from the Isle of Man to Northumbria, fought at Corbridge, divided up his conquests, returned to Ireland and, after a sojourn in Waterford, returned to Northumbria again. Much is obscure in Ragnald's career, but this simple version of events between 914 and 918 raises no obvious difficulty and strikes no discordant note.

In 914 also, in the early part of the summer, Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians, built a fortress at Eddisbury in Cheshire. The date is a significant clue to the date of Ragnald's arrival in Northumbria. Eddisbury was a unit in a developed system of fortification which served several purposes,¹¹ one of which was to protect western Mercia from dangers that lay to the north. The building of the fortress at Eddisbury seems to reflect Æthelflæd's appreciation of a northern menace, and it is not unreasonable to associate it with the arrival of Ragnald. Though there is no record of direct Mercian intervention at the first Battle of Corbridge, Æthelflæd was apparently interested in and somewhat alarmed at the progress of events.

Irish sources do not mention either of the two Battles of Corbridge, but they give details of the important battle of 918. The fullest and most reliable version comes from the trustworthy *Annals of Ulster*¹² which preserves what seems to be a contemporary narrative. The date of the battle is beyond dispute, because the same annal records the death of Æthelflæd, which is known to have occurred on 12 June 918, and because the following annal correctly

¹¹ See F. T. Wainwright, *Cledemutha*, pp. 206, (*English Historical Review*, Vol. LXV, 1950), and *North-west Mercia*, pp. 23-25 (*Lancs. and Ches. Hist. Soc. Trans.*, Vol. 94, 1942).

¹² *cit. sup.*, sub anno 917 alias 918.

notes that Easter in 919 fell on the seventh of the Kalends of May, i.e. 25 April, noteworthy to the chronicler as the latest possible date for Easter Day.¹³ If events within the annal for 918 are arranged in chronological order, then the battle fell in the first half of the year, before Æthel-flæd's death on 12 June. Ragnald King of the Dubhgall left Waterford, where he had been in 917, with a force of Scandinavians which included the two earls Ottir¹⁴ and Graggabai.¹⁵ They attacked the men of Alba (*Fir Alban*), but they were ready for them and so "they met on the banks of the Tyne among the North Saxons".¹⁶ The Scandinavians were in four divisions: one under Guth-frith grandson of Ivar, a second under the two earls, a third under the young nobles, and the fourth, out of sight and held in reserve, under Ragnald himself. The men of Alba defeated the first three divisions and slew many of the Scandinavian warriors, including Ottir and Graggabai. Then Ragnald threw in his reserves and "made a slaughter" of the enemy. The men of Alba had had the initial success, but Ragnald's stratagem clearly turned the tables—not completely, however, for we are told that no king or mormaer¹⁷ was amongst the slain. And we are told specifically that "night interrupted the battle."

It is sometimes stated that Ragnald was soundly defeated in this battle, but our chief source does not give that impression. It was a battle of surprises and changing fortunes, no doubt, and the result seems to have been indecisive and debatable. Both sides could, and probably

¹³ F. T. Wainwright, *The Chronology of the "Mercian Register"*, p. 386 (*English Historical Review*, Vol. LX, 1945).

¹⁴ i.e. ON. *Óttarr* or **Óttirr*.

¹⁵ i.e. ON. *Krakabein* (Cf. E. H. Lind, *Norsk-Islandska Personbinamn*, pp. 217-218).

¹⁶ *la Saxanu tuaiscirt* (see below, p. 166).

¹⁷ An important officer of state. On the origin of the word see A. O. Anderson, *Ninian and the Southern Picts*, *Scottish Historical Review*, Vol. XXVII (1948), p. 40 (Reprinted separately, p. 17).

did, claim the victory. But according to our most reliable authority it was night, not a clear decision in the field, that put an end to the fighting. These points are important, as will be seen, in an attempt to identify the battle with the second Battle of Corbridge.

Other sources add little to our knowledge of the battle of 918. Their versions are shorter than the version preserved in the *Annals of Ulster*, but they demonstrate with startling emphasis the very important fact that major discrepancies have crept into the different accounts of the same battle. The *Annals of the Four Masters* state briefly that Oitir and the foreigners went from Waterford to Alba, that Constantine son of Aedh gave them battle, and that Oitir and his followers were slain.¹⁸ The name of Constantine is an unimportant addition to the version in the *Annals of Ulster*, but there is no mention of Ragnald, the leader and outstanding personality in the battle, no mention of the stratagem which turned the tables, and no mention of Krakabein. It is implied but not definitely stated that the victory lay with the Scots. The battle is clearly the same as that described in the *Annals of Ulster*, but it is much distorted in this summary.

In *The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill* occurs the short entry: "They [the Scandinavians] went . . . to Alba, and the men of Alba gave them battle, and they were slain there, i.e. Ragnall and Oittir."¹⁹ This entry obviously refers to the same battle but is even more distorted than the version in the *Annals of the Four Masters* for instead of merely ignoring Ragnald it lists him as killed, an error not of detail but of the first magnitude.

In the so-called *Pictish Chronicle* we find the note:

¹⁸ *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters*, ed. John O'Donovan (7 vols., Dublin, 1851), *sub anno* 916, Vol. II, p. 593.

¹⁹ *The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill*, ed. J. H. Todd (London, 1867), p. 235. A later version adds the name of Constantine (*ibid.*, p. 35).

*Bellum Tinemore factum est in xviii anno inter Constantinum et Regnall, et Scotti habuerunt victoriam.*²⁰ The eighteenth year of Constantine was 918,²¹ and this is clearly another reference to the same battle even though Otter does not figure in it. The name *Tinemore* is an interesting addition which effects a link with the statement in the *Annals of Ulster* that the battle was fought "on the banks of the Tyne". And here we have the only direct claim that the battle ended in victory for the Scots. a claim which, in this source, we may both understand and discount.

Despite discrepancies it is certain that the *Annals of Ulster*, the *Annals of the Four Masters*, the *War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill*, and the *Pictish Chronicle* are all concerned with the same battle, that of 918. But can this battle be identified with the second Battle of Corbridge? They seem to have been fought at about the same time, and the known details of Ragnald's career raise no difficulty against the assumption that they are the same battle. There are, however, serious objections to this identification. In the first place it might be argued—it has been argued—that Ragnald was soundly defeated in the battle of 918 and that he was victorious in the second Battle of Corbridge. Neither of these arguments can be accepted. It has been shown above that the result of the battle described in the *Annals of Ulster*, our best authority, was indecisive and debatable in the extreme. And an examination of the story preserved in the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* suggests that the result of the second Battle of Corbridge was also indecisive and debatable. In a passage quoted above²²

²⁰ *Chronicles of the Picts, Chronicles of the Scots, and other Early Memorials of Scottish History*, ed. W. F. Skene (Edinburgh, 1867), p. 9.

²¹ Cf. A. O. Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1922), pp. cxiii, 444 n, 446 n.

²² p. 158 note.

it is stated that Ragnald, having slain Eadred, gave his lands to his (Eadred's) two sons who had fought lustily in the battle. The view has been put forward that here we have an example of local Englishmen of rank fighting on the Scandinavian side, but there is no suggestion in the *Historia* that the two young Angles had fought on Ragnald's side, and there is no suggestion that Eadred their father was not the Eadred slain by Ragnald. It is perhaps more likely that the two young Angles had fought on the English side and that Ragnald had allowed them to keep their father's lands after the battle. This is what we might expect to have happened if, but only if, the battle had been so indecisive that Ragnald felt the need to compromise with his enemies. Eadred had been killed and so Ragnald could claim the victory; but Eadred's sons retained their father's lands and so the Northumbrians could also claim the victory. The second Battle of Corbridge, like the battle of 918, was neither a clear-cut victory nor a clear-cut defeat. There is no difficulty, on this score at least, in accepting the view that they were the same battle.

The composition of the forces opposing Ragnald raises a more serious difficulty: at the second Battle of Corbridge he fought against the Northumbrian Angles, and at the battle of 918 he fought against the Scots. The proposed identification involves the assumption that the *Historia* ignored the presence of the Scots and that the non-English sources ignored the presence of the Angles. At this point the attempt to reconcile conflicting sources becomes strained; historical interpretation of facts gives place to conjecture, though not necessarily to speculation, and the following points are relevant to the discussion. It is quite clear that the *Historia* preserves a version of events which is essentially local and incomplete. The writer was interested primarily, perhaps exclusively, in the fate of

the lands and adherents of the bishop. He makes little effort to relate his material to the wider historical issues, such as the submission of the men of York to Æthelflæd in 918²³ and Ragnald's subsequent seizure of the city,²⁴ though these must have been common knowledge in Northumbria. He builds his story around such local figures as Alfred and Eadred, and he may very well have ignored the parts played by more important men and by more important forces.

That the second battle at Corbridge was of more than local interest can hardly be doubted. We know that the Scots took part in the first battle at Corbridge, and it is certain that they would be at least keenly interested in the outcome of the second conflict with the common enemy. Similarly Æthelflæd and the Mercians had apparently reacted sharply to Ragnald's arrival in 914, and in 918 the men of York sought and were granted Æthelflæd's protection, presumably against Ragnald and his Norsemen. Therefore the failure of the *Historia* to mention either Scottish or Mercian intervention at the second Battle of Corbridge is not in itself conclusive proof that Scots and Mercians refrained from active participation in the shaping of events.

It would be a singularly curious coincidence if the Scots, the Northumbrians and the Mercians all fought as allies in a battle against Ragnald, and if the Northumbrian account ignored the Scots, the other accounts ignored the Northumbrians, and all ignored the Mercians. Yet, as on the one hand the *Historia* presents an incomplete and local version of the second Battle of Corbridge, so on the other hand the non-English sources record the battle of 918 with such a bewildering series of

²³ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (ed. B. Thorpe, 1861), MSS. B and C (British Museum, Cott. Tib. A VI and Cott. Tib. B I) *sub anno* 918.

²⁴ Symeon of Durham, *Historia Regum, sub anno* 919 (*Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia, cit. sup.*, Vol. II, p. 93).

errors and omissions that the door is not altogether closed against the possibility that the Northumbrians were there as allies of the Scots. Indeed, in the only account of the battle that is at once detailed and trustworthy, the account in the *Annals of Ulster*, there occurs a phrase that might perhaps be construed as supporting this view. The Scots are said to have met Ragnald in battle "on the banks of the Tyne among the North Saxons"—*la Saxanu tuaiscirt*. This phrase means literally "with the Saxons of the north", and it used to be taken to mean "with the assistance of the North Saxons"²⁵ (i.e. the northern Angles or Northumbrians). It is now more often taken to indicate the area where the battle was fought rather than the composition of the defending forces.²⁶ In this sense it is perhaps more in accord with idiomatic usage, but it will undoubtedly bear the older interpretation without difficulty. It is possible, therefore, that the Irish writer whose work survives in the *Annals of Ulster* meant to include the Northumbrian Angles as allies of the Scots in the battle of 918. If we could be sure that this was so our problem of reconciliation would present no great difficulty. Unfortunately we cannot be sure.

We can be sure, however, that the battle of 918 was fought near the Tyne, and the fact that the second Battle of Corbridge was also fought near the Tyne would seem to be sufficient to bring the two battles into very close association. But even this is doubtful, for it is possible

²⁵ See John O'Donovan, *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters* (1851), Vol. II, p. 593 note; William Reeves, *Adamnan's Life of St. Columba* (Dublin 1857), p. 333 note; W. F. Skene, *Chronicles of the Picts and Scots* (1867), p. 363; J. H. Todd, *The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill* (1867), p. lxxxvi.

²⁶ i.e. *with or among* in the sense of *in the land of* (the North Saxons). W. M. Hennessy (*Annals of Ulster*, *loc. cit.*) takes the phrase to mean "in North Saxonland", i.e. in Northumbria. A. O. Anderson (*Early Sources of Scottish History*, Vol. I, p. 406) gives a literal translation in a footnote and takes this to mean "in the north of England."

that the battle of 918 was fought not near the Newcastle Tyne but in East Lothian near the Haddington Tyne.²⁷ In tentative support of this possibility is sometimes quoted an annal which Symeon of Durham copied from an earlier writer and which now runs thus: *Anno DCCCCXII. Reingwald rex et Oter comes et Oswl Cracabam irruperunt et vastaverunt Dunblin*.²⁸ This section of the work has suffered some chronological dislocation,²⁹ and the date now attached to the annal may be ignored. The association of Cracabam (or Cracabain, i.e. *Kraka-bein*) with Ragnald and Otter effects a strong link between this raid and the expedition of 918. *Dunblin* cannot be Dublin, as is sometimes suggested; it is probably Dunblane,³⁰ and it may be that Ragnald's forces sacked Dunblane before they fought the battle on the Tyne. The appearance of Ragnald at Dunblane perhaps strengthens the claims of East Lothian as against Corbridge as the site of the battle of 918. Norsemen are known to have devastated this area as well as the Corbridge area, and it may be that the battle of 918 should be kept distinct from the battles at Corbridge. Perhaps Ragnald sacked Dunblane and then fought the Scots near the Haddington Tyne before pushing southwards to Corbridge and, ultimately, to York. Such a theory would fit the few known facts as well as any other, and it has much to recommend it. Doubts and difficulties abound in this period, and though it is interesting to examine one possible reconstruction of events it is unwise to ignore all others.

A little light may be thrown on our immediate problem

²⁷ As suggested, for example, by A. O. Anderson (*op. cit.*, p. 406 note) and A. Campbell (*op. cit.*, pp. 89-90).

²⁸ *Historia Regum, sub anno 912* (Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia, loc. cit.).

²⁹ On which see A. Campbell, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88.

³⁰ *Dunblin* is not the form in which we should expect Dunblane to occur, but unless another place is suggested the identification should be accepted.

by an Irish annalistic compilation which survives only in a late transcript known as the *Three Fragments*.³¹ Scholars have been reluctant to use this source because its origins are obscure and because it contains much that is legendary rather than historical. But it also contains, especially for our period, much genuine historical information which seems to have its roots in a contemporary narrative.³² Two passages in the *Three Fragments* are of interest in the present connexion. The first passage tells of a battle between the Norsemen and the men of Alba; after a fierce struggle the men of Alba were victorious and the King of the Norsemen, Oittir son of Iarnгна (ON. *Iárnkné*), was slain with many of his followers.³³ This story has been crudely inserted in the middle of the long account of Ingimund's attack on Chester, but it is clearly misplaced. The mention of Otter's death alone would carry it forward to 918, and in content it is very like the notice of the battle of 918 preserved in the *Annals of the Four Masters*.³⁴ It is usually accepted as a reference to the battle of 918,³⁵ and there seems to be neither valid objection nor suitable alternative to this identification.

The second passage is more difficult to place. It gives a long and, as is usual in the *Three Fragments*, a garbled and legendary description of a battle between the Scandinavians and the English.³⁶ Errors, later additions and legendary details may bring the *Three Fragments* under

³¹ *Annals of Ireland, Three Fragments*, ed. John O'Donovan (*Irish Archaeological and Celtic Society*, Dublin 1860). On the origin of the name, *Three Fragments*, see F. T. Wainwright, *Duaid's "Three Fragments"* (*Scriptorium*, Vol. I, Part ii, 1948, pp. 56-58).

³² F. T. Wainwright, *Ingimund's Invasion* (*English Historical Review*, Vol. LXIII, 1948, pp. 145-169).

³³ John O'Donovan, *op. cit.*, pp. 228-230; Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels, MS. 5301-5320. fol. 33b (p. 66).

³⁴ See above p. 162.

³⁵ E.g. William Reeves, *op. cit.*, pp. 332-334; A. O. Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 407-408.

³⁶ John O'Donovan, *op. cit.*, pp. 244-246; Bibliothèque Royale MS. 5301-5320, fol. 35b (p. 70).

suspicion, but we cannot dismiss as mere fabrication a source which, though itself confused and inaccurate, apparently preserves a core of genuine historical fact. We are told that a large force of Scandinavians attacked the English after accepting "Sitriuca" (ON. *Sigtryggr*), grandson of Ivar, as their king. The battle seems to have been exceptionally bloody; many important men were slain, but the English were victorious and destroyed many of their pagan enemies. We are told that the king of the pagans, "attacked by a disease", was carried into a wood where he died, and that Oittir, "the most active jarl in the battle", also fled into the woods with the remaining Scandinavians. Then Æthelflæd, who seems to have been responsible for the English strategy, ordered the wood to be cut down; this was done, no doubt with facility possible only in legend, and all the pagans were killed. Æthelflæd's fame is reputed to have spread far and wide. So ends the story of the battle. It is followed by an interesting paragraph, the last in the *Three Fragments*, which specifically states that Æthelflæd concluded a defensive alliance with both the Britons and the men of Alba; each was bound to render assistance to the other against the Norsemen. The statement that the Scots and the Britons proceeded to destroy positions held by the Norsemen suggests that the alliance was more than an empty gesture.

There is much in this story that we cannot accept, but the record of an Anglo-Celtic alliance against the Norsemen is of first-rate importance, and the account of the battle, though garbled and legendary in its present form, is worthy of consideration. To which of the known battles might it refer? O'Donovan³⁷ linked it with the Battle of Tettenhall which is described in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and in which a certain *Ohter eorl* was

³⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 245 note.

among the slain.³⁸ But the death of an Otter in each of the two battles is the only link between them. The Battle of Tettenhall appears to have followed a raid southwards of the Danish Army of Northumbria, and it belongs to the year 910; the battle described in the *Three Fragments* leaves one with the impression that it followed an invasion from across the sea, and in its present context it is preceded by a series of events which belong to the years 913-917. It cannot have occurred later than 918 because Æthelflæd died in that year. It is altogether easier to link this battle with the battle of 918 than to link it with the Battle of Tettenhall. The Otter who was "the most active jarl in the battle" and who died there should be identified with the Otter slain at the battle of 918 and not with the Otter slain at Tettenhall. This identification also gains some support from an examination of the possible sources used by the compiler whose work now survives as the *Three Fragments*.³⁹

The introduction of Sihtric, grandson of Ivar, into the story is obviously an error; it is impossible to accept the implication that he died in 918 or at any time during the lifetime of Æthelflæd. He survived her death in 918 to pursue an illustrious career in England and Ireland before he died in 927.⁴⁰ It is possible that the name Sihtric was added as a mistaken explanatory gloss to "grandson of Ivar" and was transferred to the text by a later copyist. Both Ragnald and Sihtric were grandsons of Ivar and both appear under this description in Irish annals for the years 917 and 918.⁴¹ It would be easy enough for a scribe to choose the wrong one for his gloss. It is true, of course, that Ragnald also survived the battle of 918, but it is

³⁸ MSS. B, C and D *sub anno* 911 (*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. B. Thorpe, Vol. I, pp. 184-185).

³⁹ Cf. *Ingimund's Invasion*, *cit. sup.*, pp. 152, 153, 159 *et passim*.

⁴⁰ *Annals of Ulster*, *cit. sup.*, *sub. anno* 926 *alias* 927.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, *sub annis* 916 *alias* 917, and 917 *alias* 918.

significant that one version (in *The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill*) lists Ragnald and Otter as slain⁴² just as the *Three Fragments* lists both Sihtric and Otter as slain. It looks as if a scribe whose work is now incorporated in the *Three Fragments* made worse, by a faulty gloss, an error already current in at least one Irish version: Ragnald was present at the battle of 918 but he did not die there; Sihtric, so far as we know, was not even present.

It is possible, therefore, to regard the story in the *Three Fragments* as yet another version of the battle of 918. The existence of an earlier notice of this battle, mistakenly inserted into the account of Ingimund's attack on Chester, raises no obstacle, for it is not unusual in the *Three Fragments* to find the same event recorded more than once—this simply shows that a compiler had more than one source before him.⁴³ There is no need to emphasize the obvious point that, if this is indeed another version of the battle of 918, then it goes far towards reconciling the divergent traditions current in Durham (*Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*) and Ireland (*Annals of Ulster, Annals of the Four Masters, War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill*). The reconciliation of our different sources would be sufficiently complete to permit the identification of the battle of 918 with the second Battle of Corbridge.

The importance of the version in the *Three Fragments*, however, lies less in its possible reconciliation of other sources than in its introduction of Æthelflæd and the Mercians as active participants in the moulding of northern events. Æthelflæd had as much reason as Constantine to be interested in the activities of Ragnald and the Norsemen, but only in the *Three Fragments* do

⁴² See above p. 162

⁴³ Cf. *Ingimund's Invasion*, *cit. sup.*, p. 156.

we get a direct statement that she collaborated with the northern peoples against the common enemy. The story in the *Three Fragments*, though perhaps unreliable in its details, tells us no more than we might have guessed from a study of the scraps of evidence which are all that we have of northern history in this period. Æthelflæd would not be blind to the dangers arising from Norse invasions beyond her northern frontiers, and it has already been suggested that her fortification of Eddisbury in 914 is some measure of her alarm. Her anxiety would not be relieved by subsequent events, and the Anglo-Celtic alliance, with the formation of which she is credited by the *Three Fragments*, may be closely associated with the submission of the men of York to her in 918. Such a development, dictated by the common fear of Northumbrian, Mercian, Scot and Briton, would naturally follow a battle which so clearly emphasized the menace of the Norsemen. That the fear was founded upon a sound appreciation of the situation was proved, after Æthelflæd's death, by Ragnald's seizure of York.

But what of the second Battle of Corbridge? Is it possible to identify it with the battle of 918? The view that these two battles are one and the same has already been put forward,¹⁴ and it certainly is possible to accept it. This essay has attempted to show that beneath an acceptance of this identification must lie a reconciliation of apparently conflicting sources, and to show that such a reconciliation is possible. But the resulting structure is not free from stresses and strains; its weaknesses are no less prominent than its strength. We may, if we wish, believe that Ragnald sailed to Northumbria in 914, fought a battle against the English and Scots at Corbridge, divided up his conquests, ravaged in Ireland (917), and returned to sack Dunblane and to fight against the

¹⁴ F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (1943), p. 329.

English and Scots again at Corbridge in 918. We may believe, that is to say, that the battle of 918 is identical with the second Battle of Corbridge. But it is equally possible to believe that the two battles are distinct and that in 918 Ragnald fought the Scots on the Haddington Tyne before pushing southwards. It is even possible to believe that there was no second battle at Corbridge at all. An unsatisfactory conclusion may be summarized thus: if there were two battles at Corbridge, the first was fought in about 914, the second was fought in about 918, and it is probable, though by no means certain, that the second is the same battle as that which, according to the *Annals of Ulster*, was fought in 918 "on the banks of the Tyne among the Saxons of the north."

RUDOLF OF BÆ AND RUDOLF OF ROUEN.

BY DR. JÓN STEFÁNSSON.

Members of the Society will welcome this tangible sign that Dr. Jón Stefánsson, our one surviving foundation member, is able to pursue his work with undiminished vigour and enthusiasm.

Dr. Jón Stefánsson has been an active contributor to the publications of the Society. Among his works may be mentioned the translation of *Kormáks Saga* in which he collaborated with W. G. Collingwood. This was published in 1902 as No. 1 of the Society's Translation Series. Dr. Jón Stefánsson has contributed many interesting articles to the *Saga-Book*, and among them may be mentioned *Western Influence on the Earliest Viking Settlers* (vol. V, pp. 288 ff.) and *The Vikings in Spain* (vol. VI, pp. 31 ff.). Until recently, Dr. Jón Stefánsson was a regular attendant at meetings and gatherings. His eightieth birthday was celebrated at the Icelandic Legation in London in 1942, and many distinguished literary figures were present. He now lives in Iceland, where he is pursuing his researches into the history of Iceland and of Icelandic literature.

Since this paper went to press Dr. Jón Stefánsson has published a large and important volume of memoirs in Icelandic under the title *Úti í Heimi* (Reykjavík 1949). It contains many details about the early history of the Viking Society, as well as character sketches by W. P. Ker and of other scholars who collaborated with the Society.

Editors.

I desire to rescue from oblivion the name of a Norman of the royal blood of England and Normandy, who laid firmly the foundations of Icelandic literature soon after Iceland adopted Christianity at the Althing, who established the first school and monastery in the island, who for twenty years, with his staff, taught men of rank and chieftains' sons to read and to use the Old English alphabet, which contained þ, ð and æ to represent Icelandic sounds, who organised the nucleus of the Icelandic Church and who introduced English ecclesiastical terminology. About sixty of the words he introduced are still in use.

Ari the Learned mentions: "Hróðólf who stayed nineteen years" in a list of foreign missionary bishops who came to Iceland (*Íslendingabók* Ch. 8). The

Skarðsárþók MS. of *Landnáma* says "Roðólf nineteen years, he established a *munklíf* at Bæ in Borgarfjörð." *Munklíf(i)* means a monastic institution. *Hungrvaka* says: "Úlf Bishop came from Rúðuborg (Rouen) in England and was therefore called Rúðu-ólf." Thus far the meagre Icelandic authorities.

The foreign missionaries who came to Iceland before Rudolf taught through interpreters, even Bernard the Bookwise, who came from England to Norway with St. Ólaf in 1015, was sent by him to Iceland in 1016 and stayed till 1021. He probably got his ekename from being the first missionary to bring with him illuminated vellums of the Holy Books, which the Icelanders admired for their beauty.

Norway continued to be heathen after the adoption of Christianity by the Althing in A.D. 1000. *Kristnisaga* says that Þormóð the priest and six acolytes with him came from England, obviously the Norse-speaking part of it. They sang Mass on the edge of the Almannagjá and walked in procession, with two roods (crosses), one the height of King Ólaf Tryggvason, the other the height of Hjalti Skeggjason, the leader of the Christian Icelanders. They carried censers with burning incense, its fragrance was borne, not only with the wind, but also against it. Christians as well as non-Christians deemed this a miracle. It must have been an impressive scene, the heathens agreeing with the Christians.

Thus, no Norwegians participated in the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of Iceland. It was wholly the work of Englishmen and Normans. One cannot count the quarrelsome German Þangbrand (German: *Peotbrand*) as a missionary, who was sent by King Ólaf Tryggvason to convert Iceland. He was an utter failure, fought duels and killed those who refused to be converted.

The name Rodulf or Rudolf occurs frequently in

Norman chronicles. Rodulfus Glaber, residing in several monasteries, wrote a *Historia Normannorum*, 900-1044, in five books. Rodulf, Count of Ivry, was a half-brother of Duke Richard II. Rodulf, Count of Gony, lived in the days of Hrólf the Conqueror. Rudolf of Gacé was a son of Archbishop Robert (William of Jumièges VII). Archbishop Robert was a brother of Queen Emma. Rúðólf of Bø is called *propinquus regis* in contemporary annals. He was thus related to Emma's son, Edward the Confessor. Robert, the father of William the Bastard — strange to say, William signs himself William the Bastard in genuine charters — had the boy elected Duke of Normandy before he started on a crusade. Robert appointed one Rodulf de Wacceo tutor of his son and commander of all military forces (William of Jumièges VII, 4). Count Rudolf of Ivry and Duke Richard II, half-brothers, both warmly encouraged Dudo to continue and complete his history of the Normans. The Rouen ducal family had strong literary interests.

Dudo of St. Quentin, writing about 1026-1030, gives Count Rudolf of Ivry as his authority: *comitem Rodulfum, hujus operis relatorem cujus quae constant libro hoc conscripta relatu digessi*. This Rodulf is the half-brother of Richard II. Gunnor (Gunnvör), wife of Richard I, is described by Dudo in terms of Ari's description (minnug ok óljúgróð) of Þuríð, daughter of Snorri Goði, as *capacis memoriae et recordationis thesauro profusius locupletatae*. With her son, Archbishop Rothbertus, she listened to the saga of the Normans, related by Rudolf. Thus the Dukes of Normandy were intensely interested in literature and even active themselves. The ducal family was a centre of culture. It was from such a family that our Rudolf was sprung. None of the missionaries in Iceland were equipped as he was. He laid the foundations of a literature that was soon to spring

up as well armed as the helmeted goddess herself springing from the head of Zeus. No one else had the ability or opportunity to do so.

After all, Iceland and Normandy were two contemporary settlements from Norway. Hrollaug, a brother of Hrólfr, the conquerer of Normandy, had settled in eastern Iceland. The highborn men, whom Rudolf taught, would be proud to make a radical change, guided by a man, not only of their own kith and kin, but of royal blood, and not by rigid and narrow-minded itinerant missionaries, some of whom were violent and quarrelsome. There was no bigotry about this scholar from Bec and Rouen. Men of noble birth flocked to Bœ to profit by his teaching as eagerly as Italians and Frenchmen flocked to the contemporary school of Lanfranc at Bec in Normandy. One of Lanfranc's pupils at Bec became Pope. Lanfranc and Anselm impressed their views on the medieval Church in Europe for centuries.

Norman historians (William of Jumièges, *Historia Northmannorum etc.*), tell us that Rudolf was present at the baptism of Ólaf Haraldsson (later St. Ólaf) at Rouen in 1015 and accompanied him to Norway. He stayed with him in Norway till his death in the battle of Stiklastaðir, 1030. He learnt in these fifteen years *how not to convert heathens*. Violence and bloodshed were repugnant to the gentle scholar of Bec. He met highborn Icelanders at the court of St. Ólaf and he decided to use his own method of conversion in Iceland where the two kings, Ólaf Tryggvason and Ólaf Haraldsson, had utterly failed. At the Norwegian court he gained full and detailed knowledge from Icelanders of the situation in their country. He selected a staff of teachers and priests at Rouen, mostly trained at Bec, to go with him. Once he had decided to settle at Bœ in Borgarfjörð, he

corresponded with the chieftains, whose sons were eager to have the honour of attending his school, so that he might make Bœ fit for the work, rebuild and enlarge it. He planned everything beforehand.

According to the *Coutumier* of Normandy and documents in the first volume of the *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, Icelandic ships came up the Seine, carrying wool and furs. Whether he took passage in one of these depended on whether they came from Hvítárós, more frequented than any port in Iceland at that time.

No doubt, Rudolf had with him vellums containing the works of Beda Venerabilis, the life of St. Edmund and other Latin books. Ari, born in this part of Iceland seventeen years after Rudolf left for England, uses the works of Beda and the life of St. Edmund. Particularly he uses the death year of St. Edmund as a basic date for dating the settlement of Iceland and the adoption of Christianity.

When Rudolf set forth on his adventure, he desired, not only to organise the inchoate Church in Iceland, but to give this élite of vikings on the edge of the inhabited world, on the verge of the Arctic, direct access to the highest thought and culture of the time, that of Lanfranc and the school of Bec. But first they must discard the cumbrous runic letters or signs, which they cut in stone and carved on wood, and adopt the Latin alphabet with the addition of a few Old English letters to indicate the sounds for which Latin had no signs: þ, ð, æ, œ, etc. Once this was taught to the sons of chieftains, it would spread from their country seats to their followers with lightning rapidity. Thus high-born Icelanders, after learning the new alphabet, came into immediate contact with the highest reach that western Europe had attained. This goes some way to explain why they soon surpassed their kinsmen in

Norway, Sweden and Denmark in learning and literature, and so outdistanced them that their distant isle became a centre of literature for all the northern lands.

Bœ had many advantages for Rudolf. There are several hot springs in the home meadow, and the heat of the water has been found to be ninety degrees Celsius. There is a patch of ground on which is found a species of wild leak, unknown elsewhere. A *blótbolli* (sacrificial bowl) as Matthías Þórðarson calls it, has been dug up, retained by Rudolf as a heathen relic, and also burnt tiles. Bœ was surrounded by morasses and easy to defend. It was conveniently near the then most frequented port in Iceland, Hvítárós.

Since Rudolf brought the art of writing to Iceland and ousted the runes, Icelandic *bók* is borrowed from Old English *boc*, *stafróf* from *stæfræw*, *rita* from Old English *writan*. The *w* is retained in one early Icelandic MS. I append a few church words. Their continual use involved their incorporation into Icelandic.

<i>Tíðasöngur</i>	Old English	<i>tidsang</i>
<i>tíðir</i>	„ „	<i>tida</i>
<i>syngja tíðir</i>	„ „	<i>tida singan</i>
<i>óttusöngur</i>	„ „	<i>uhttid</i> (Matutina)
<i>undorn</i>	„ „	<i>undern</i> (tertia) ¹
<i>miðdagstíð</i>	„ „	<i>middægtid</i> (sexta)
<i>nón</i>	„ „	<i>nón</i> (hora nona)
<i>aptantiðir</i>	„ „	<i>æfentid</i> (vespera)
<i>náttsöngstíð</i>	„ „	<i>nihtsangtid</i> (nocturnium)
<i>bjalla</i>	„ „	<i>belle</i>
<i>guðsþjall</i>	„ „	<i>godspell</i>
<i>hvítasunnudagr</i>	„ „	<i>hwita sunnandæg</i> (Old English Chronicle)

¹ In heathen times, *undorn* was 3 p.m. English Christianity moved it to 9 a.m. or *dagmálattíð*.

<i>reðingabók</i>	Old English	<i>rædingboc</i> (lectionarium) ¹
<i>guðspjallabók</i>	„ „	<i>godspellboc</i> (evangeliarium)
<i>saltari</i>	„ „	<i>saltere</i>
<i>reykelsi</i>	„ „	<i>recels</i>
<i>pistlabók</i>	„ „	<i>pistolboc</i> (epistolarium)
<i>Kirkja</i>	„ „	<i>cyrice, cyrce, circe, kirke</i>
<i>prestr</i>	„ „	<i>preost</i>
<i>djákn</i>	„ „	<i>diácon</i>
<i>klerkr</i>	„ „	<i>clerc</i>
<i>klaustr</i>	„ „	<i>clauster</i>
<i>prédika</i>	„ „	<i>predician</i>
<i>embætti</i>	„ „	<i>embeht</i>
<i>skríð, skríða</i>	„ „	<i>scrud, scrydan</i>
<i>hátíð</i>	„ „	<i>heahtid</i>
<i>kaleikr</i>	„ „	<i>calic</i>
<i>guðsifjar</i>	„ „	<i>godsibb</i>

ADDITIONAL NOTES.

Hróðólf was a descendant of Sprot, the widow of William Longue-Épée, and son of Rolf, the conqueror of Normandy. William reigned at Rouen from 932(?)–942. The death year of Hrólf is uncertain, but William was murdered in 942. Sprot then married a wealthy landowner Esperlengus. Their son was Rodulfus, Count of Ivry. Duke Richard I (942–996), Rodulf's half-brother, son of William I and Sprot, made Rodulf Count of Ivry. There were about fifteen Rodulfs of prominence in A.D. 911–1050. Only in the family of Count Rodulf of Ivry does the name reappear in every generation. Our Rodulf must be one of those to be called in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle a kinsman of Edward the Confessor, whose mother Emma, daughter of Duke Richard I, was married to Ethelred the Redeless in 1002.

¹ *reðingabók* may be owing to the rare use of *ráða*, “to read.”

Dudo, the earliest historian to write, in Latin, the history of the first Dukes of Normandy, calls Count Rodulf "comitem Rodulfum hujus operis relatores" (Dudo: *Gesta Ducum Normannorum*, ed. Jules Lair, 1865, pp. 125-6) . . . "cujus quae constant libro hoc relatu, digessi attonitus" (ibid). Dudo was dumb-founded (attonitus) by Count Rodulf's art of story-telling. He also listened to the history-telling of Gunnor (Gunnvör), the widow of Duke Richard I, "endowed with capacious memory and a great treasure of "recordation." Ari and Snorri record their oral authorities in a similar manner. Emma brought with her Normans to England. The Normans were keen advocates of the Cluny reforms. Even before leaving Normandy for Norway, Rodulf must have been attracted to the Icelanders by their fame for relating history, so familiar in his own family. The Norse language in Normandy was still a living language in the first thirty years of the eleventh century, and he must have listened to the Icelandic art of relating history at the court of King Ólaf in Norway.

The scions of the great families, studying at Rodulf's school at Bæ, must have related to him the family feuds, and he, brought up in a family loving history, must have encouraged the first faltering steps in the art by his pupils. Here is one of the reasons which induced this kinsman of Dukes and Kings to bury himself for twenty years of his life in the island of the sagas. He was keen to Christianise these story-tellers and his knowledge of Norse and English enabled him to Icelandicise the whole terminology of the Old English Church for the use of his pupils. The fact that nearly all these terms are still in the Icelandic language proves that these foundation stones were well and truly laid. The two earliest Bishops of Iceland, Ísleif and Gissur, were trained

in Germany, and first brought up in the famous convent for women of aristocratic lineage, Hervorden, from the age of six years. It is obvious that these two master minds, who ruled Iceland as if they were kings, must have done their best to introduce the terminology of the German Church. They succeeded in adding four or five German terms, but Hróðólf's English terminology was accepted by them, being already in use. This is the best testimony to the greatness of Hróðólf's work. His love for story-telling and the relating of history must have endeared him to his highborn pupils, and even to all Icelanders. This was a chip of their own block. That he was left to do his work in peace and quietude amidst the welter of family feuds proves that he had no enemies and that all were unanimous to uphold the national work at which he worked so assiduously that he died from overwork soon after his retirement to England at the age of fifty-five.¹ His introduction of the Old English alphabet is proved, if it were only by the negative fact that there is not the slightest sign that it was introduced between 1050, when he departed and left acolytes to continue his work at Bœ, and the winter 1117-1118, when the *Haflidaskrá* was written down in letters taken from Old English. But there is other evidence which it would take too long to enter upon here.

A well-known Englishman wrote to me: "You have recued from oblivion the memory of a great man." This man's work which still lives a vigorous life is the best memorial to his greatness.

¹ Being present at the baptism of King Ólaf of Norway at Rouen in 1015, he must have been, then, about twenty years old. This would make him fifty-five at his death in 1050.

THE ORIGINS OF GÍSLASAGA.

By IDA L. GORDON

THE origins of *Gíslasaga* up to a certain point seem clear enough. Thanks largely to Gísli's kinship with Snorri Goði some of the main facts of his life are referred to in reliable sources,¹ which permits us to assume a potential historical nucleus, while from the saga itself and a study of its topography it seems safe to infer that there were popular local traditions about Gísli, associated with the scenes of events. So it might seem that apart from matters of verification and identification the origins of *Gíslasaga* present few problems—that here we have a straightforward case of a saga writer taking a subject known in outline as history and filling it out from his own local knowledge and research. Even the fact that *Gíslasaga* is unlike most family sagas in its literary approach need not in itself present any difficulty: the shaping of the tragedy on the lines of heroic legend is paralleled in *Laxdæla*, and could be attributed to the saga writer's own literary taste. It is only when we come to consider the poetry in it, and particularly the relation of the poetry to the saga, that difficulties arise. The proportion of poetry is high: there are forty strophes in all, of which thirty-six are attributed to Gísli himself, but it has been shown beyond doubt that this attribution of the poetry to Gísli cannot be accepted, and that in fact some of it, at least, must derive from a Christian poet of not earlier than the twelfth century.²

It seems impossible to decide with certainty whether

¹ These are cited in the Introduction to *Gíslasaga* in *Íslenzk Fornrit* VI, p. xii ff. References to the saga text in this article are to this edition.

² See G. Turville-Petre: *Gísli Súrsson and his poetry, Traditions and Influences* (Modern Language Review 1944, p. 374).

all the poetry attributed to Gísli is by one poet. Björn K. Þórólfsson, in his edition of the saga,³ regards one or two of the strophes as not likely to be by the same poet as the rest, chiefly because they use metres other than the usual *dróttkvætt* of the main body of the strophes. But even if it is true that these doubtful strophes are by a different poet from the rest, the probability is that they are later additions made during the course of scribal transmission: what would be really helpful to know is whether the main body of poetry itself is wholly the work of the Christian poet, or whether some of it is earlier, possibly deriving from Gísli himself. If there were any major division of authorship like this, the most obvious place to look for it would be between the dream strophes at the end of the saga and the rest of the poetry, because, whatever the explanation, there is a division of some sort here, in that the dream strophes are different in character and have a different function in the saga from the rest of Gísli's poetry. Instead of being used as occasional strophes to support and embellish the prose account of events as the other strophes are, the dream strophes are themselves in the foreground and stand more or less as an entity in themselves, while the prose account seems to be entirely dependent on them. And since it is only these dream strophes which bear obvious marks of the Christian poet, it is reasonable to consider whether the rest of the poetry might be earlier. Stylistically there is a certain difference between the two: the dream strophes are more discursive, less objective, in that instead of being allusive descriptions of people and events they sometimes express the personal attitude to life of the poet himself, and less direct, in that they are preoccupied with symbolical figures. Much of this difference, it is true, arises from difference

³ *Íslensk Fornrit*, VI, p. x.

of subject matter, but since the subject matter of the dream strophes is almost wholly imaginative, that itself is not inseparable from style in its wider application. But, on the other hand, there seems to be no marked difference in diction between the dream strophes and the rest of the poetry in the saga, and, as Mr. Turville-Petre has shown, influences which belong to the medieval period are found in both the dream strophes and the others, and (to quote his words) ‘since these influences are distinctive and are not often found in skaldic strophes of family sagas, it seems probable that they should be traced to one, and not to several poets.’⁴ So, on the whole, though the matter cannot be regarded as proved, it is probably safer to assume that we are dealing here not with two different poets but with one poet whose purpose was different in the two parts. This is a point which will be touched upon later in considering what may be regarded as the major problem raised by the poetry in *Gíslasaga*, which is to decide whether, as Mr. Turville-Petre suggests, the thirteenth-century writer of *Gíslasaga* is himself the author of the poetry in it, or whether, as Björn K. Þórólfsson believes, the poetry belongs to the twelfth century and has been used by the saga writer as one of his main sources of information.

For the first theory the argument is briefly this: it can hardly be a coincidence that both the saga of *Gísli* and the poetry in it reflect the influences of the medieval Christian world, and that both show also the direct influence of heroic poetry to an extent that no other saga poetry or family saga does, and the best explanation of these uncharacteristic traits would be to assume one author for both. Against this, the strongest argument used is that there is not the harmony—the agreement of matter—between the saga and the poetry that we

⁴ *Op. cit.* p. 389.

would expect if the same person had written both. Björn K. Þórólfsson takes this view,⁵ and since it is a point of first importance to our problem, it seems worth while to consider now the validity and significance of some of the discrepancies between the saga and the poetry which he adduces. For instance, he claims that strophe 10 (which was spoken by Gísli when he had returned home from Sæból after killing his brother-in-law Þorgrímr) is incompatible with the saga account because it begins: 'I did not fall for words alone.' This, he says, indicates that the murder followed a quarrel, whereas in the saga account Gísli crept quietly to Sæból by night and killed Þorgrímr in his bed. But there is no reason why the opening words of this strophe should not be taken as a reference back to earlier events. Ever since their secret murder of Gísli's beloved brother-in-law Vésteinn, Þorgrímr and Þorkell (Gísli's own brother) had been taunting Gísli by veiled allusions to the murder, and Gísli had borne their goading with great patience, torn as he was between family loyalty and instinctive duty to avenge the wrong. But there was a culminating scene on the frozen lake during the games after Vésteinn's funeral when his forbearance with Þorgrímr was tried to breaking point, and they had a quarrel of some violence. This may well be the 'words' referred to in the strophe.

Similarly, Björn K. Þórólfsson reads considerable significance into the fact that strophes 13 and 15 as they stand would conflict. Strophe 13 is one of a pair spoken when Gísli receives news of his outlawry sentence for the murder of Þorgrímr, and in it he says that the sentence was passed 'at Þórsnes.' This pair of strophes is followed immediately by strophe 15 which says 'this news is come from the North.' But since Gísli was then in

⁵ *Op. cit.* p. v. ff.

hiding in Geirþjófsfjörðr, which is north of Þórsnes, these statements are apparently contradictory, and, according to Björn K. Þórólfsson, the saga writer has tried 'rather clumsily' to reconcile them by making Þorkell Auðgi, who lived in Dýrafjörðr, be the one to bring Gísli the news. If this supposition is correct, then the saga writer obviously cannot have written either of these strophes, since, if he had, there need have been no discrepancy between them to explain away. But it is by no means certain that this supposition is correct. Strophe 13 is one of those which it is fairly generally agreed should be rejected as not belonging to the main body of poetry in the saga. It differs in style and metre from the rest and may well have been added by a later scribe. It may have been this scribe who brought it into conformity with strophe 15 by the introduction of Þorkell Auðgi. It cannot even be regarded as proved that the introduction of Þorkell at this point is an invention of a later time than the composition of Strophe 15: at any rate, such an assumption carries with it an obligation to explain why that strophe is addressed to a 'wealthy man'—a title which, in the district in which these events took place, would most naturally apply to Þorkell Auðgi.

These examples are perhaps enough to illustrate that seeming discrepancies between saga and poetry can hardly be regarded as proof of separate authorship unless it is possible to show that they cannot have arisen during scribal transmission. But this is not always easy to decide. For example, Gísli's last strophe is to the effect that his wife will hear that he put up a brave fight, and the one before it refers to a parting with her, yet according to the saga account she herself was present at the time. Here, if the discrepancy is due to scribal transmission, the scribal treatment must

amount to radical revision, since not only was she present but also took an active part in the events. Similarly strophe 28, which is spoken by Gísli when his foster-daughter comes to him where he is hiding in the woods to tell him that his wife is about to betray him, indicates that he is away from her and living among strangers, whereas he was at the time with her in Geirþjófsfjörðr; and the strophe seems to refer to conditions quite different from those indicated in the money-throwing incident to which it is attached. Here again if the discrepancies are due to scribal interference we must assume that the interference amounted to the inclusion of an entirely new episode. And it is doubtful if this is justifiable. There seems to me nothing in this incident or in any other part of the saga which conflicts with the poetry, to indicate that they are later insertions. They fit neatly into the sequence of events, and their style of narration does not differ from that of the rest of the saga. This style is the more recognisably homogeneous because it is more personal than the usual saga style: it is rather more explanatory, and it reflects to a greater extent a taste for the stylised type of narration familiar to us in folk tale and romance, where, for example, parallelism between situations and events is underlined, and where things tend to happen in threes, and so on. It is partly because of this stylistic treatment, which has a more popular appeal than the usual matter-of-fact saga style, that *Gíslasaga* is so admired in England among readers who find the more classical sagas too austere.

It seems, therefore, that although there has perhaps been a tendency to exaggerate the importance of the discrepancies between the saga of Gísli and the poetry in it, the significance of some of them cannot be explained away easily by the theory of scribal revision, unless we assume the present saga to be a complete revision of

an earlier saga. And before we do that I think we should examine more fully the relation between the saga and the poetry, and the nature of the poetry, in particular Gísli's dream strophes.

This remarkable collection of poetry comes towards the end of the saga and describes the troubled dreams which Gísli began to have after he had been living in hiding for some years, and the loneliness and constant peril were beginning to prey upon his mind. They represent a form of mystical experience: a dream woman appears and prophesies to Gísli that he has only seven years to live, but she is kind and leads him to a fair hall and shows him the consolations that will be his after death and gives him good moral advice—to forsake heathen practices, to shun violence and to be kind to the weak and maimed. Then as the time of death draws nearer the character of the dreams changes; they become more immediately prophetic of the violence which will cause his death, and another dreamwoman appears, her hands smeared with blood, who washes Gísli in blood, and so on.

It is these dream strophes which seem to me the greatest stumbling block to the assumption that the author of *Gíslasaga* also wrote the poetry in it. The explicitly Christian precepts in the first dreamwoman's utterances sit oddly in the mouth of the tenth-century Gísli, and so do many of the words used in them, which have a Christian application, such as *Allvaldr aldar* 'Lord of men,' *annan heim*⁶—'another world'. And the sentence *Nú er skammt til betra*⁷ which implies an outlook on life incredible in a heathen. It would suggest an unusual attitude to his subject in a writer of a family saga to compose such stophes for his hero, because one of the

⁶ Strophe 29.

⁷ Strophe 17.

main characteristics of the family sagas is their realism: their chief literary ideal, even in the less historically authentic ones, seems to be to describe people and events in such a way as to give the impression of truth. And they are probably unique in medieval literature in the way that they depict heathen people and heathen ways without the prejudice that we might expect from their Christian authors. *Gíslasaga* itself is typical of this attitude in the way it describes, for instance, the melting of the snow on the south-east side of Þorgrímr's grave-mound, and without the least hint of scepticism adds the explanation that men regarded this as a sign that, because Þorgrímr had been so devoted a priest of Frey, the god did not allow any coldness to come between them.

Moreover, it is no part of the function of a family saga or of saga poetry to be didactic, as many of these dream strophes are. If there were anything in the saga itself to show that it was indeed the writer's intention to portray the impact of Christian teaching on Gísli or to preach Christian principals, then we could perhaps regard these alien elements as peculiar to this saga. But, on the contrary, these particularly Christian strophes do not connect naturally with their saga setting, and the explanation of them given there seems to me misleadingly inadequate, and even a deliberate distortion of their true significance. In the circumstances the appearance of the first dreamwoman and her words to Gísli were nothing short of divine revelation: from the saga account it appears as a supernatural phenomenon with no recognition of its Christian significance. And the function of the two dreamwomen and their relative importance seem to have been distorted in a similar way. The function of the first dreamwoman in the poetry itself seems clear enough: she is Gísli's guardian angel who comes to warn him of his coming death and to prepare

him for the life to come. The function of the second one is not so clear. It is usually inferred that she is the opposing force to the first one, the spirit of evil opposed to good, or possibly heathenism opposed to Christianity. But this view of her is not really borne out by the strophes themselves, and is perhaps influenced by the saga interpretation. In the very first dream strophe the two women appear together sitting on the bench in the dream hall in apparent harmony—they both greet Gísli kindly. And there is nothing in the later behaviour of the second dreamwoman to indicate that she represents the opposite force to the first one:⁸ she does not offer Gísli any advice of an evil or heathen nature; all she does is to presage and symbolise the violence and bloody nature of his coming death. Moreover, to interpret her as an evil force carries grave implications, since it is implied that her power prevails as Gísli's death draws nearer. If, in fact she is anything more than a symbol of Gísli's death by wounds, then I think a more fitting explanation of her would be that she represents the implacable and impersonal Fate, while the first dreamwoman, though she prophesies the same fate for Gísli, represents it in the more comforting light of Christian faith.

But the saga takes a different view of these dreamwomen, and tends to exaggerate the part of the second one. Gísli's first dream is concerned entirely with the first one (apart from the mention of *báðar bekksagnir* who both greet him kindly), yet the saga account of it in Gísli's own words is: *Ek á draumkonur tvær, ok er önnur vel við mik, en önnur segir mér þat nokkut jafnan, er mér þykkir verr en áðr, ok spár mér illt eina.*⁹ And despite the fact that it is the first dreamwoman who

⁸ Except one strophe (29) which, as will be shown later, has possibly been given a mistaken interpretation in the saga, and is, in any case, suspect on other grounds.

⁹ Chapter XXI.

tells Gísli exactly how soon he must die, it is constantly implied in the saga account that the increasing appearances of the second one are connected with, if not responsible for, the imminence of his death. It is as if the guardian angel is rather an embarrassment in the saga account, whereas the second dreamwoman, who is not unlike the traditional *fylgja*, can be made to fit more happily into the saga setting.

Apart from this general shift of emphasis, there are perhaps other indications that the part of the second dreamwoman has been exaggerated. Of the three strophes which describe her appearance¹⁰ two are doubtful strophes: they use different metres from the *dróttkvætt* of the rest of the poetry, metres which belong to not earlier than the thirteenth century. Thus there is only one strophe describing the appearance of the second dreamwoman which is not suspect; while of the ones attributed to her as her utterances we have only the saga's word for it which dreamwoman is speaking, and it is possible in at least one place that a strophe has been wrongly attributed. Strophe 29, attributed by the saga to the second dreamwoman is described there as a cancellation of the prophecy of the first one: the first dream woman had promised Gísli that he should live with her after death in the fair hall, but strophe 29 runs: 'You two cannot remain together; so great a grief has your passionate love caused you. The Lord of men has driven you alone from your home to experience another world.' Björn Þórólfsson points out¹¹ that such a cancellation of a prophecy goes against firmly accepted belief: nothing could cancel a prophecy except some flaw or loophole in the prophecy itself; and he concludes therefore that this strophe too is 'spurious.' But there is nothing

¹⁰ Strophes 21, 30 and 31.

¹¹ *Op. cit.* p. x.

metrically or stylistically to distinguish it from the rest. More probably, I think, it is the saga explanation of this strophe which is 'spurious,' that it was not a cancellation of the prophecy, or intended to be uttered by the second dreamwoman at all. The wording of it, especially the Christian application of such phrases as *Alvaldr aldar* and *annan heim*, read more like the utterance of the guardian angel, breaking the news to Gísli that God has decreed that he must be parted from his beloved wife by death, but softening the blow by holding out the hope of the life to come.

These particular instances of what seem like deliberate exaggeration of the part of the second dreamwoman, but still more the general Christian character of the language and sentiments of some of the dream strophes, make it, I think, unlikely that they were the work of the saga writer himself. Why should an author who has been careful elsewhere in the saga to be historically realistic compose strophes so explicitly Christian and attribute them to his tenth-century hero? That he included them at all is explained by the prestige of skaldic verse, and I think it would be understandable that, having included them, he ignores their Christian nature and gives them a heathen interpretation, but not so understandable that he should go to the lengths of composing Christian poems only to explain away their significance in the prose account.

I feel inclined therefore to Björn Þórólfsson's view that the poetry is earlier than the saga, and that the saga writer is dependent on it as one of his sources of information. Probably he had two main sources, these strophes and popular traditions about Gísli, closely connected with the scenes of events, which the author clearly knew intimately. For the tragic theme itself he seems to follow the strophes—all the main events are supported

by information given or implied in them. But in actual bulk the material not linked with them is much greater, and this part bears clear marks of popular tradition.

But this view of the origins of *Gíslasaga* is not in itself an adequate explanation of the relation between the saga and the poetry. There is, for instance, the strong likeness of the tragic plot to the Guðrún story of heroic legend (which has been observed by almost every commentator), and the fact that the poetry too, as Magnus Olsen¹² and Mr. G. Turville-Petre¹³ have shown, reflects the influence of the Guðrún lays. Since such direct influence of heroic poetry in family sagas or saga poetry is unusual, this similarity between them cannot be disregarded. Björn Þórólfsson takes the view¹⁴ that the likeness of the Gísli tragedy to the Guðrún story was the work of the saga writer, but was suggested to him in the first place by the strophes, especially the one which Gísli speaks when he hears of his sister's betrayal of him, in which he reproaches her for not having the unbending spirit of Guðrún Gjúkadóttir. But this explanation ignores the fact that the poetry of Gísli not only reflects the influence of the Guðrún lays in verbal echoes and direct reference, but also is of such a nature that it can only have been written by a man whose conception of the tragedy of Gísli already followed the lines of the later heroic poems.¹⁵ For instance, one of the ways in which the tragedy of Gísli is modelled on heroic poetry is that it is preoccupied with emotions, whereas ordinarily in family sagas there is little place for expressed emotion: the style of narration discouraged it, and the saga ideals of conduct imposed imperturbability

¹² *Gíslasaga og helteðigtningin* in *Festskrift til Finnur Jónsson*, Copenhagen, 1928, pp. 6-14; and *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 1930, pp. 150-160.

¹³ *Op. cit.* p. 378 ff.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.* p. xxxvi.

¹⁵ See G. Turville-Petre, *op. cit.* 378 ff.

even in the most moving circumstances. But the poetry of Gísli, too, is concerned with emotion, the love between Auðr and Gísli, the grief of both of them for Vésteinn, and Gísli's fear of death.

Another unusual feature of the tragic theme which links it closely with the Christian poetry is the treatment of character, especially Gísli himself. In the family sagas, as in early Germanic literature, character is usually assessed, not by moral standards of goodness or badness, but by standards more nearly approaching the aesthetic. Heroes are those whose conduct is not necessarily beneficial but is satisfying as a striking or memorable gesture. Hence their characters need not be admirable by modern standards, but must possess distinction of some sort. Gísli is admirable in both senses. There is nothing unusual in that itself: great and memorable conduct is often morally admirable. But what is unusual is that he himself realises the moral virtue of his actions,¹⁶ which implies in him a consciousness of Christian standards.

He is also unlike a saga hero in his attitude to Fate. Fate plays a part in all the family sagas, but in none of them is there the obsession with it that Gísli shows. There is no reference to Fate in the early chapters, but once the tragic theme begins, even before there is anything to justify foreboding, Gísli begins to harp on the idea that Fate is directing events. When his attempt to bind Þorgrímr and Vésteinn by the bond of sworn brotherhood fails, he says: 'Now Fate will have to take its course.' (Chapter VI). And he shows a curious resignation to the events which follow. When Auðr confesses to him her part in the unfortunate conversation which started the tragic train of events, he replies: *Mæla verðr einhverr skapanna málum*—'Someone has to be the mouthpiece

¹⁶ See G. Turville-Petre, *op. cit.* pp. 375-6.

of Fate'. It is significant that he goes into hiding *before* the suit for outlawry is brought against him, and makes little attempt to oppose his prosecutor. Saga heroes, conscious though they may be of the working of Fate, do not usually lie down under it like this, nor does the Gísli of the popular episodes. This attitude seems to be part and parcel of the peculiarly unsaga-like nature of the tragic theme, and again links up with the strophes, where Fate and resignation to Fate are strongly stressed.

Thus there seems to be a closer relation between the tragic theme and the poetry than would be accounted for only by the assumption that the strophes which appear in the saga were one of the sources used in the writing of it. Those strophes, though it is true that all the main events of the tragic theme are referred to in them either directly or by implication, are not connected enough or lucid enough in themselves to supply the necessary information for the conception of character and situation, or even to be intelligible alone. They are allusive rather than descriptive. Björn Þorólfsson believes, along with Finnur Jónsson, that the author of the saga must have known them in a written collection, and suggests that there were some brief prose explanations along with them.¹⁷ But if this were so, then from the nature of the strophes themselves, such a prose setting would surely have to anticipate the unusual features given to the tragedy in the saga itself. The strophes, in fact, if we assume them to be of an earlier date than the saga, would seem to make it necessary to assume also the existence of a highly artistic conception of the whole tragic theme before the saga was written.

And such an assumption seems to be supported by other features in the saga. There is, for instance, again the figure of Gísli himself. There are two distinct

¹⁷ *Op. cit.* p. xi.

impressions of him to be gained from the saga: the one outside the tragic episodes points to a popular conception of him as a man of ingenuity, clever with his hands, quick-witted in an emergency and a good mimic, just the sort of figure likely to come down in popular tradition as the outlaw who outwitted his enemies for so many years, but hardly of the same stature as the noble hero of the tragic episodes. There is an incongruity, for instance, between the Gísli of the scene at Vésteinn's funeral, and the person who goes about tying cow's tails together and hiding under mattresses. Björn Þórólfsson, who feels that some of these popular episodes are unworthy of a hero like Gísli, concludes therefore that they cannot be the invention of the saga writer, but must have been taken by him from the traditions he was using. That may well be so, but it would be equally logical to say that if the author was capable of attributing such behaviour to his hero, he is unlikely to have been the one responsible for the conception of Gísli as he appears in the great tragic episodes—that he has taken that, too, from some source.

And closely bound up with this there is another curious point—that the tragic theme, supported by its strophes, occupies a comparatively small proportion of the whole saga, hardly a third of it, and yet the essential events of the saga all occur in this part. There is a concentration of material here and a conciseness which is not maintained elsewhere: the rest of the saga is comparatively much more discursive. There is, in fact, something distinctive about the tragic episodes of *Gíslasaga*, both in conception of character and situation, and in presentation, which is absent from the rest of the saga. And still more curious seems the fact that in the very core of the tragic theme there occurs an episode (the killing of Þorgrímr

¹⁸ *Op. cit.* p. xxviii.

at Sæból) which can be proved to have been borrowed from another source¹⁹ and in this episode, too, the saga writer's skill as a tragic author seems to desert him. It is not only longer and more circumstantial than its neighbouring episodes, but it is aesthetically clumsy. It is essentially popular story and too entertaining for tragedy. The earlier murder of Vésteinn was narrated in lively style, but the scene was essentially tragic, chiefly because the action was closely bound up with character and motive. The murder of Þorgrímr is so concerned with precautions to avoid detection that it has no more reality as tragedy than a modern detective story. It is dangerous, of course, to suggest that a good author would be incapable of writing a bad passage; but it is probably equally dangerous to dissociate creative ability entirely from critical sensitivity, and the writer of *Gíslasaga* seems to have had little of that sensitivity in his choice of material, excellent though his narrative skill may be.

It is, of course, almost entirely from internal evidence that we must judge how far the authors of family sagas exercised selection in their choice of material, and it must have varied with their purpose. Those who set out to record as much traditional information as possible about their subject, as seems to have happened for instance with Grettir Ásmundarson, would include many local tales about it; while those who, like the author of *Hrafnkelssaga*, wish to tell a well-defined story, would keep the outlines clear, and, no doubt, omit many traditional tales which were irrelevant to their theme or incongruous to the impression of character which they wished to give. But the author of *Gíslasaga* seems to show a combination of both purposes: he seems to have wished to include much of the current local tradition

¹⁹ See *Medium Ævum*, III, 1934, pp. 79-94.

about Gísli—his feats of strength, his ingenuity and so on—, but at the same time the tragic theme shows an exceptionally well-defined conception of character and train of tragic events, which is so purposeful and confident for the most part that the interruption of it by the clumsy and incongruous ‘cow’s tail’ episode of the murder of Þorgrímr comes as an artistic shock. Yet in itself that episode is not incongruous with the idea of Gísli gained from the other popular episodes, and it is told with the same narrative skill as is shown in the whole saga. It is unlikely to be a scribal interpolation. And I think the explanation of the apparent confusion of purpose lies in the double source of the saga—that we have in Gíslasaga an attempt to make a family saga from two incongruous elements, popular stories about Gísli (some of them very thin, in the sense of being merely standard motives foisted on to Gísli), and the tragic theme, which I believe to be derived from the ‘poetic’ source to a much greater degree than Björn Þórólfsson would allow.

The one particular example cited by him as proof of an episode in the tragic plot which has been invented by the author himself is far from conclusive; and, in fact this suggestion seems to be based on a doubtful interpretation of the episode²⁰ (which is Gísli’s vain attempt to avert the tragedy by the ceremony of sworn brotherhood). Briefly, the saga account is this: Gísli, with prophetic foreboding, foresees the possibility of enmity towards Vésteinn on the part of Þorkell and Þorgrímr, and tries to bind all four of them by the oath of brotherhood, to avert possible tragic consequences. The preliminary ceremony—the cutting and raising of the turf, the mingling of blood and the swearing of the oaths—is performed, but before the hand-clasping which makes

²⁰ *Op. cit.* p. xxi.

those oaths binding, Þorgrímr refuses to bind himself to Vésteinn, whereupon Gísli refuses to bind himself to Þorgrímr. Björn Þorólfsson concludes, therefore, that the whole ceremony breaks down, and that, when the saga later refers to Þorkell as Vésteinn's sworn brother, there is an inconsistency which, according to him, proves that the whole incident of the failure of Gísli's attempt is an invention of the saga author. But I do not think we are intended from the saga account to conclude that the *whole* ceremony failed. We are not told that the others withdrew, and there is no reason why we should not assume that, except between Þorgrímr-Vésteinn and Gísli-Þorgrímr, the ceremony was completed. Gísli's concluding words are: 'Now it has gone as I feared, and what has now been done will be of no avail. Fate will have to take its course.' *What has now been done* could well refer to the completed ceremony between the rest of them, which would bind Vésteinn-Þorkell, and Þorkell-Þorgrímr, but which, by the omission of the Vésteinn-Þorgrímr pact, would be of no use to avert the tragedy. In view of the usual saga habit of leaving the reader to make inferences from limited information, this seems a likely interpretation, and it seems to me one vital to the whole tragic plot. It helps to explain Þorgrímr's willingness to do Þorkell's dirty work for him, and it explains how Gísli knew that it could not have been Þorkell himself who killed Vésteinn. He had no other evidence which of them it was, except his knowledge of Þorkell's cowardly nature, which is hardly decisive. Also the parallelism to the Guðrún story, where Sigurðr was killed by the one Gjúkung brother who had no reason for doing so, only because he was the one not bound by the oath of brotherhood, makes it very unlikely that there was ever any confusion about whether Þorkell and Vésteinn were sworn brothers.

I see no reason, therefore, for regarding this episode as an invention extraneous to the tragic theme. Moreover, the saga author must have taken his information about the traditional ceremony of brotherhood from some source; (it is unlikely to have been preserved in such detail in popular tradition of the thirteenth century), and what more likely source is there than the 'poetic' source, which by its link with the Guðrún story most probably would contain some incident by which Þorkell and Vésteinn became sworn brothers?

But if this 'poetic' source was important enough to be responsible for the shaping of the tragic theme, we are left with the question, what sort of a work can it have been? It is unlikely to have been an earlier family saga containing the poetry, which has been worked over later by a writer with a taste for popular story, because it is precisely in the tragic theme that all those elements so unusual in a family saga are concentrated—the likeness to heroic poetry, the influences of medieval morality and the Christian poetry—, while in the artistic handling of the material in that part we have a simplicity of treatment—circumstances briefly stated merely as the setting for the great scenes—, which is quite unlike the realistic 'build-up' of the extant family sagas, with their pre-occupation with practical details and avoidance of literary emphasis. It seems to lie outside the scope of family sagas as we know their development in the thirteenth century. Could it have been an earlier work, of the twelfth century? We know that in the twelfth century different parts of Iceland had different schools of learning and literature: in the South the literary work was distinguished by its strong historical interests, (and it seems to have been these which set the seal on the form taken by the thirteenth-century sagas), but in the North, especially the North-West, the leaning

was more to ecclesiastical learning and to foreign literature, and there was a flourishing tradition of Christian poetry. *Gíslasaga* comes from the North-West and the unusual elements in it reflect all these tendencies. Moreover, as several recent writers²¹ have commented, Gísli's poetry has strong stylistic similarities to the great twelfth-century Christian poems. And since we know from references in *Æfi Snorra Goða*²² that the main outline of the events of the story was known in the first half of the twelfth century, then a twelfth century treatment of the theme, on less historical lines than the thirteenth-century sagas and reflecting the literary trends of the North-West, might seem a possibility.

It would, however, be contrary to what we know of the development of prose writing in Iceland to assume a mainly prose treatment of the tragic theme of *Gíslasaga*, so sophisticated as this treatment would have to be, as early as the twelfth century. More probably if there were such a work it would be mainly poetic. Some of the poetry in the saga approaches the simplicity of syntax of heroic poetry,²³ and would be not unnatural as part of a narrative work, while in the prose account of the tragic theme there occur frequent traces of poetic rhythm (which have been pointed out by Mr. Turville-Petre). These occur only in the tragic theme, and even there very intermittently in a curiously sporadic fashion, and might possibly derive from the opening (or otherwise memorable) lines of further poetry which has been turned into prose form by the saga writer. The use of peculiarly archaic and poetic words, too, might derive from the same source: the phrase *Gísli kvað þá visu er*

²¹ Björn Þórólfsson, *op. cit.* p. vi; G. Turville-Petre, *op. cit.* p. 388; J. de Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, 1941, I, pp. 3200-1.

²² Which Einar Ólafur Sveinsson attributes to Ari Fróði, *Íslensk Fornrit*, IV, xi-xiii and 185-6, and V, xxxvi.

²³ For example strophes 5, 12 and 35, and parts of many others.

æva skyldi is especially interesting, not only because the word *æva* is hardly ever found in historical prose, as Mr. Turville-Petre points out, but because the whole phrase is so curiously unlike the words of a family saga author, who almost never comments personally like this on the actions of his characters. It would be more natural as part of the prose skeleton of a poetic work.

And there is also the harsh flying scene in Chapter XV between Þorgrímr and Gísli, where Þorgrímr, angered by a blow from Gísli in the game on the ice, breaks out into open taunting about Vésteinn's death with the couplet:

Geirr í gumna sárum
gnast; kannkat þat lasta.

And Gísli at last lets himself go, and drives the ball with force between Þorgrímr's shoulders crying;

Böllr á burðar stalli
brast; kannkat þat lasta.

I know of no scene in a family saga so reminiscent of similar flying scenes with verse dialogue in the later heroic poems. There is the same stylistic tenseness and emphasis in this scene that Mr. Turville-Petre observes in the poetic rhythm of the prose passages he mentions, and it is a tenseness which is more natural in poetry than in Icelandic prose of the family saga type.

But it is unlikely that this hypothetical source of *Gíslasaga* was wholly a poetic work. The allusive nature of the greater part of the existing strophes makes them unnatural as direct narrative. There must have been some explanatory framework. And we have, of course, no evidence of twelfth-century treatment of family saga material outside the histories, except the mention of the recital stories for entertainment,²⁴ which for the most part of appear to be stories claiming to be true accounts, and

²⁴ See Finnur Jónsson, *Lit. Hist.*, II, 198 ff.

not 'artistic' compositions. There is, however, one interesting reference to the recital of an apparently historical saga in the twelfth century which may point to a very different type of work, one more nearly approaching what we may imagine this hypothetical source of *Gíslasaga* to have been. This is the mention in *Porgilssaga* in *Sturlunga* of the story of Orm, the poet of Barrey, told by the priest and poet, Ingimundr Einarsson, at the famous wedding feast at Reykjahólar in 1119. The words of the saga are: *Ingimundr prestur sagði sögu Orms Barreyjarskálds ok vísur margar ok flokk góðan við enda sögunnar, er Ingimundr hafði ortan, ok hafa þó margir fróðir menn þessa sögu fyrir satt.*²⁵ It is not perhaps certain how this should be interpreted. The *flokkur* (i.e. a group of strophes comprising a poem) which he recited 'at the end of the story', and which is described as his own composition, may not have been part of the saga itself. But, on the whole, the position of the statement in the sentence indicates that it was as part of the saga that he recited this poem at the end, and the use of *þó* in the comment 'and yet many wise men regarded this saga as the truth' seems to confirm this—although it contained his own composition men regarded the saga as true fact. If this is so, then surely we have here evidence of a poetic composition, perhaps similar to the dream poetry at the end of *Gíslasaga*, used as part of a saga containing historical material. And the fact that the authorship of the *flokkur* is acknowledged is an indication that the saga itself was an 'artistic' composition rather than of the type of the family sagas, which always hide their authorship under the claim to be true records.

Miss Ursula Brown in a useful study²⁶ of the parallel

²⁵ Chapter 10, p. 38 in *Sturlungasaga I, Íslendingasagna útgáfan*.

²⁶ *The Saga of Hrómund Grípsson and Porgilssaga, Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, Vol. xiii, pp. 51 ff, 1947-8.

mention of the saga of Hrómund Gripsson by Hrólfr of Skálmarnes on the same occasion, concludes that Hrolf's story probably was mainly poetic, though it is described, similarly to Ingimund's story, as 'a saga with many strophes.' Is it perhaps possible that Ingimund's story of Orm was also essentially poetic, earning the title of 'saga' only by virtue of its prose explanation of the poetry and because it was a relation of events?

However that may be, it would seem that we have here some points of similarity with what might well have been a twelfth-century treatment of the Gísli story, and one would like to think that its author, too, was a man like Ingimundr, who lived in the North-West in the first half of the twelfth century, was interested in local family history, but also well-versed in ecclesiastical learning and foreign culture, perhaps also (in the words of the saga description of Ingimundr), *it mesta gøfugmennni, skáld gott ofláti mikill bæði í skapferði ok annari kurteisei.*

STURLUSAGA AND ITS BACKGROUND.

By PETER G. FOOTE.

IN the eleventh century we can see that the almost pure oligarchy of the settlement period in Iceland has been qualified. Constitutionally, that balance had been struck which Professor Nordal has crystallised for us, between the desire for individual independence and the desire for individual power.¹ The economic development further resulted in a levelling throughout the population. The great estates, on which the agriculture was first founded, were subject to division from the beginning as the demands of sons and dependents were met. Once labour was no longer as cheap as it had been when slavery was a distinctive feature of the society, the conditions of the farming year made it unprofitable to keep a large number of workers through the winter as well as the summer season, and this contributed to the parcelling out of smaller land-plots, and to the eventual emergence of what may, with some justification, be called a 'cotter-class.'² The evidence of *Bandamannasaga* cannot be altogether disregarded. There we seem to have a picture, no doubt exaggerated, of an economic decline in the great families. By 1100, the *goði*, the official aristocratic figure, could not be considered, as Ólafur Lárusson has pointed out, more than 'primus inter pares.'³ Generally, the whole country-side maintained a large class of moderately well-to-do farmers, more or less independent and autonomous: a steady-going society, with the balance of power comparatively well distributed.

¹ *Íslenzk menning* I, Reykjavík 1942, pp. 107 ff.

² See generally Ólafur Lárusson, *Úr byggðarsögu Íslands, Vaka* 1929, and Þorkell Jóhannesson, *Die Stellung der freien Arbeiter in Island*, Reykjavík 1933.

³ Op. cit., p. 33.

The conversion of the country and the establishment of the Church had of course provided a new moment. Among other things, it had meant the abolition of the Temple-dues (*hoftollr*), while presenting the chieftain with a new expense, that of building and maintaining a church and of paying for a priest to serve it. To solve the latter problem, it was not unusual for the chief to become a priest himself, or he might allow a member of the family to take orders or train up some child specifically for the purpose. Priests so provided had virtually no rights, and they were not paid for their services as was a smaller class, who served the churches without such a contract as was forced on these.⁴ It was much the cheapest way to provide the ministry necessary for salvation, and seems to have been the common practice.

To provide priests, the Church had to provide education. The first foreign bishops were teachers, and Ísleifr Gissurarson, the first Icelandic bishop, and Teitr his son established schools and taught.⁵ In *Jónssaga biskups*, we read that 'many chieftains and men of standing had their sons fostered and educated by Ísleifr, and let them become priests';⁶ and we read in *Kristnisaga* that, in the days of Bishop Gissurr Ísleifsson, 'most men of standing were educated and entered the priesthood, even though they were chieftains.'⁷ This is especially noteworthy in the opening years of the twelfth century, and the reason, though partly no doubt a pious one, seems mainly to be found in the economic and authoritative advantage offered. In 1096 the law of tithes was introduced — we are led to suppose by Ari fróði that it was through the personal influence of Bishop Gissurr,

⁴ Grágás, *Staðarhólsbók*, Copenhagen 1879, p. 20, line 23: *Þat er manni ok rétt at láta lara prestling til kirkju sinnar*; pp. 24-6: *Of presta vistir ok kaup*.

⁵ *Íslendingabók*, ed. W. Golther, Halle 1923, pp. 19, 64-5.

⁶ *Biskupa Sögur* I, Copenhagen 1858, p. 153.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 29.

Sæmundr fróði and Markús lögsogumaðr Skeggjason.⁸ But, as Árni Pálsson has maintained, if this measure held no advantage for the chiefs and land-owners, it is, to say the least, unlikely that they would have agreed to such a tax.⁹ It is to be remembered that the Icelandic tithe was unlike that elsewhere adopted in Catholic christendom: not only income was to be tithed, but all property in goods and land was to be included.¹⁰ The tithe law was accepted so quietly because the chieftains supported it; and they gave their support because they saw it would mean not inconsiderable financial advantages for themselves, or, at least, that it would be no burden for them. As usual, wealth and power were complementary. One quarter of the tithe went to the bishop and one quarter to the poor, and these were honest and by no means uncharitable divisions. One quarter to the priest and one quarter to the local church meant in effect, however, one half to the man who owned both church and priest. There was, moreover, one great exemption from the law of tithes: land or other property which had been given over to the Church was free from its imposition. Chieftains, who owned most land and on whose land the churches stood, made the property over to the appropriate saint, retaining the administration to themselves and their heirs. They seemed, as it were, in the rare and happy position of one who was both to have his cake and eat it: they enjoyed their land, whose possession was not liable to tax, and an income from the local tithe-paying farmers; they seemed, moreover, to have a fair prospect of a reward in heaven for their piety.

The Church, of course, gave much more than this opportunity. Its influence seems to have contributed

⁸ *Íslendingabók*, p. 21.

⁹ University lectures delivered in the University of Iceland, 1935. Not published.

¹⁰ *Diplomatarium Islandicum* I, Copenhagen 1857-76, p. 77.

to the peacefulness of the period, and the dignity of a man like Bishop Gissurr seems both to have enhanced the episcopal office and to have received addition from it. The Church with its schools and cloisters provided an essential condition for the existence of the literary culture of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and a notable element in the culture itself. The aristocracy in Iceland moved naturally into possession of the ecclesiastical culture as the heathen prestige was removed from the office of *goði*. The greater families entered into alliance with the Church and the Church with them: the international and ecclesiastic was firmly linked with the insular and aristocratic. The two were identified in the person of the ordained *goði*. Respect for the book-learned, and even more for the dispenser of the mysteries of absolution and benediction, must have played some part in the revival and maintenance of the aristocratic position.

It must be made perfectly clear that these advantages which the chieftains gained from their close connection with the Church were not the results of an exploitation or opposition. The persons representing both Church and State were often the same and their interests were identified. The bishops themselves came usually from the most powerful families and retained all their aristocratic connections. There was as yet no room for the assertion of one element at the expense of the other.

The character and episcopate of Gissurr Ísleifsson provide a full illustration of this. We have the opinion of King Haraldr harðráði that Gissurr was fitted to be viking chief, king or bishop,¹¹ and in *Hungrvaka* there is a similar eloquent testimony to his dignity and influence: while he lived, Gissurr was both king and bishop over

¹¹ *Haraldssaga harðráða*, Ch. CIX, in *Fornmannasögur*, VI, Copenhagen 1831, p. 389.

the land.¹² He did his work well, not without the interested co-operation of his own and the other great families, and by his personal influence, ability and administrative zeal contributed largely to the advance of the organised Church and the peacefulness of the time. At the end of his bishopric the Church was in a strong position, and the strength of the aristocracy grew in the same measure as the strength of the Church.

The growth of the power of individual families was furthered not only by the new favourable economic conditions, but also by the concentration of the power of several *goðorð* under the patronage of one chieftain. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, the *goðorð* power seems to have been widely enough distributed to prevent its accumulation in the hands of a few. The *goðorð* could be alienated by sale or gift, and in the twelfth century this seems to have become commoner. The Church may possibly have had some influence in the matter. We know, for instance, that the priest Ingimundr Einarsson of Reykjahólar gave his *goðorð* to Þorgils Oddason of Staðarhóll,¹³ and in 1188 Guðmundr dýri Þorvaldsson was given the *Fljótamannagoðorð*.¹⁴ According to Barði Guðmundsson, the whole point of *Þorgilssaga ok Hafliða* may have been a dispute about the possession of a *goðorð*.¹⁵ The great chieftains had *þingmenn* in districts far outside their own *herað*.

Iceland 'drooped' after the death of Bishop Gissurr in 1117. His father, Ísleifr, had been troubled by bad harvests and the disobedience of great men; but we read in *Kristnisaga* that Gissurr 'made the land so peaceful that there were no disputes of first importance between the

¹² *Biskupa Sögur* I, p. 67.

¹³ *Þorgilssaga ok Hafliða*, Ch. III in *Sturlunga Saga*, ed. Kr. Kaalund, Copenhagen 1906-11, I, p. 9.

¹⁴ *Guðmundarsaga dýra*, Ch. IV in *Sturlunga Saga* I, p. 165.

¹⁵ *Goðorð forn og ný*, *Skírnir* CXI, Reykjavík 1937, pp. 70-73.

chieftains, and the practice of carrying weapons was largely abandoned.¹⁶ After his death however came bad years and fierce weather, shipwreck, damage to property and loss of life: more ominous still, strife and lawlessness.

The dispute between Þorgils Oddason and Hafliði Másson, which began in 1117, the year of Gissurr's death, is presented in their saga as a challenge to the remaining bishop and the Church, a challenge to all the Christian moral forces and their persuasion to peace. The decisive moments are at the *Alþingi* in 1121. Hafliði intends to bar the way of Þorgils to Þingvellir: he has the civil law on his side because Þorgils was outlawed the year before. Bishop Þorlákr Rúnólfsson tries to persuade Hafliði to allow Þorgils to ride, so that a reconciliation might be effected between them. He challenges Hafliði's obstinacy and demands respect for the feast of St. John. Hafliði finally refuses to listen, and the bishop then advances his most powerful weapon, the ban. Hafliði agrees at last, and Þorgils rides his uncontested way to Þingvellir. Peace-loving men attempt to bring about an agreement: Hafliði is adamant and will only accept unchallenged sole judgment (*sjálfðæmi*), while Þorgils will make conditions. Another deadlock is reached. Late one night, the priest Ketill Þorsteinsson goes to talk to Hafliði. He tells him a story of an episode in his own early life, when by God's grace he renounced his desire for revenge, and exercised humility and charity: since then, things have gone well with him. Hafliði is moved by this, and he becomes much gentler in the matter of reconciliation. An agreement is reached, but to the end, it seems, Hafliði is not perfectly at ease: he has doubts whether he may not be trading his honour by accepting a money atonement. Þorgils behaves

¹⁶ *Biskupa Sögur* I, p. 29.

graciously to Hafliði, and the two are henceforth on the same side. Some hostility remains however: Hallr Teitsson, Hafliði's most active supporter, is far from satisfied: he maintains that Hafliði is rich enough in his old age as long as he does not lose his honour. And between Hafliði and Bøðvarr Ásbjarnarson, Þorgils' closest friend (*mágr*, but the exact relationship is not known) and supporter, relations were always strained.

It was a test for the bishop and the Church: more, it was a trial of the Christian spirit — the heathen sense of honour was pitted against Christian humility. The Christian won, but the oppositions are clearly seen. The Church used its combination of powers: Þorlákr forbade members of the clergy to take part in Hafliði's prepared ambush, and, for the first time, we have a record of a threat of excommunication. The heathen spirit, which saw strife as the essential instrument of honour, is typified in Hallr and Bøðvarr, members of important families. Their spirit finds a classic statement in the action and explanation of Bøðvarr, when he will not allow Þorgils to strike at Hafliði before the church-door at the *Alþingi* in service-time. He argues the general sanctuary of the *þing*-place and of the consecrated ground on which they stand, and the special sanctity of the Saint's day. Þorgils is moved to refrain. But Bøðvarr was not reckoned among the pious, and Þorgils taxes him with this later. Bøðvarr's reply is on these lines: We stood hopelessly between two lines of enemies, we should have been cut down one on top of another. There was no chance of moving you by presenting the facts, but in other circumstances I shouldn't care whether you killed Hafliði in any sanctuary, of Church or *Þing*.

The bishops in Iceland after the death of Gissurr were not his equals, good men but not great. They exerted their influence towards peaceful conclusions. Bishop

Magnús Einarsson, who was burnt to death in a fire at Hítardal in 1148, did not spare his own property to effect settlements, and in consequence there were no great disputes while he lived.¹⁷ We hear more of the bishops' activities in furthering Christianity by teaching and by church adornment, by the provision of books and vestments. In these matters we find ample evidence of wealth at their disposal. The connection of the bishops with the secular aristocracy was firm. The priest Ketill Þorsteinsson, who became bishop at Hólar as a protégé of Hafliði Másson, to whom he had told so effective an *exemplum*, was a member of the Mǫðrvellingar family, descended from Guðmundr ríki. Bishop Magnús Einarsson was in direct male descent from Hallr á Síðu and through his mother was connected with the Reykhyltingar. Bishop Klængr, who died in 1176, was descended through his father's mother from the Reyknesingar: she was a daughter of Ari at Reykjahólar and so an aunt of Þorgils Oddason. Brandr Sæmundarson, who died in 1201, was the son of a cousin of Sæmundr fróði, and through his mother belonged to the family descended from Þorfinnr karlsefni in Reynines; Þorlákr Rúnólfsson belonged to the same family, and they had not distant connections with Guðmundr dýri and with Jón Sigmundarson of the Svínfellingar. The strands of lordly and prelatial, secular and cleric, pride and humility, cross and re-cross in these men and their background.

Bishop Klængr, for example, exchanged gifts with great men abroad, and gave a breakfast feast, on the occasion of the dedication of the church at Skálholt, at which seven hundred men, told in long hundreds, were present. Nevertheless, Klængr was sterner in vigils and fastings and dress than others, and used to go barefoot in frost

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 77.

and snow. Again, we have read earlier that he was so persistent in his litigation, if someone sought his help, that he was a great chieftain, both on account of his wisdom and his eloquence: he was also more than well acquainted with the law. Because of this, the chieftains got all their own way in the suits in which Klængr supported them.¹⁸ Some idea of the temper of the time is further given by that comment in *Hungrvaka*, after the sudden death of Bishop Ketill during his attendance at a wedding-feast in Skálholt: 'His death caused great sorrow: but with the persuasion of Bishop Magnús and the excellent drink which was there available, men's grief was lightened more readily than would otherwise have been the case.'¹⁹

Two families detach themselves as the greatest in Iceland at the time. One was the family of the Haukdælir, descended from Gissurr hvíti through his son, Bishop Ísleifr, and through his son, Teitr, brother of Bishop Gissurr and foster-father of Ari fróði. Hallr Teitsson we have already met in *Þorgilssaga ok Hafliða* as a man with firm ideas on personal honour: yet he was a man of learning too, and was chosen as bishop-elect (*biskupsefni*) on the death of Magnús. He went abroad to be consecrated, but died in Utrecht.²⁰ The other family was that of the Oddaverjar, descendants of Sæmundr fróði. During the bishopric of Magnús Einarsson, it is said that the leading men were Hallr Teitsson and Eyjólfir Sæmundarson.²¹ As for Klængr, he had trusty friends in Gissurr Hallsson and Jón Loptsson, the most respected men in Iceland.²² It is worth noting that both these families could claim kinship with Norwegian royal

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 78.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 80.

²¹ Ibid., p. 79.

²² Ibid., p. 82: *er mest váru virðir á Íslandi.*

families: the mother of Gissurr hvíti was a cousin of Ástríðr, mother of King Óláfr Tryggvason.²³ The connection of Loptr Sæmundarson was more recent and more impressive: he was married to an illegitimate daughter of King Magnús berfœtr, and Jón Loptsson was their son.

In the north, the family of Hafliði Másson does not seem to play much of a part in affairs after his death. There the greatest family seems to have been that of the Mǫðrvellingar, amongst whom are to be numbered Bishop Ketill and later Guðmundr dýri. Late in the twelfth century, the Ásbirningar in Skagafjörður come into prominence, descendants of Ásbjörn, father of Bǫðvarr, whom we know in *Þorgilssaga ok Hafliða*. In some ways, the extension of their power is a parallel to that of the Sturlung family.

After the disturbance of the *status quo* threatened by the Þorgils and Hafliði affair, which laid bare for a moment the antagonisms inherent in this fosterbrotherhood of secular and cleric, the close identification of church and lay interests was maintained. The great chieftains in Church and State were of the same blood and could not be opposed ideologically or practically one to another. The ordained *goði* was the common type: the number of influential families to which this applied can be seen by a glance at the list of forty high-born priests, collected by Ari fróði, apparently for some special purpose, in 1143.²⁴

This effective integration was however again disturbed, and on this occasion never restored in the same secure form. The disturbance was caused by the opposition of two strong-willed men and an impulse that came from abroad. It is interesting to note how, on at least two

²³ *Biskupa Sögur* I, p. 10; *Ólafssaga Tryggvasonar in Heimskringla, Íslensk Fornrit* XXVI, Reykjavík 1941, p. 328.

²⁴ *Diplomatarium Islandicum* I, pp. 180 ff.

important occasions in the history of Christendom in northern Europe, similar movements meet similar reactions at much the same time. Thus in the 970s and 980s, for example, we find a strong, even desperate, heathen reaction against the Christian missionising influences, in Kievan Russia before Vladimir's conversion, in the rule of Hákon Hlaðajarl in Norway, and in the opposition met by Þorvaldr inn víðförli and Bishop Friðrekr and by the missionaries sent by Óláfr Tryggvason in Iceland. Afterwards, the secular powers and the ecclesiastic joined forces: the royal houses derived great benefit in their movement towards national unification from their close connection with the Church, and the Church in its work enjoyed their support. The co-operation must at some time have an end: one of the two must, as it were, look at the other and like Þorgeirr in *Fóstbræðrasaga* wonder what would happen if it came to a struggle between them. So in 1170 Archbishop Thomas á Becket is murdered in Canterbury; in 1179 Archbishop Eysteinn is forced into exile after temporary success in pressing the Church's claims. And in the same period in Iceland arises the conflict which means the end of the identity of secular and spiritual interests and power.

The break depended on two men, Bishop Þorlákr Þórhallsson and Jón Loptsson; but behind the former stood a power which, until then, had played no significant part in internal affairs in Iceland: a militant international Church with the Hildebrandine reforms as its programme. Thomas á Becket was the great example. Later a complicating factor was to be the movement towards asceticism and poverty, whose beginnings may be detected before Saint Francis made it his own — a movement completely antipathetic to the typical Icelandic aristocratic mentality.

Þorlákr came of a good family but was not closely

related to the greatest. His mother and he moved, while he was still young, to Oddi under the priest Eyjólfur Sæmundarson. Þorlákr studied in Paris and Lincoln, and in Iceland entered the monastery at Þykkvabær on its foundation in 1168 and became abbot there. In the old age of Klængur, he was elected bishop-elect from three candidates, and he returned from his consecration in 1178. He was both celibate and ascetic all his life; typically, from the time of his bishopric, we know of three new saints' days and two new fast-days. We need to note his less intimate family connection with the aristocratic leaders, and further that Þorlákr was the first bishop in Iceland to be recruited from a monastic rule.

Jón Loptsson receives unanimous acclaim from the writings of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries as the greatest chieftain of his time. Throughout, the same superlative is used: *gøfgastr*, the noblest by birth and accomplishment. Jón received a marked advantage from his royal mother, and the acceptance of the kinship by Magnús of Norway in 1164.²⁵ He must himself, however, have been a remarkable man. In Iceland he does not appear as a protagonist in any particular dispute, but generally, as for example in *Sturlusaga* and *Guðmundarsaga dýra*, his mediation was the last and best resort in important feuds. His prestige could not have been greater: even where there is opposition to him, the voice of assent in his greatness is not stilled. In the *Oddaverjaþáttur* in *Þorlákssaga in yngri*, he is described in this way: 'At that time, Jón Loptsson, who was the greatest chieftain in Iceland, had the administration of Oddi. He was a *goðorðsmaðr*. He was the wisest man in clerical matters, something he had learnt from his forebears. He was a deacon by ordination, a great voice

²⁵ *Magnússaga Erlingssonar*, Ch. XXI, in *Heimskringla*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Copenhagen 1911, p. 628.

in the Holy Church. He paid great attention to see that the churches under his charge were equipped as well as possible in every way. He had a full complement of most of the abilities which a man needed in those days. His regard for his honour and his obstinacy were so great that they could scarcely be greater, for he would give way to no-one, nor desist from any course he had once taken up.²⁶

Þorlákr and he found themselves on opposite sides when the bishop tried to effect two significant reforms. The first was a moral improvement in the relations between men and women. Jón, as so many of the chieftains, was *mjök fenginn fyrir kvennaást*; and matters could only be aggravated by the fact that Jón's mistress was the sister of Þorlákr. Jón's decision in this matter is well known; he told Þorlákr: 'I know that your ban is just and that there is sufficient cause. I shall go into Þórsmörk or some place where other people will not incur trouble by coming into contact with me, and I shall stay there with the woman you are complaining about as long as I please. But your ban will not divide me from my difficulty, nor force from any man, until God quickens it in my heart to withdraw of my own accord.'²⁷ The other issue between the two men concerned the rights of patronage in those estates which had been dedicated, in name at least, to the use of the churches built on them. In this dispute, the *staðamál*, Þorlákr was to succeed only partially, and the Church's victory was to be deferred until the bishopric of Árni Þorláksson, a century later. The Church, in maintaining its supremacy over the lay, had a vital weapon to hand in the gifts of property made to the individual churches from the end of the eleventh century onwards, which have been mentioned above in

²⁶ *Biskupa Sögur* I, p. 282.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 291-2.

discussing the tithe. Þorlákr made a good beginning in exerting his prestige over Sigurðr Ormsson, the head of the great family of the Svínfellingar in the east. His method was to refuse to consecrate a church until the question of the right of patronage in the dedicated property was firmly decided in favour of the Church. Jón, however, was as strong as Þorlákr, and refused to agree to any such settlement. His reply was as characteristic as before: 'I can hear what the Bishop has to say, but I am decided to consider it valueless; and I do not think that he intends or knows better than my forebears, Sæmundr fróði and his sons. Neither will I condemn the practice of our former bishops, who agreed to this custom of the land, that laymen should administer the churches which were given to God by their ancestors, but whose charge was reserved for them and their descendants.'²⁸ This may be compared perhaps with the words of Henry of England to Thomas á Becket at one of their meetings to reach a settlement: 'Now, what everyone of his predecessors, archbishops greater and higher than he, did with respect to everyone of my ancestors, even the least of them, let him do that with me, and we shall soon be at one.'²⁹ The same issues were at stake.

The international features of the struggle are reflected in the letters which the active archbishop of Trondheim, Eysteinn, and his successor, Eiríkr, sent to the Icelandic leaders. Characteristically, the chief men addressed are Jón Loptsson and Gissurr Hallsson, though in one letter Þoðvarr Þórðarson and Ormr Jónsson Svínfellingr find a place in the address. In 1173, 1180 and 1189 came letters about moral reform and obedience to the demands made by Þorlákr.³⁰ Most marked was the concern for the ordained who was guilty of immorality or strife.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

²⁹ *Thomas Saga Erkibyskups*, Oslo 1869, p. 180.

³⁰ *Diplomatarium Islandicum* I, pp. 216, 280, 284.

The aristocratic attitude took long to die, even in the best servants of the Church. The priest Guðmundr Arason, later bishop, was in his younger days seriously troubled by a suit against a man whom he got outlawed. Further action than this, the execution of the outlaw, was difficult for his conscience. But in a struggle at a horse-fight meeting, the son of a man who had supported Guðmundr's outlaw was killed, and the outlaw himself wounded. This was satisfaction indeed ; but, as the saga says: ' God so guarded Guðmundr that he had contributed to this neither by word nor act.'³¹ In the following century, in 1255, Abbot Brandr Jónsson, later bishop, showed clearly where his sympathies lay, when it was a question of revenge for his nephew. Though he argued the Christian attitude, when he turned away from the meeting, his face was as red as blood, and he said: ' It is hard if we should leave our noble kinsmen unatoned against the sons of farmers.'³² It is like the words of Jón Loptsson, when he is asked for help after the death of Einarr Þorgilsson in 1185: ' The friendship of Einarr and myself was such, that I have no obligation on its account in this case. But I think things have reached a bad stage if justice is not done when men of no principles strike down chieftains, and I shall therefore promise my help in this case when it comes to the *Þing*.'³³

The dispute between Þorlákr and Jón over the *staðamál* was in 1179 and 1180; the *kvennamál* was probably rather earlier. We have reached the period of *Sturlusaga*, of which the last part, the dispute called the *Deildartungumál*, belongs to 1180 and 1181. The action of the saga needs to be considered in the light of the development of events which has been sketched here.

³¹ *Prestssaga Guðmundar*, Ch. IX, *Sturlunga Saga* I, p. 145.

³² *Íslendinga Saga*, Ch. CCLXXXIII, *Sturlunga Saga* II, p. 255.

³³ *Íslendinga Saga*, Ch. III, *Sturlunga Saga* I, p. 233.

I shall not concern myself directly with the saga's unity of composition; more important is the unity of Sturla's character, which has been questioned by some scholars. The presentation of his character in the saga helps towards an understanding of the period and is in turn illuminated by it. In any case, the character is worth attention for its own sake, and because of Sturla's remarkable sons and grandsons.

Sturlusaga is built up of three blocks of source-material. After a genealogical preliminary and a short lawsuit, which we are told was the first occasion Sturla took part in affairs, comes the story of Sturla's feud with Einarr Þorgilsson of Staðarhóll. This was carried on intermittently for a number of years and culminated in the battle on Sælingsdalsheiðr in 1171, when Sturla was victorious. As men said at the time, that meant a reversal in the prestige of Sturla and Einarr. The second block of material deals with Sturla's other affairs, principally with Þorleifr beiskaldi Þorláksson, who lived in Hítardal. There was no such decisive conjunction here as in the feud with Einarr, but generally Sturla had the better of it. The matter of this section, though it follows the Einarr-Sturla material, must in part at least have been contemporary with it. There is finally the *Deildartungumál* and what follows from it. Bǫðvarr Þórðarson, Sturla's father-in-law, is engaged in a suit with the priest Páll Sǫlvason, who lived in Reykjaholt, over the typical and vexed question of an inheritance. Páll, strictly speaking, seems to have had the law on his side, but Bǫðvarr moves into the property in question before the suit is decided. A meeting is arranged to effect a settlement, where Sturla is present. During the course of the discussion, Þórbjörg, Páll's wife, gets impatient, and attributing the whole ill affair to Sturla stabs him in the face, saying why should she not make

him like Óðinn, whom he himself wished to emulate. Sturla does not lose control of himself, but takes the opportunity to get the present agreement negotiated in Boðvarr's favour; and he gets *sjálfðæmi* for his wound. He makes his award later, and to everyone's astonishment follows the example of Hafliði Másson in awarding himself the enormous sum of 240 hundred. Páll will not pay, and at the *Alþingi* matters look ugly, until Jón Loptsson, who supports Páll, makes it clear that Sturla will gain no advantage unless he allows the case to be decided by himself, Jón. Sturla gives way and Jón settles the matter.

Because Sturla is successful in the first part of the saga but unsuccessful in the last, scholars, notably Björn M. Ólsen and W. H. Vogt, have thought that the author's attitude towards Sturla changed.³⁴ Ólsen thought that Snorri might well have written the saga, because, since he was fostered at Oddi (one outcome of the settlement after the *Deildartungumál*), he would naturally have the point of view of Jón's party in that division of the saga where Jón appears in a most important rôle. Vogt thought that he could show that the sections of the saga had existed separately and in written form. The third section was a sort of *Pálsþáttur*, the hero being Páll prestur Sölvason. He too saw in the saga 'einen grossen unterschied der auffassung Sturlas.' This is not the place to discuss Vogt's theory in detail, but it is certain that, in the form we have them, the first two sections were written as a continuum; and I do not believe that Páll is to be considered the central figure in the third. I should like, however, to consider the character of

³⁴ Björn M. Ólsen, *Um Sturlungu in Sami til sögu Íslands* III, Copenhagen 1902, pp. 213-224 (*Um Sturlusögu*); W. H. Vogt, *Charakteristiken aus der Sturlunga Saga* in *Zeitschrift für deutsches Alterthum* LIV, 1913, pp. 376-395 (*Sturlusaga*).

Sturla, in the hope of showing that this thesis of disunity in characterisation is not tenable.

It is true that the events in the earlier part of the saga are told from the point of view of those living in Hvammr, something which cannot be said in the same unqualified way for the *Deildartungumál*. It is true also that in one place early in the saga, Sturla is spoken of in terms of high praise (ch. 4), and his shrewdness is obviously a matter for admiration (ch. 19). Even if no active disposition in Sturla's favour is to be detected there is throughout an evident hostility towards Einarr Þorgilsson, who is always rapacious and unscrupulous. But, as Finnur Jónsson briefly suggested,³⁵ the advantages and failings of Sturla's character are there to be realised in the earlier as well as the later chapters: he is not all good in the first and all bad in the second. The moderation which Sturla shows when he imposes a small sum on his opponent, Þórhallr Surtsson (ch. 25), answers well to the moderation in his behaviour in his first litigation, the case of his cousin, Gils Þormóðarson, whom his opponents are bent on outlawing (ch. 5). Sturla resorts to violence to prevent it, but when he has made his point he is willing that compensation as it was first offered should be paid. But the moderation of Sturla is shown by the occasional hastiness, even savagery, which he displays in the earlier as well as the later chapters, to be more like the paying patience of any small farmer than that of a forgiving spirit. The difference seems to be that in the first part there is no vocal opposition to stigmatise him, he is opposed by no-one the writer much respects. The act which demonstrates most clearly the savage possibilities of Sturla's character is the attack on the priest Erlendr Hallason and his companions, which is told in ch. 15. The

³⁵ *Den oldnorske og oldislandske Litteraturs Historie*, Copenhagen 1920. II, p. 551.

preceding hostility comes mostly from Sturla's side and is not elaborated in any attempt to justify it. The immediate provocation — one of Sturla's men is roughly handled by Þorleifr—is small compared with the payment Sturla exacts: Þorleifr is killed and Snorri, who was the brother of one of Sturla's sons-in-law, is wounded. Sturla tells his son, Sveinn, to wound Erlendr, but Sveinn refuses because he had been christened by the intended victim. There is another moment when the possibilities of Sturla's character are suggested, in the battle on Sælingsdalsheiðr itself (ch. 21). When a truce is asked for, Sturla's first answer is to tell his enemies to lay down their weapons: this they refuse to do, and Sturla then allows them a truce (*gríð*). What would have happened had they surrendered their weapons before the truce had been formally conceded, we can only surmise; but no-one's conjecture is likely to favour Sturla's quality of mercy.

When we have observed these points, and others like them, matters in the later part of the saga, like the killing of Þórhallr (ch. 26), Sturla's malevolence towards Þorleifr beiskaldi (chs. 23-24), Sturla's self-interest and his support for Bøðvarr, who was, of course, his father-in-law, in the *Deildartungumál*, his pettish exception to those included in the settlement by Páll (ch. 32), his extravagant claim, and the malice shown in the last speech when he hears of the death of Þórbjörg (ch. 36) — none of these should seem exceptional.

Sturla's most distinctive characteristic is his wit, and the nature of this remains constant throughout the saga. It is most typically of a mocking sarcastic kind. It is clear that his remarks were remembered, as were *lausavísur* in other instances, as central points for the narrative. In the exchange between Sturla and Þorleifr beiskaldi in the *sóttarvetr* (ch. 24), Sturla's remark is the

more effective, but this shows not only a greater malevolence, but also that his was the keener wit. There is not much humour present in Sturla's reference to the burning of Bishop Magnús (ch. 23). In the chapters dealing with the *Deildartungumál* Sturla's wit remains ironic and mordant. In his greeting to Jón Þórarinsson, when he ignores Guðmundr dýri, Jón's brother (ch. 30); in his almost gay remarks to Páll Solvason (he calls him *mágr*) after the knife-attack by Þórbjörg (ch. 31); even in his final speech at the *Alþingi* in ch. 34, Sturla expressed himself as he might have done at any time in the whole saga. The attitude of mind and the wit are qualified, not altered, by the touches of effrontery, concealed jubilation and dissembling, which variously appear.

Wit of the kind Sturla exercises needs self-control — which is perhaps why Sturla took to his bed when he was grieved over something (*hugsjúkr*). It is something like the habit of an animal who retires to lick his wounds. One might suspect, however, that Sturla, once between the blankets, spent his time in thinking up savagely witty remarks for use on hypothetical occasions. Sturla was eager to be talked about, as much apparently for his speech-making as for his deeds (ch. 34). That he appreciated his own wit is certain. This is not to imply that Sturla did not feel deeply or lacked a real self-respect.

Sturla's withdrawal in times of mental stress is matched in greater figures from an earlier age, Egill Skallagrímsson and Hákon Hlaðajarl for example.³⁶ Jan de Vries writes: "Die erstaunliche Energie des germanischen Menschen hat also als notwendige Begleiterscheinung das Gefühl der ohnmächtigen Abspannung";³⁷ and, however fiercely they might act, these men in fact led a

³⁶ *Ólafssaga Tryggvasonar* in *Heimskringla*, Ch. IX; *Egilssaga*, ed. Sigurður Nordal, Reykjavík 1933, Ch. LXXVIII.

³⁷ *Die Geistige Welt der Germanen*, Halle 1945, p. 36.

nervous existence. Snorri is undoubtedly his father's son, and Sighvatr Sturluson is nearest his father both in wit and mood.³⁸ It seems appropriate to make some remark about the usual derivation of the artistic sense and ability shown by the sons and grandsons of Hvamm-Sturla. Generally, the hard and unscrupulous side of their nature is attributed to Sturla, whilst to Guðný, and through her to the Mýramenn, descending from Skallagrímr and his son Egill, are ascribed their artistic leanings. This seems to me to do less than justice to Sturla, who had apparently a peculiar sense of what was fitting, especially in the use of words. He possessed an inborn intuitive gift, but it is not suggested that he had any great imaginative power. I should say that he gave to his sons that desirable limitation, which imagination, if it is ever to find expression, continually needs: inferior if prolific poets and better historians might very well be the result.

The conception of Sturla's character does not change as the saga proceeds. He grows older and the situations are different. Most important is the fact that the nature of the opposition which he has to meet alters from the earlier to the later part of the saga. It is essentially an alteration from the small to the great, from an opponent like Einarr Þorgilsson, small-minded if of great family, to one like Jón Loptsson, the noblest of twelfth-century Icelanders by birth and culture. The *Deildartungumál* must admittedly depend on sources different from those used in the rest of the saga, but it does not seem possible to accept Vogt's thesis that Páll Sölvason is the central figure. His part is never one of decisive influence: matters are taken out of his hands by Jón Loptsson and Guðmundr dýri, by his ecclesiastical superiors, even by

³⁸ Cf. *Íslendinga Saga*, Ch. CII, where his mood changes from the apathetic to the energetic overnight; and Ch. CXXX, where he is elaborately humorous at the expense of Sturla, his son.

his wife. In the saga, he is an actor rather than a power. The saga remains *Sturlusaga* though he is now on the losing side: the result is, however, a check, not a decline. There should be something in the nature of the circumstances to explain the attitude of a writer, who, though he seems to do no more than present Sturla in a historically objective view, yet finds himself in agreement with the opinions of the party opposing him, in sympathy with this party's members and the tradition to which they belong.³⁹

The first part of the saga relates Sturla's rise to power through dealings with the neighbouring family of Staðarhóll, particularly through strife with Einarr, the son of Þorgils Oddason. The struggle was confined to the district, but success against such a family obviously meant much for one's prestige throughout the country. The saga nowhere, however, suggests that the writer regarded Sturla as a great chief. On the female side, he could claim descent from Guðmundr ríki and Snorri goði, but on the paternal side, the family seems to have been of no particular consequence until his father, Þórðr Gíllsson, took over the *Snorrunga goðorð*. We find him playing a part with the mediators in *Þorgilssaga ok Hafliða*. The family seems quite unconnected with the intellectual and literary activity of the twelfth century. Sturla would seem to be something of a newcomer in the political world outside his own *herað*, though his determination to make his own way is seen from the first.⁴⁰ He seems to have had closer contacts with the soil than most chiefs of the period.⁴¹ His alliances were few and

³⁹ Cf. the view expressed by Kr. Kaalund in *Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed*, II Række, 16 Bind, Copenhagen 1901, p. 286.

⁴⁰ The saga notes particularly the beginning and high point of Sturla's career: *Þessi vǫru af Sturlu upphöf fyrst, er hann átti málum at skipta við menn* (Ch. V). *Ok var þat mál flestra manna at á þeim fundi skipti um mannvirðing með þeim Sturlu ok Einari* (Ch. XXII).

⁴¹ One of the most vivid pictures in the saga is in Ch. XXI. Sturla is up

for the most part close to his own district. He laid the real foundations of the fortunes and prestige of the Sturlung family, but no-one, not even his sons, could see in him a chief of the stature of Haflíði, Þorgils, Gissurr or Jón. He lacked the qualities which called forth the highest approval of the literary thirteenth century, and the saga was written too close to living memory for him to be made into a heroic figure, if indeed his lack of simplicity and nobility would ever have allowed it — his shrewdness often reached the point of slyness. Although Sturla stands at the centre of the saga, he is never a completely commanding figure. The battle on Sælingsdalsheiðr, though decisive for his prestige, is not so for his power, and affairs between him and Einarr appear to dwindle down to the *modus vivendi* we are left with at the end of ch. 28.⁴² It cannot be denied that Sturla is master of the situation in ch. 31, after he has been stabbed by Þórbjörg — he is superbly so: but he commands not so much by the positive exercise of his personality as by a patient withdrawal of it. He sees here a wonderful opportunity to make capital out of the incident — success for the *Deildartungumál* suit and a personal advantage he could use to satisfy his revenge, feed his malice, and increase his wealth and prestige. Some of his jubilation comes through in his smooth words to Páll *mágr*. After this, however, Sturla has to meet Jón Loptsson and give way before his opposition. Jón has acted before as an arbitrator between Sturla and Einarr;⁴³ he was opposed to Sturla in the abduction case

with the first light and out with his workmen at the hayricks; there is a freezing wind. "Han var i al sin færð en jordvendt mand," as Paasche justly says (*Snorre Sturluson*, Oslo 1922, p. 62).

⁴² *Ok sátu þá hvárir um þat sem fengit höfðu* (*Sturlunga Saga* I, p. 104).

⁴³ In Ch. XXII, after the *Heiðarvíg*, possibly on Sturla's behalf. Jón and Gissurr Hallsson were the arbitrators; Jón has not been mentioned before, but Gissurr appears in Ch. XIX as a supporter of Einarr. If, as is probable, each of the two parties chose an arbitrator, Jón would thus be the acceptable choice for Sturla's side.

mentioned in ch. 29; and he now champions Páll. This can only have been historical fact. It also seems certain that no writer in the thirteenth century could have regarded Jón as anything but the cream of the Icelandic gentry in the preceding hundred years. Jón champions Páll whom he describes as an excellent priest, an old and noble priest.⁴⁴ The phrases seem to show the chief reason for Páll's importance in Jón's eyes, and in the saga Páll does appear as a member of a distinguished class rather than as a distinguished individual — or, if distinguished as an individual, then by virtue of his age, priesthood and aristocratic family.⁴⁵ Páll's connections are with the 'clerical gentry,' if we may use the term, those who earlier in the century were gathered round Bishop Gissurr, Hafiði Másson, Sæmundr fróði and Ari fróði, the old *goðar* who had adopted the new authority of the Church into their midst, giving it their family prestige and enjoying in return especially what the Church could offer in cultural things. His supporters include Bishop Brandr (who was Sturla's kinsman and who had supported him earlier), and Ari inn sterki, grandson of Ari fróði. Bishop Þorlákr the Saint advises Páll to carry arms, and his support would be another guarantee for the general attitude towards the dispute, both at the time and in later years. Jón Loptsson and Guðmundr dýri are spokesmen for Páll's party. These were the powerful members of society in twelfth-century Iceland, distinguished both as a social and cultural aristocracy.

⁴⁴ *Dýrligr kennimaðr, gamall ok gofugr kennimaðr.* (Ch. XXXII, *Sturlunga Saga* I, p. 116.).

⁴⁵ Páll was the *Reykhylltingagoði*. He appears in the list of distinguished priests from 1143, and he was one of the three candidates for the bishopric when Þorlákr the Saint was elected. There he is described as *lærdómsmaðr mikill ok beztu búþegn* (*Biskupa Sögur* I, p. 272), and he is referred to as *skynsamr maðr* on the occasion of the death of Bishop Magnús in 1148 (*Ibid*, p. 79). But despite these references, Páll Sölvason makes no impression as a character.

Sturla is an upstart in the one, and apparently a total stranger in the other.

It is instructive to examine the relationships of those members of the clerical gentry, of whom we know more than the name, listed by Ari fróði in 1143.⁴⁶ We find that fifteen were closely connected with the great men who opposed Sturla in the *Deildartungumál* and on one or two occasions earlier in his career. Their connections were with the Haukdælir, Oddaverjar and Mǫðrvellingar, with Hafliði Másson and Þorgils Oddason, with Bishop Þorlákr the Saint and Páll Sǫlvason. Only three names can be connected with Sturla's family, and the identity of two of these is not certain. These men could in no way compare with the other distinguished names and relationships that appear.

We find Sturla's position as a leader is suggested in the earlier part of the saga by the small number of his followers, compared with the forces of Einarr Þorgilsson. Thus, when Einarr rides to hold a court of execution in Hvammr and Sturla rides for the same purpose to Staðarhóll, the former has 420 men (so MS AM 122a; Brit. Mus. Add. 11, 127 from AM 122b has 120) in company and leaves 120 men at the homestead; Sturla rides with 60 men and leaves an unspecified number at Hvammr; he is said though to have a great force (ch. 9). Einarr and Þorleifr beiskaldi ride with a legal summons to Hvammr and have 360 men; Sturla has a much smaller following (ch. 23).

Sturla's reputation is made by the battle on the heath. We may take it that in this matter the other chiefs were not interested in interfering, even could they have done so with some feeling of righteousness. Einarr, despite all the advantages inherited from his father of position,

⁴⁶ Some details are known of twenty-six out of the forty named, although the references are not always certain.

wealth, kindred and friends, could not have been popular personally. It is even possible that members of the leading class saw no harm in the reduction of the power of one family, as long as the affair was confined to a narrow locality. When Sturla, however, in a consolidated position in his own *herað*, begins to enlarge his sphere of interest (as he is already doing in his dealings with Þorleifr beiskaldi), the other chiefs will not refuse an opportunity to curb his ambitions.⁴⁷ We may note the generalised resentment in Þorleifr's remark in ch. 23: 'He said that Sturla showed great disregard for honourable dealing when he attempted so to undermine the prestige of chieftains.'⁴⁸ Through his marriage-alliance with Bǫðvarr Þórðarson Sturla has a part in the *Deildartungumál* proper, a fact not likely to reassure those interested in his progress. There is no doubt, however, that the great men, principally Jón Loptsson and Guðmundr dýri, can combine against him and check his career. It can be done, moreover, without precipitating an armed struggle, though both sides go as far as the use of threats.

Sturla imposes a self-award which, had it been accepted, would have placed him on a level with Hafliði Másson. Hafliði, we know, was a great man at the beginning of the century, a great lawman, at whose home the codification of the laws was undertaken in the winter of 1117, and who may well have stood at the centre of a writing activity much wider in scope. No one would accept such a preposterous claim on Sturla's part, not public opinion at the time⁴⁹ nor any saga-writer in the following century,

⁴⁷ His affair with Þórhallr takes him out of the Hvammssveit south over the fjord to Hólmblátr. Þorleifr beiskaldi lives in Hítardalr. Sturla's support for Bǫðvarr, who lives at Gardar in Akranes, involves him in that area, as his own case against Páll does even more ominously.

⁴⁸ Þorleifr kvað mikla ósæmð sýnask af Sturlu, er hann vildi sitja fyrir sæmð hofðingja (*Sturlunga Saga* I, p. 94).

⁴⁹ Ok þótti öllum mönnum mikil undr er honum kom í hug at kveða slíkt upp (*Ch. XXXII, Sturlunga Saga* I, p. 115).

even if his connections with Sturla's side were of the closest. Sturla makes a bold bid and takes himself seriously, for the moment at least: that he should do so is not surprising, and he sees the occasion as an opportunity not to be missed for his own aggrandisement. But 'Han spændte buen for höit,' as Paasche says, and thirty hundred is the final assessment, one-eighth of the original demand. The writer is not even sure of the exact amount of the sum,⁵⁰ so the matter ends with no such memorable claim as was imposed by Hafliði: Sturla's self-comparison was effectively dismissed. Sturla sees clearly the coalition ranged against him, returns to his more usual realistic way of looking at things, almost in fact to a more humorous attitude,⁵¹ and comes off well with hospitality from Jón, gifts, and the honourable offer that young Snorri should be fostered at Oddi. This was more significant than the fostering by one man, albeit the noblest, of the son of another, for reasons of pure policy and family connection. It was too an offer and an acceptance of a share for one member of Sturla's family in the cultural gifts which seemed an indispensable heritage in those who were to belong amongst the greatest members of the commonwealth. Sturla must have learnt genealogies and family lore from his mother, just as Bishop Þorlákr did from his, and we feel all the time that Sturla's mind is peasant and proverbial. But Snorri was to have a share in a learning which was international and royal in all its connections. In the tradition of Sæmundr and under the patronage of Jón, the Church was no illiberal schoolmistress, and in Oddi this new culture was apparently being applied steadily and independently to the native resources. It was the

⁵⁰ The phrase is *helzt ákveðit* in MS. AM. 122a; *helzt* is omitted in 122b.

⁵¹ *Nú kann vera at ek hafa eigi vilt til at sjá mér hlut til handa, en vilja munda ek halda sæmð minni* (Ch. XXXIV, *Sturlunga I*, p. 118).

greatest good fortune that Snorri was the youngest and thus eligible for fostering.

The esteem shown by the writer for the priest Páll Sölvason (it is expressed largely in Jón's words) is not so much individual as an esteem for the cloth, as it were, especially when it decked a member of a high-ranking family in that golden age of the Icelandic secular Church. The author's sympathy and regard seem to be on the side of the 'clerical gentry,' once they enter the scene. This does not mean that he was a cleric himself, and if he was, he must certainly have been connected with the insular and aristocratic Church and not an enthusiast for the Hildebrandine reforms.⁵² This regard for prominent members of the priesthood is shown clearly in ch. 29 and is the keynote of the final chapters. We may note that Jón's speech in ch. 29 seems to be the composition of one interested in ethical matters. The record of the drowning of Páll Þórðarson may, as Vogt suggested, be introduced as a moral reminder. The *kviðlingr* with which Jón Þórarinnsson replies to Sturla in ch. 30 suggests very well the attitude of the clerical party, for whom he is momentarily the spokesman: Sturla has the devil as his accomplice — *stendr hann fyrir réttendum* —⁵³ a revealing point of view.

We see that Jón Loptsson, despite his differences with Bishop Þorlákr, is in no doubt as to the social forces he represents with his aristocratic and ecclesiastic background. There is no question of him not supporting men of his own kind, no question of him attempting to enlist

⁵² With the view of the saga here developed, it would not be possible to accept without qualification Meissner's categorical statement: 'Die *Sturlusaga* . . . enthält nicht das geringste, das auf einen geistlichen Verfasser schliessen liesse' (*Die Strengleikar*, Halle 1902, p. 53).

⁵³ The reading given by Vigfússon from the British Museum MS. Add. 11, 127 fol. (*Sturlunga Saga* I, Oxford 1878, p. 80). It seems better than that given by Kaalund from MS. AM. 122a, *stendr hann frá rangindum* (*Sturlunga Saga* I, p. 112).

the assistance of men like Sturla in his own struggle with Þorlákr. Yet, by fostering Snorri, he may perhaps have thought consciously of allying this new assertive power with the things he himself stood for.

It is generally agreed that the composition of *Sturlusaga* must date from the early years of the thirteenth century. After about 1200, none of the important people connected with the events were alive, other than Guðný. The collection and composition must be closely connected with the Sturlung family, with Guðný and the rising power of her sons. It was no ordinary thing to have a saga written about one: we know none about Jón Loptsson or Gissurr Hallsson. The connection of the writer with the family does not seem to have affected his presentation of fact, and his own training seems to have ensured his respect for those who appear in the most favourable light in the saga — in this he was only a member of his age. We are very nearly back to Björn M. Ólsen's suggestion that here is the Oddi point of view, but I think the reference can be made much more general than this. It is perhaps possible to regard *Sturlusaga* as the first fruits of a combination of the homely story-telling of Hvammr and the writing culture of Oddi: possible even to believe that Snorri was responsible at least for the later chapters, and that the work was produced in some sort of collaboration. It may be more than symbolic that Reykjaholt, the home of Páll Sölvason, which would have been at stake had he been forced to meet Sturla's extravagant demand, was the favourite home of Snorri, after he moved there from Borg about 1206. Whatever may have been the process of composition, the character of Sturla is firmly illustrated and appears consistent and authentic.

It is noteworthy that the entry of Sturla's family into wider and more powerful connections was assured not

only by Snorri's fostering at Oddi, but also by the marriage of Þórðr to a daughter of Ari inn sterki, grandson of Ari fróði. Ari inn sterki's sister was married to Magnús, the son of the priest Páll. We should note too that Þórðr is called deacon in the notice of his death in the annals.⁵⁴ Typically, we find that Sighvatr, the second of the brothers, was allied with the Ásbirningar. We observe that in the *Rauðsmál* of 1196, the Oddaverjar are on the side of the Sturlungar, opposed this time to the Ásbirningar who were supported by Guðmundr dýri and Þorvaldr Gissurarson.⁵⁵ Similarly in the *Qnundar-brennumál* of 1197, the sons of Sturla are with Sæmundr Jónsson against the same combination.⁵⁶

Of the general outline after the death of Sturla in 1183, much need not be said. The main outlines are well known. In 1190 a decree from the Archbishop of Trondheim forbade any man to be both *goði* and priest⁵⁷ — the social type could no longer exist on which the Icelandic Church and State in the twelfth century had depended. Þorlákr the Saint died in 1193, and he was canonized in 1198. The choice of his successor proved a triumph for the insular and aristocratic, though naturally no such suggestion is to be found in the saga of the new bishop. The man who was elected was Páll, the son of Jón Loptsson and his mistress, Ragnheiðr, sister of Bishop Þorlákr. Páll's succession must have been a considerable relief for those who had been troubled by Þorlákr. Páll belonged to the proper school: he concentrated on church building and adornment and on magnificent entertainment for his kinsmen and friends.

Jón Loptsson died in 1197. His death occurred after

⁵⁴ *Annales Regii* 1237, ed. G. Storm, *Islandske Annaler indtil 1587*, Oslo 1888, p. 130.

⁵⁵ *Íslendinga Saga*, Ch. V, *Sturlunga Saga* I, p. 237.

⁵⁶ *Guðmundarsaga dýra*, Ch. XV, *Sturlunga Saga* I, p. 196.

⁵⁷ *Diplomatarium Islandicum* I, p. 289.

he had acted as arbitrator in the suit after the burning of Qnundr by Guðmundr dýri. That tragedy came as a sudden flare in the already threatening sky. The bishopric of Guðmundr Arason was soon to follow, and in the time of that pitiful and disastrous man the Sturlung age reached its first climacteric.

KNÚTS SAGA.

By A. CAMPBELL.

MUCH of the Scandinavian research of the present century has been devoted to the recovery, if not of the texts, then at least of a conception of the general content of lost historical sagas, and the immense works of Gunnlaugr on Óláfr Tryggvason and Styrmir on Óláfr Helgi have emerged in reasonably clear outline, and while the sagas of Knútr the Great, of the earls of Hlaðir, and of Brian Boru remain somewhat nebulous though perceptible forms, those of the Orkney earls and the Faroese squires have been practically re-created.

In a recent work,¹ Gustav Albeck has postulated a far more extensive *Knúts Saga* than any previous scholar, and has attempted to determine its contents. His results, if accepted, would mean that all the scattered references to Knútr in the extant sagas are to be traced to one source, the postulated *Knúts Saga*. The importance of this to the English historian would be great, and hence an examination of the case presented by Albeck for his conclusions is called for. Albeck's reasoning is intricate, and it is doubtful if justice could be done to his arguments in much less space than he has himself devoted to them. Accordingly it is hoped that this brief study will be used side by side with Albeck's work as an aid to its understanding and assessment, not as a substitute for it.²

¹ *Knytlinga: Sagaerne om Danmarks Konger*, Copenhagen, 1946.

² Readers should perhaps be warned that Albeck sometimes falls below the severe standard of accuracy which must be observed by those who write on the extremely intricate relationships of the king's sagas, if they are not to cause their readers endless trouble. The worst example of this is on p. 48, where Albeck offers a list of five points in which the *Supplement* to *Jónsvikinga Saga* resembles c. 20 of the *Flateyjarbók* version of the saga of Óláfr Helgi, and which are not mentioned in other Norse sources. Now he is correct about

Albeck has presented the chief elements which he believes to have been contained in *Knúts Saga* in a convenient list.³ They may be divided into four categories:—

- (1) The well-known material in *Fagrskinna* (cc. 29-34), which is generally agreed to be from a *Knúts Saga*.
- (2) Points found in both *Knytlinga Saga* and the document which I have elsewhere termed the *Supplement to Jónsvíkinga Saga*.⁴
- (3) Points peculiar to *Knytlinga Saga*.
- (4) Points absent from the *Supplement* and *Fagrskinna*, but found in *Knytlinga Saga*, which may reasonably be supposed to have been present in the *Óláfs Saga* of Styrmir.

Since Styrmir's *Óláfs Saga* is agreed to be the source of the account of Óláfr's period found in *Fagrskinna*, it is reasonable to suppose that the points of group (1) were present in the former work. Now Albeck points out

only nos. 2 and 4 of these five points. No. 1 is that Thorkell Hávi's English activities are mentioned by the two sources under consideration only. But in the *Legendary Saga*, Óláfr Helgi while still in the Baltic hears that Thorkell was a mighty man *Væstr a ænglande*. No. 5 is that Thorkell avenged his brother: but see c. 10 of the *Legendary Saga* (p. 9, line 2 of Johnsen's edition). No. 3 is that Eadric Streona was foster-father of Queen Emma. This is in *Flateyjarbók* only, not in *Supplement* (see below, note 9); Albeck here makes matters worse by adding incorrectly the qualification that the *Legendary Saga* has the point. Again, Albeck (p. 30) claims that *Flateyjarbók* twice mentions that Úlfr was in England and fought with Óláfr Helgi, and later repeats this (p. 47). Now the first of the *Flateyjarbók* passages makes Úlfr accompany Óláfr Helgi on some of his European wanderings, the second on an Irish expedition, which he admittedly seems to join in England. But no source except *Knytlinga* makes Úlfr take part in the English wars. Albeck (p. 77) claims the high authority of Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson for the view that the *Legendary Saga* is influenced by *Knúts Saga*, but he has failed to understand Bjarni's words. Lastly it is extraordinary that Albeck (p. 77) quotes Ordericus Vitalis rather than William of Jumièges, for the latter is much earlier and is the source of the former for the matter under consideration.

³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 79-80.

⁴ *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, Royal Historical Society, 1949, pp. 87-8.

(as I had independently done)⁵ that many of the points of group (2) recur in c. 20 of the *Óláfs Saga Helga* of *Flateyjarbók*.⁶ Now S. Nordal, in his famous study of the *Óláfs Saga*,⁷ has regarded the additions to Snorri's version found in c. 20 of the *Flateyjarbók* version as derived from Styrmir's version. Albeck accepts this view, and considers that since some of the points of group (2) were in Styrmir, they may all be reasonably supposed to have been there, and that since group (1) was there also, both groups may well have been known to the writer of *Knytlinga Saga* from Styrmir. (A great deal of group (1) does not recur in *Knytlinga Saga*, but this, Albeck suggests, may be due to the fact that much of this material was not greatly to the credit of Knútr, the hero of the relevant part of *Knytlinga*.)⁸ It might then follow that not only group (4) but group (3) also were derived from Styrmir by *Knytlinga*, and Albeck finally concludes that *Knytlinga*'s only sources in its account of Knútr are *Heimskringla*, Styrmir and skaldic verse. All four groups of points are assumed to have been derived by Styrmir from an extensive *Knúts Saga*.

Now this view of the relationship of the sources depends on Nordal's assumption that all the additions to Snorri in c. 20 of the *Óláfs Saga* of *Flateyjarbók* are from Styrmir. So far as they are also found in the *Supplement*, may they not be due to the addition by the scribe of flourishes to the *Óláfs Saga* from the *Supplement*, a document which was present in his manuscript? One detail of expression supports this view,⁹ as does also the absence of elements

⁵ *Encomium Emmae*, p. 91.

⁶ The text of the *Supplement* is given, *Encomium Emmae*, pp. 92-3, and that of c. 20 of the *Flateyjarbók* version of *Óláfs Saga Helga* in Miss Ashdown's *English and Norse Documents*, pp. 176 ff.

⁷ *Om Olaf den helliges saga*, Copenhagen, 1914.

⁸ It deals chiefly with the story of the death of Úlfr, and the battle of Helge-å.

⁹ The chapter of *Flateyjarbók* under discussion has the words *Edrikur striona var fostri Emmu drottningar er att hafde Adalradr konungr*. The

related to the *Supplement* from all interpolated sagas of Óláfr Helgi except that of *Flateyjarbók*, the very MS. in which the *Supplement* is preserved. If this view be accepted, practically all grounds for regarding groups (1) and (2) as ever having been combined in one work disappear, and with them goes the temptation to postulate a work which combined (1), (2), (3) and (4).

One ground for suspecting a connection between groups (1) and (2) remains: these groups have a common element, for the story of Knútr's visit to Rome is found in similar form in *Fagrskinna* and *Knytlinga*, and the *Supplement* has a shorter but related account of it. This is, however, not sufficient to prove that (1) and (2) were ever combined in one work. I have elsewhere¹⁰ suggested that the source of much material in the *Supplement* is the saga of Óláfr Helgi in a pre-Snorri form of which we may see the essentials in the *Legendary Saga*. This may have been Styrmir's version, and from here the *Supplement* may have taken the story of the Rome visit, greatly shortening it. *Knytlinga* has it in a fuller form, but this may be regarded as a free treatment of the account in *Fagrskinna*, which would no doubt be taken from Styrmir. Indications that *Knytlinga* used *Fagrskinna* are not wanting: some of these are inconclusive,¹¹ but taken together they are not insignificant, and another more important one will emerge below.

Supplement has the same sentence with the additional words *Jatmundar brodir* between *fostri* and *Emmu*. This is clearly correct, for already in the *Legendary Saga* Eadric is foster-father of Eadmund. Hence *Flateyjarbók* has evidently dropped two words in copying the sentence. But it is fairly certain that *Flateyjarbók* is drawing simply from its own text of the *Supplement*, not upon a common source, for the idea that Emma and Eadric were brother and sister is a highly eccentric individual trait of the *Supplement*, where it is twice expressed. The idea may have sprung simply from an assumption that Emma was the mother of all Æthelred's children, and that Eadmund's foster-father would be his maternal uncle. (Curiously, there is another attempt to bring Eadric and Emma into conjunction, this time apparently of a dishonourable kind, in Roger of Wendover, ed. Coxe, i, 448).

¹⁰ *Encomium Emmae*, pp. 88-9.

¹¹ Albeck, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.

We are no longer able to assume that any of group (2) except the account of the Rome journey were present in *Styrmir*. It is therefore surely tempting to assume that *Knytlinga* took them directly from the *Supplement*. This was Finnur Jónsson's view,¹² and Albeck sees the danger to his theories which it involves, for he rejects it with emphasis at the outset of his study,¹³ but does not develop his reasons for so doing. One may presume that they are two. Firstly, that the account of Knútr's Rome visit is much fuller in *Knytlinga* than in the *Supplement*. But in this passage, as we have seen, *Knytlinga* may be using *Fagrskinna* (or *Styrmir*, a possibility to which I will return). Secondly, that the *Supplement* is added to *Jómsvíkinga Saga* only in *Flateyjarbók*, a MS. much later than the date of *Knytlinga*. Albeck indeed suggests¹⁴ that the *Supplement* is the work of the scribe of *Flateyjarbók*. But it is a lively and interesting *þáttr*, far beyond the capacities which we have any ground for crediting to Jón Þórðarson, the scribe in question. There is no reason why it should not have been added to *Jómsvíkinga Saga* at a relatively early date, and have been present in the copy used by the author of *Knytlinga*. That he used *Jómsvíkinga Saga* in some parts of his work is evident.¹⁵ The absence of the *Supplement* from the separate MSS. of *Jómsvíkinga* need not disturb us, for only one of these contains a recension at all similar to that of *Flateyjarbók*.

Albeck's position has been weakened by the suggestion that the correspondences between the *Supplement* and c. 20 of the *Óláfs Saga* of *Flateyjarbók* are due simply to insertions in the latter from the former by the scribe. This has made it unsafe to assume that the points of

¹² *id.*, pp. 29-30.

¹³ *id.*, p. 30, footnote.

¹⁴ *id.*, p. 76.

¹⁵ *id.*, p. 20.

group (2) were present in Styrmir, or were united with any of those of group (1) in any work earlier than *Knytlinga*. If it appears that group (2) may be derived (apart from the Rome journey) by *Knytlinga* from the *Supplement*, Albeck's theory will appear to be incapable of proof, and therefore the possibility that the points of group (2) were so derived by *Knytlinga* must be examined. The relevant points are 1-7 and 12 of the list given by Albeck (pp. 42-3) of elements in *Knytlinga* of undetermined source, but known from other sources. Now 1-7 may very well be directly from the *Supplement*. 12 is the description of the peace of Knútr and Eadmund. Albeck¹⁶ shows that in a number of points it resembles the *Legendary Saga* rather than *Heimskringla*, but two of these (the intervention of the followers of the rivals, and the description of Eadric Streona as Eadmund's foster-father) are found in the *Supplement* also, and one (the explanation of the name *Heiðrekr* as a mixture of *Heimskringla*'s form *Heinrekr* and the *Edrikur* found in *Flateyjarbók*, presumably from Styrmir), although neat, is uncertain. The only outstanding point is the agreement of the *Legendary Saga* and *Knytlinga* in one phrase (*hælmíng lannz*) which is not in the *Supplement*. But Albeck has shown¹⁷ that there was originally an account of this treaty in *Fagrskinna* which is wanting in the extant text, and this may be the source of the expression. We have seen that there may be contact between *Fagrskinna* and *Knytlinga*, and since the *Legendary Saga* and *Fagrskinna* are both developments of the same early saga of Óláfr Helgi, their accounts of the treaty would no doubt be practically identical. It is accordingly likely that all the points of group (2) are derived from the *Supplement* by *Knytlinga*, with a few

¹⁶ *id.*, p. 38.

¹⁷ *id.*, pp. 62-4.

additions relative to the Rome journey and the peace of Knútr and Eadmund from *Fagrskinna*.

It has appeared that the account of Knútr in *Knytlinga*, in so far as it is not derived from Snorri and skaldic verse, may be based mainly upon the *Supplement* and *Fagrskinna*. It has however a good deal of independent information, and no source can safely be suggested for this. One independent element of some bulk is the romantic *þáttur* of Úlfr and Godwine. From this the compiler naturally inferred that Úlfr was in England with Knútr. He mentions this in describing Knútr's invasion, and is the only Norse writer to do so.¹⁸

The possibility that *Knytlinga* uses Styrmir's saga of Óláfr Helgi must now be considered. We have postulated a use of *Fagrskinna* by *Knytlinga* in at least two places, and since *Fagrskinna* derived its account of Óláfr from Styrmir, it is possible that not *Fagrskinna* but Styrmir was the source used by *Knytlinga*, for we have remarked that the other traces of *Fagrskinna*'s influence on *Knytlinga* are poor. If this were the case, other traces of a knowledge of Styrmir by the author of *Knytlinga* would probably be found. Such traces are, in fact, provided by the points of group (4). These are:— (a) The story of Eadmund's mighty blow at Knútr. This is known from *Knytlinga*, where it is placed at the battle of Sherston (which *Knytlinga* knew about from a verse of Óttarr Svarti not used by other sources), and from *Flateyjarbók*'s version of the saga of Óláfr Helgi, where it is supposed to be an insertion from Styrmir. (b) There is a decided similarity between the description of Knútr's attack on London in c. 13 of *Knytlinga* and a passage in *Flateyjarbók*'s saga of Óláfr Helgi, which is usually regarded as an insertion from Styrmir, and another one in the Legendary Saga which is believed to be

¹⁸ c p. above, note 2.

a summary of Styrmir's source. (c) The verses known as *liðsmannaflókkir* were given by Styrmir as Óláfr's work, and are used by *Knytlinga*, although they are there regarded as anonymous poems of the soldiery. (d) There is a slight similarity between the description of the defence of London in c. 13 of *Knytlinga* and another of the supposed passages from Styrmir in the *Óláfs Saga* of *Flateyjarbók*, but here the similarity is due to the fact that a verse of Óttarr (which *Knytlinga* quotes) underlies both passages. Now of all four points only (b) is convincing, because (a) and (c) involve only the common use of respectively a story of popular type and skaldic verse. It might even be argued that the use of (a) at a different point in the narrative, and the failure to attribute the poems mentioned under (c) to Óláfr suggest that *Knytlinga* did not derive these elements from Styrmir. Nevertheless a further point, unnoticed by Albeck, is stronger than all the other points, and with them makes a fairly good case that the author of *Knytlinga* used Styrmir. In the *Legendary Saga* the famous verse of Óttarr, *Kontu í land ok lendir*, is correctly referred to the return of Æthelred to England after Sveinn's death. (The *Legendary Saga* does not quote the verse but its author clearly knew it). This is also the case in *Knytlinga*, c. 7, though *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla* use the verse otherwise. Therefore *Knytlinga* clearly used one of the older versions of the *Óláfs Saga*, and this is most likely to have been the popular one by Styrmir. The case for a use of Styrmir by *Knytlinga* seems, accordingly, to be reasonably good, and we can assume that it was Styrmir, not *Fagrskinna*, that the author of *Knytlinga* used in his accounts of the Rome journey and the peace of 1016. Whether we postulate a use of *Fagrskinna* by *Knytlinga* will, therefore, depend on our subjective estimate of the value of the points of resemblance between the two texts listed by Albeck, pp. 69-70.

It has appeared above that it not possible to prove Albeck's theory that the points of groups (1) and (2) and probably (3) were all derived by the sources in which we find them from a saga of Knútr, which was incorporated by Styrmir into his work on Óláfr Helgi. How far is this view to be regarded as attractive though unprovable? The points of group (1) many reasonably be presumed to have been present in Styrmir. Can group (2) have been present in his work? These points are nos. 1-7 of the list given by Albeck on pp. 42-3, if we neglect the Rome journey, and the 1016 treaty, which have already been fully discussed, and regarded as having been in Styrmir. Nos. 1-7 are rather differently presented by Albeck on pp. 75 bottom — 76 top. Now it will be seen that these points are the story of Knútr's conquest of England as told in the pre-Snorri forms of *Óláfs Saga* with some romantic additions and with Óláfr left out. Now this omission of Óláfr is obviously not due to Styrmir. Albeck assumes¹⁹ that we have in the *Supplement* a summary of *Knúts Saga*, and that both the *Legendary Saga* and (more thoroughly) Styrmir mixed this part of *Knúts Saga* with the story of Knútr and Óláfr in England found in the *Oldest Saga of Óláfr*.²⁰ Then *Knytlinga* removed Óláfr from Styrmir's story (presumably following Snorri's example, cf. Albeck p. 35, lines 14-19), and so produced practically the material which *Supplement* takes from *Knúts Saga*. But this ignores the difficulty that *Knytlinga* could not have achieved an account so similar to that in *Supplement* if it had independently removed Óláfr from the account in an *Óláfs Saga*, and the *Supplement* were using a subsidiary source of the same *Óláfs Saga* into which Óláfr had not been introduced.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 77.

²⁰ He incorrectly claims Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson as support for the view that the *Legendary Saga* is influenced by *Knúts Saga* (see above, note 2).

For, in that case additional elements from the *Óláfs Saga* would have remained in *Knytlinga*, since that saga had no object in suppressing the interesting legend that Knútr and Óláfr, the great rivals, had an early meeting. One must assume, therefore, that it removed Óláfr because the *Supplement* did so, although the meeting in England would have been an excellent prelude to the story of Knútr's rivalry with Óláfr, and that it logically abandoned the attribution of the *liðsmannaflokkr* to Óláfr. Snorri's example would not have caused the removal of Óláfr, for we have seen that *Knytlinga* wisely distrusts Snorri on Óláfs career. The *Supplement* removed Óláfr because it was only concerned to complete *Jómsvíkinga Saga* briefly with an account of the latter days of Thorkell.

We are thus brought back to the view that *Knytlinga* used the *Supplement* directly. It may be remarked as an aside that the reverse cannot be the case, for while both works are based on *Óláfs Saga* material, the *Supplement* is far the closer in expression to *Óláfs Saga* (as seen in the *Legendary Saga*). Hence the descent of the material must be *Óláfs Saga*, *Supplement*, *Knytlinga*.

It appears then that *Knytlinga*'s account of Knútr is based on *Heimskringla*, the *Supplement*, and *Styrmir*, and that perhaps a form of *Fagrskinna* was consulted. The author has made good use of verses not previously used in sagas,²¹ and has a good many stray fragments of information of which the source is unknown.²² We cannot safely attribute to the lost *Knúts Saga* anything not contained in the familiar passage of *Fagrskinna* derived from it, and the possibility that this saga had an account of Knútr's English wars which influenced early

²¹ The author was an intelligent interpreter of skaldic verse: see *Encomium Emmae*, p. 70.

²² Most of these are listed by Albeck, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

forms of the saga of Óláfr Helgi is not capable of proof. The chapter of the Legendary Saga held by Albeck to represent an attempt to incorporate material from *Knúts Saga* is not really very disjointed by the standards of the early sagas of Óláfr, and may well represent a faithful summary of the Oldest Saga.

THE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE OF THE FAROE ISLANDS

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I am very pleased to have this opportunity of speaking to you about the language and culture of the Faroe Islands. These are not subjects which are well-known in this country, or in any other country for that matter, nor is this surprising when one considers that the population of these somewhat remote islands amounts only to 30,000, and hence their share in the momentous events of world history has been very modest indeed. Nevertheless, in the course of my talk, I hope to show you that there are considerations connected with this theme which in importance transcend by far the more limited problems of the specialist study of Faroese.

But first of all, I must be rather technical for a minute or two in order to give you some of the salient facts about the Faroese language. Faroese is the natural speech of all the native inhabitants of the Faroe Islands; it is an official language and known as the *Høvudsmál* or Chief Language, for Danish is also recognised as a second official language. This is because the Faroes are politically an integral part of the Kingdom of Denmark. The islands were colonised in the early part of the Viking Age, apparently in the decades around 800, and linguistic evidence, gathered by Hægstad in *Vestnorske Maalføre*, indicates that the settlers came principally from S.W. Norway. There is some evidence that Irish hermits, and perhaps others, managed to live in the Faroes before the Norsemen came, but they must have soon disappeared, for the Faroese language is purely Scandinavian, that is, a language of the same type as Norwegian, Danish,

Swedish or Icelandic, and like them, a descendant of Old Norse, the speech of the Vikings. There can be no doubt about the genuinely independent position of Faroese as a separate language. It is now phonetically and otherwise so different from the other Scandinavian tongues that a monoglot speaker of Faroese cannot understand a conversation in any other Scandinavian language, except for odd words and a phrase here and there; and vice-versa, no other Scandinavian can understand spoken Faroese without having first learnt it. Structurally, Faroese has considerably simplified the inflexional system of the parent language, Old Norse, though it has not gone anything like so far as have the continental Scandinavian languages; it has remained at a stage corresponding roughly to Middle Norwegian. However, it is written in an orthography constructed in the last century on etymological principles, which does ample justice to the Old Norse origin of the language, so that anyone with a knowledge of Old Norse can soon learn to read Faroese. On the other hand, this orthography is often a nuisance to the Faroese themselves. As a rule, Faroese people spell badly, and school teachers are for ever complaining of the difficulties of teaching their charges to spell.

You will know that the Faroese have always been a nation of peasant-fishermen: only in this century has there come into existence a small group of professional and business people. This state of affairs is faithfully mirrored in the language. We find that it is very rich and expressive as far as practical, homely pursuits are concerned. The people are eloquent speakers and are constantly quoting from their vast stock of proverbial sayings. In some spheres, the degree of precision is astonishing and very perplexing to the foreigner. Thus there are a large number of quite distinct words to denote different kinds of waves and currents in the sea — different, mark you, to the Faroe fisherman, but often

not to the foreign land-lubber — and these words can all form numerous compounds, each of which is associated with special phraseology. Most Faroese people easily recognise species of sea-birds, and the language uses quite different words to distinguish, for instance, the various kinds of gull: thus they say *gneggjus* for “common gull,” *mási* for “herring gull,” *rita* for “three-toed gull,” *bakur* for “greater black-backed gull,” *likka* for “lesser black-backed gull”, yet they have not got a generic word for “gull” — a feature not infrequently found in analogous circumstances in other languages.

Every language has its own lexical peculiarities, and Faroese is no exception. To take one instance. The Faroese word for potato is *epli*; now, as you can perhaps guess, this is really the word for “apple.” The change of meaning has come about as follows. Until this century apples were as good as unknown in the Faroes; in fact I met a fair number of old Faroese people who do not like them. Thus, since apples were unknown a word for them did not exist, at least not in popular use. About 1800, the potato was introduced to the Faroes by the Danes, and naturally enough was called by its Danish name — lit. “earth-apple” — appropriately assimilated to Faroese, i.e. *jørðepli*. Soon the first part of the compound was discarded as superfluous and *epli* alone came to denote “potato.” But then in this century apples made their appearance in the Faroes. So a new word arose to mean apple, namely *súrepli*, lit. “sour apple,” or rather, looking at it from the Faroese point of view, “sour potato.”

Another funny thing about Faroese is the fact that they often call the moon the sun. Actually *sól* is the word for sun and *máni* the word for moon, but in certain circumstances and in certain phrases *sól* is used where you would expect *máni*. May I tell you how I first heard this rather surprising usage? My host at that time, an

elderly man, was telling me at great length and with a wealth of circumstantial detail how they used to slaughter cattle in the olden days. Then referring to bulls, he said: *Tarvurin mátti ikki drepast í avtakandi sól*, which means "The bull had not to be slaughtered in the waning sun." Now, obviously the sun does not wane, only the moon wanes, and the moon was meant in this sentence. Why did the speaker replace the word for moon by the word for sun? Because, there was a superstition in the Faroes, as the sentence itself shows, that it was somehow unwise to slaughter a bull at the time of the waning moon. Clearly the moon was believed to exercise a baleful influence, it was unlucky. As often happens in languages, an object thought to be unlucky is renamed, because it is felt that the name is unlucky too; in other words the name becomes taboo, and is replaced by a harmless euphemism, in this case by the word for sun. The superstition no longer holds as a rule in the Faroes to-day, but the linguistic effect of the original taboo remains, so that in quite a number of expressions the word for sun takes the place of the word for moon.

I mentioned at the beginning that the Faroes are a part of the Kingdom of Denmark; this has been so since 1380. Such a long period of Danish rule has naturally deeply influenced the development of the Faroese language and Faroese culture generally, and we may now turn to a consideration of this most important aspect. It may be safely assumed that the political change of 1380 did not at first leave much mark on the ordinary spoken language in the Faroes. A few documents from the beginning of the 15th century give an idea of the language and show that it was still close to contemporary Norwegian. The islands were poor and uninviting, but political dependence on Denmark was bound to mean that in the long run Faroese would have to face competition from Danish. This became clear at the time of the Reformation and

from 1538 onwards Danish was raised to a dominant position, for it was the sole official language. From this advantageous position Danish was able to exercise an influence over the native language. The use of Danish in official matters meant a corresponding disuse of Faroese, which led in turn to the lack of cultivation and consequent stunting of the Faroese language in this important sphere. In addition, the intensification of Danish exploitation in the Faroes, particularly the Danish monopoly of trade, not only prevented the development of native enterprise, but also apparently caused a decline in the living standards of the Faroese population, a decline which still further lowered the status of the native culture and the native language vis-à-vis the Danish. From this time onwards, Faroese was progressively danicised. Nevertheless, the remoteness of the Faroes, the relatively small alien population, and the mass of traditional ballads which formed the national entertainment were factors which helped the language to preserve its identity. I shall say more about these ballads later on.

Already in 1725, a Faroeman, J. H. Weyhe, had composed a grammar of Faroese, but his manuscript was accidentally destroyed by fire. By the last quarter of the 18th century literary interest in the ballads began in earnest when many of the important ones were committed to writing. The language appeared in print for the first time in 1822, with the publication of a volume of ballads relating to *Sjúrdur* (Siegfried). But this literary interest was almost exclusively antiquarian and the position was still unchanged when V. U. Hammershaimb drew up the orthography now in use and published his outline of Faroese grammar in 1848. Nevertheless, his pioneer work prepared the way for a modern literary language.

At this time the Faroese people were making their opposition to Danish restrictions felt, and in 1856 the

Danish monopoly of trade ceased. After a lull, national consciousness rose to a new level, which boded well for the national language. However, the prestige of Danish could not yet be challenged. It remained without question the official medium. From the point of view of business with Denmark its advantages were undeniable, while on the spiritual side it was strongly entrenched as the language of the Church, or rather, it was now more strongly entrenched than before. In the Faroes, as elsewhere, the last century saw the rise of a movement of deep religious piety. There is plenty of evidence that the mass of the Faroese people regarded the Danish language as sacrosanct, much as others have regarded the Latin of the Medieval Church. Indeed, when on New Year's Eve, 1855, Hammershaimb read out his Faroese version of a passage of scripture to the congregation in the village of Kvívík, the people were so exasperated and hostile that he preferred not to repeat the experiment. In this connection one can hardly fail to reflect how all this stands in curious contrast to the position in other places where small national groups cling most tenaciously to their native tongue for religious purposes. To take only the example of Wales, it is clear that the Celtic enthusiasm of the Methodist revival, coming at a critical time in the history of Welsh culture, raised the language out of the neglect and degeneration to which officialdom had condemned it, and helped to carry it forward, enriched and vigorous, into the present century.

As with religion, so it was with school education, which became general in the last century. Naturally this was based on Danish text-books and so the Faroese people acquired their whole knowledge of things other than those pertaining to the daily routine through the medium of Danish. Soon the position was reached where they tended to become literate in a foreign language, but remained quite illiterate in the language they habitually

spoke — a position not without parallel in certain Celtic-speaking areas to-day. But since the native population remained in the over-whelming majority, always assimilating the second generation of new settlers, no matter how much the language absorbed Danish elements or how much it was despised in some quarters, it remained the natural spoken medium everywhere, and its persistence in this fashion meant that a conflict between the languages was always a possibility.

Anti-Danish feeling became again articulate about 1875. Independence movements in Norway and Iceland, which had previously been administered by the Danish Crown, had been successful or partly successful, and many leading Faroemen studied the role which the native languages of Norway and Iceland were playing in the wider movement for national self-expression and political independence. Consequently it was the nationalist movement in the Faroes which took up the language question and made it an issue which came more and more to the front as the century drew to a close. By this time a few books in Faroese had made their appearance, and in 1899, through the self-sacrifice of two Faroemen, a Folk High School was opened with Faroese as the medium of instruction. The formation in 1906 of a strongly-supported home-rule party with its demand for the official recognition of Faroese resulted in an intensification of the language struggle — for a struggle it now was. The Faroese people were becoming thoroughly conscious of themselves as a nation, albeit a small one, and as such entitled to the customary rights of nationhood. Faroese began to displace Danish in the Church. A modern literature was appearing. It is only fair to note that Danish policy did not encourage these tendencies. Much bitterness was caused by official penalties sometimes imposed by the Danes, such as the dismissal of Jákup Dahl, then a teacher, later *próstur* in the Faroes, for using

the native language during his lessons instead of Danish as prescribed by law (Royal Decree of 16th January, 1912, § 7). In the twenties of this century, the newspapers began to print more and more articles in Faroese, and to accept advertisements in that language. Later on almost the whole press became exclusively Faroese. To-day there are four Faroese-language newspapers, each appearing twice or thrice a week, so it is possible to buy at least one Faroese-language newspaper every day of the week. In addition there is a newspaper edited mainly in Danish, but this always contains a fair amount of Faroese material as well. The great distance of the Islands from Denmark favoured the development of a local, that is a national press, and in this respect the Faroes have been more fortunate than, for instance, the more easily accessible Celtic countries, none of which have been able to establish similar newspapers in the national tongue. During the thirties Faroese made good progress in internal business correspondence and was employed to some extent in public administration. All these tendencies received a new impetus during the period of the British occupation from 1941 to 1946, when the Islands were temporarily severed from Denmark and the *Løgting* assumed governmental responsibility. A great increase in the national wealth during the war — derived mainly from the fishing industry — brought with it a corresponding increase of national prestige which further fortified the position of the national tongue, so that in the Constitution of 1947, Faroese becomes the "Chief Language" with full legal rights in every sphere, though Danish continues to be recognised as the second official language.

Thus Faroese, emerging from centuries of obscurity, has at last conquered for itself a recognised place as the fifth Scandinavian language. Since it is now official, it can demand a respect and attention it could not claim

before. All the portents indicate that it will maintain and strengthen its position. There used to be a Danish literary circle in Tórshavn, but it is now no more. Gone are the days when Faroe was the only place where the use of Danish was a sign of good breeding, as some patriotic Danish wit is alleged to have said in reference to the adulation many of his countrymen were then showing to German. In a word, Faroese is coming into its own more and more. I have referred to the use of Danish as a second official language, but I must add that its use, as far as internal Faroese matters go, is confined almost solely to officials who are actually Danes. But native Faroese are now obtaining official posts in greater numbers than formerly. It seems to me, as an outside observer, that the importance of Danish as a language of administration is bound to diminish further, until one day, perhaps, it will lose its official status altogether, leaving the national language as the sole recognised medium. If that day comes, and I for one think it will, the Faroes will be following the example of Iceland, a country much admired by the Faroese. Of course, this will not be a narrow, academic issue. I have no doubt that it will be an important political decision. But that will be nothing new in the history of Faroese. I think I have said enough to show you that the Faroese language has only emancipated itself as a result of long struggle. The language has thus played a part in the national life and in politics in a way in which we can hardly imagine if we are acquainted with our own country only. Very definitely, small nations have cultural problems which we English people, for instance, do not have, so that if we wish to acquire some understanding of the aspirations of these small national groups, we need to be sympathetically aware of their special problems. I am sure that many of you will feel with me that Faroese has deserved its successes so far, and that its elevation to official standing

is morally what ought to be. I also think that it is not only morally right, but also a necessity, for in all countries the only possible medium for the unfolding of the national culture is the native language.

Having now given an outline of the history of the language, I should like to say something about Faroese culture as it is expressed in the native literature.

The best-known and most striking product of this literature is the ballads or *kvæðir*. Many of these are medieval, the oldest dating from about 1300, and in their performance we have the ancient unity of song and dance. A ballad is usually quite long, with say a hundred verses. These are sung by a leader or precentor, who stands in the middle of the ring formed by the dancers, while they move round him, joining in the refrain which follows each verse. The Faroes have preserved by oral transmission alone about two hundred of these ballads from the Middle Ages, some of them having hundreds of verses, and about ninety different tunes have been handed down too. When we remember that the population of the Faroes during the 18th century was only 5000, we can realise what a truly vital thing this ballad literature must have been and how it must have formed an integral part of the national culture.

The ballads deal with familiar medieval themes. Some are old in the North, such as the story of Sjúrdur or Angantýr; others again are more recent there, such as the tales dealing with Charlemagne and Tristram. Ballads similar to these were once widely known throughout Scandinavia, as also in Great Britain. Indeed, it is not unlikely that the material for many of the Faroese ballads found its way north from Scotland via the Orkneys and Shetlands. This would not be a difficult matter, for Orkney and Shetland were at this time still Norn-speaking. But, whereas everywhere else the ballad combination of song and dance as a living vogue disappeared long ago,

it survived in the Faroes as the ubiquitous popular pastime down to the beginning of the present century. All the older generation remember with longing how in every village a large room or an outhouse was set aside for dancing during the winter evenings. But just after the turn of the century, this pastime began to lose its attraction and gradually fell into disuse as a regular feature of village life. This was because the communal spirit, which had been so characteristic of social life, began to weaken perceptibly. In former times, a very large amount of the essential work, such as bird-catching, sheep-tending, fishing, whale- and seal-hunting, milking (when the cows were wandering in the open), clearing paths and building houses, was done more or less communally and the whole village partook of the fruits of this collective labour. There are plenty of reminiscences of this older state of affairs in the Faroes to-day. For instance, on some islands, at least a part of the sheep are owned in common by the whole population. In some places, whenever birds' eggs are taken, a portion of these, the so-called "land-part," must be distributed freely to all members of the community, young and old, regardless of whether or not they have done anything towards getting the eggs in the first place. However, the foundations of this communal life were shaken by modern developments. The beginning of deep-sea fishing in the closing decades of the last century drew an ever-increasing number of the most vigorous men away from their villages for months at a time. These men naturally began to look as much to their cash earnings for their security as to the communal pursuits of their villages. A feeling of personal independence inevitably followed, and modern life with its lure of ready money has confirmed this trend, so that to-day in the Faroese villages the hazards of individualism have largely triumphed over the older communal spirit. Now the ballad is essentially a

communal pastime; it caters for and in fact almost demands the participation of all. Hence when the spirit to which it gave artistic expression declined, it was bound to decline itself. Nowadays, Faroese dancing is only to be seen at festivals or on some other special occasion, such as at a wedding or after a successful whale-hunt. Perhaps it may one day be possible to restore the *baliad*, but society will have to change again, I think, if it is to become a really living genre once more. It is no exaggeration to say that the ballad has been an inseparable part of Faroese life and a characteristic expression of its culture. It is not surprising that such a popular form included in its repertoire not only the age-old, ever-recurring motives of love, hate, treachery etc., but also themes drawn from the peculiar social life of the islanders. In fact, the Faroese recognise a special subdivision of the ballads, those which deal with topical Faroese matters, and they call them *tættir*. Sometimes *tættir* have been composed to lampoon some unco-operative village character or to describe the adventures of a rejected suitor. Sometimes also the *tættir* condemn corruption and other sorts of social injustice. You will perhaps have inferred from what I have already said about nationalism and the stormy history of the Faroese language that a large number of Faroese do not have a high opinion of the Danish officials who work among them. It is an indisputable fact that the Faroese people have often deeply resented the actions of the Danish administration and that Danish officials have from time to time incurred the displeasure of the natives. It is important to remember that the Danes are everywhere in the Faroes felt to be foreigners. Mention of these things brings me now to the most famous of all *tættir*, the so-called "Ballad of the Birds," for it was opposition to Danish policy and Danish officialdom which inspired its composition. The author, Nólsoyar-Páll, lived from 1766 to 1809. He

managed to travel widely as a sailor and to engage in trade in defiance of the Danish monopoly, sailing in a ship he had salvaged — the first ship to be owned by a Faroeman since the Middle Ages. Needless to say, Páll had many an encounter with the Danish authorities, who sometimes got the better of him. This enraged Páll, who alleged that some of the Danes were also breaking the king's law in the same way as he was. At this time he wrote the "Ballad of the Birds." The birds of prey such as the falcon, the merlin, the skua, the raven and the crow are various identifiable Danish officials. The small or peaceful birds, such as the starlings, puffins, terns, guillemots and so on are the native Faroese who live in fear of the predatory officials. The hero of the ballad is the oyster-catcher — in reality Páll himself — who constantly warns the small birds of the approach of their enemies and if necessary attacks them. I am not going to pretend that Nólsoyar-Páll was a Faroese nationalist aiming at political independence; that position was never reached in his time. But what Páll did was to resist and attempt to defeat the trade monopoly, which he recognised as being in part responsible for the backwardness and poverty of the Islands. Since Páll's day the oyster-catcher has been the national bird in the Faroes and the ever-green popularity of the ballad leaves us in no doubt as to how highly the Faroese themselves have always thought of their hero in their fight against monopoly restrictions.

Besides the more famous ballads, the Faroes also possess an interesting folk-tale literature. This has not been so well preserved, but it is none the less an important source of information about Faroese life in olden times. These tales have been collected chiefly by Hammershaimb, the man I mentioned as the creator of the modern orthography, and by Jacobsen, a most distinguished philologist, who also wrote the standard work on the Norn language

of Shetland. These folk-tales are often full of fantastical accounts of battles with trolls and nixies, of the good deeds of fairies, of the power of charms and enchantments and so on, but they often contain matter of social significance also. Thus, priests usually come in for criticism, being mostly depicted as greedy and often as cruel men. They wax fat on the produce of the church land, which is usually represented as having passed into the possession of the church owing to some fault of the previous owner; the commonest of these faults being the eating of a shoulder of mutton during Lent. To-day a considerable portion of the land in the Faroes is held by the Danish Crown and is let for a nominal rent to the cultivator. The tales likewise often treat the acquisition of such land by the Crown as due to some chance misfortune on the part of the former owner, who, for instance, may die without having nominated an heir, and then the land passes into the hands of the king.

Many of the tales relate to known historical facts. Quite a number deal with the cruelties of the Turkish pirates who savaged the islands in the 16th and 17th centuries. These tales are what they call "horrific" at the pictures, so I won't say more about them now. Other stories tell of the Black Death which reached the Faroes from Bergen. Here is a very short one with a really modern, happy ending :—

"During the Black Death all the inhabitants of the village of Saksun died except one farm-girl. When the spring came she made her way to the Thing in order to make good her claim to the whole village. She pleaded her case well, and the Thingmen had to admit that the law was on her side. Yet it was obvious that a woman was herself incapable of doing all the work that would be necessary on such a large property. Therefore they decided to confer it upon her, but only on condition that she chose a husband there and then. This condition

pleased the girl as much as getting the property did; she took a look round and saw a young man from Hestur. She went up to him, and proposed to him, and he, nothing loath, agreed. It is said that their sturdy descendents live in Saksun to this day."

Some of the tales refer to more or less recognisable historical persons. One cannot vouch for the accurate historicity of these persons, of course, but I would like to read out to you a fairly literal translation of two short tales as they have been printed by Jacobsen in his collection *Sagnir og Aevintýr*. Both the stories are primarily about women; the name of the first is Annika.

"Annika, the daughter of the bailiff of Sand Island, was the farmer's wife on Dímun Island. She did away with her husband and took one of the farmhands in his stead. For this she was adjudged to death, but she did not intend to submit to the judgment and set men to defend the island so that that none might gain access. There are two ascents on Dímun, one on the east side and one on the west side, and men were set to guard each way up. For three years she guarded the island and denied access to all, both to the authorities and others; but at length one of those on guard betrayed her. A boat had come into Broad Ness Bay on the eastern side, and the crew climbed up. A man from Nólsoy led the expedition. He had forfeited his life, but the court had promised to rescind the sentence if he could lay hands on the woman on Dímun and bring her to Tórshavn. Just as she was standing preparing a bowl of porridge, and when there was no one to protect her, men came upon her — among them her own father. She gave herself up, for now she had no means of resisting. She threw the porridge-spoon into the face of the man she had had, as thanks for the way he had looked after things. She then asked her father which dress she should wear: the red one, the blue one or the green one. That was not particularly important, her

father thought, for she was not invited to a wedding. Then she was taken and brought to Tórshavn. As the men went off with her, she called out that her little son was not to be deprived of that which she was wont to give him every morning: a sup of freshly curdled cream. Her end was that she was condemned to death by drowning in Tórshavn Bay. At first she floated; so her long hair was cut off, and then she sank to the bottom."

The next one is not quite so tragic. The name of the lady this time is Beinta.

"Beinta, the judge's daughter, was married to three priests, one after the other. She was renowned for her beauty and many a man became infatuated with her. But though she was like an angel on the outside, she was the very devil inside and all three men she married suffered an evil fate. Before she first married and afterwards when she was a widow, it was her custom to go down to the shore at Tórshavn each time a ship was expected in from Denmark with a new priest for the Faroes on board. Then she would stand in all her finery in front of the priest when he stepped ashore. In this way she became betrothed to the three priests. Her first husband was Jónas and they went to live at Ónagerði. Beinta worked the servants so hard that this has passed into a proverb. That is why, whenever we see a terribly thin person, we say: 'He looks as though he came from Ónagerði when Beinta was there.' After a time Beinta began to tire of her husband. Jónas was a widower when he married her, so Beinta took earth from the grave of the first wife and put it under his pillow. So then the first wife began to haunt him and that sent him crazy. Soon he was lying on his death-bed, and when he asked for a cold drink he got a hot one, and when he asked for a hot drink he got a cold one."

Well there's a lot more about Beinta, and how she got on with her other husbands, and how one day an infuriated

servant angered at her treatment of his master seized his mistress and threw her bodily into a tub of lye — *tvagtunna*. If you know anything about washing in the Middle Ages you will know what was in the tub — but it is time to leave this part of my talk.

Now, before I close, I should like to say a little about the place of Faroese to-day in academic studies. Here Denmark has taken the lead. Since 1935, there has been a special lecturer in Faroese at Copenhagen University. The lecturer, Dr. Christian Matras, is himself a Faroeman, who has been particularly active both as a research scholar and as a popularising writer. I am glad to be able to tell you that in April, 1951, it was decided to create a chair of Faroese at Copenhagen, so that Dr. Matras becomes the first professor of this subject. Now, to compare great things with very small ones, Faroese has been introduced at the University of Birmingham, in a very modest way of course. It is an alternative subject to Old Norse in the syllabus of the Honours School of English and Germanic Philology.¹ There are, I suppose, two reasons for the study of Old Norse; firstly for its linguistic value, and secondly for the exceptional cultural and literary merit of its texts. On the linguistic side, Old Norse presents us with a picture of an early form of the northern branch of the Germanic languages. However, this form already represents a big advance on Primitive Germanic, so that a considerable amount of additional work has to be done before the student can explain the specific Norse innovations. It is true that Faroese is still further removed from Primitive Germanic, but the archaic character of its orthography gives it an obvious Old Norse appearance, while the special Faroese developments do not obscure the essential features of Norse speech. Thus, from the point of view

¹ Dr. Ernst Krenn has just informed me that he has begun lecturing on Faroese literature in the University of Vienna.

of undergraduate studies in Germanic philology, Faroese may not inconveniently be an alternative to Old Norse.

While I am breaking a lance for Faroese, I might as well add that Faroese has this to commend it: There is no other Germanic language which so badly needs the specialist attention of competent philologists. Consider for a moment just one aspect of Faroese linguistic studies — that of lexicography. There exists only one dictionary of Faroese. It is an excellent work, but as the authors say in their preface, the book contains but a portion of the whole vocabulary in use. Since the appearance of this dictionary in 1927, Professor Matras, in particular, has been gathering further material, but still a great part of the vocabulary known to be in use remains to be recorded. This is an unfortunate situation, for it is clear that so long as much of the Faroese material is inaccessible to scholars, philological studies are deprived of a source of valuable information. May I give one or two illustrations of a purely formal kind to show how Faroese can help, for instance, in the interpretation of English words? Take the common English word “cut,” first occurring at the end of the 13th century. Here we have a word of disputed provenance. It has been regarded as coming from French; some have postulated a Scandinavian origin. This latter seemed the more reasonable, although a difficulty lay in the fact that the presumed cognate existed only in the more remote Eastern Scandinavian, to wit in Swedish dialects, whereas there was nothing comparable in Western Scandinavian. However Faroese clears up the matter! There is in Faroese, which is of course Western Scandinavian, spoken by the descendants of the same stock as the vikings who settled in England, a common word *kvetta* meaning “cut” in a figurative sense, i.e. “to cut the conversation”. This information seems to establish the Scandinavian origin of the English word beyond any doubt. While I was in the Faroes two

years ago I took down a number of hitherto unrecorded words, one of which was the verb *fubba*, meaning "exaggerate, tell lies." I thought at once of English "fib," and in due course turned to the Oxford English Dictionary, to find that the origin of "fib" is not known. The Dictionary knows of nothing similar in other Germanic languages and makes a guess that it may be an abbreviation of a now obsolete word "fible-fable." But since a word looking suspiciously like the English turns up in Faroese, we are entitled to suspect that "fib" is perhaps after all an ancient part of the Germanic vocabulary which has happened to survive only in English and Faroese. One last example, our word "newfangled." Actually in older English the word was "newfangle," without the 'd,' and it has been conjectured that the word is a compound of "new" and "*fangle", the latter being derived from a stem, formerly common in English, but now forgotten, which had the meaning "catch," so that the original meaning of "newfangled" was something like "being prone to catch new things." However, this would remain a conjecture did we not possess, quite uniquely, the Faroese verb *fanglast*, constructed with a similar suffix to the postulated English "*fangle." Suppose you were sitting in a Faroese house and a little child came in and, as children do, started to handle and play about with ornaments in the room or with things on the table, you would hear some one reprove the child and perhaps say: *Fanglast ikki við hasum!* which means roughly: "Stop catching hold of those things." It is reassuring to observe how Faroese confirms a good etymological conjecture in this way. To be sure, there is no reference to any of these three Faroese words in the Oxford English Dictionary, or in any other etymological dictionary as far as I know. The point I am making is this that Faroese has still a lot to tell even about elementary formal matters, such as

Germanic etymology. I am sure that Faroese will prove to be a most rewarding hunting-ground for linguistic studies of all kinds.

If now we undertake to compare the respective values of Old Norse and Faroese literature, we must concede that the former is by far the richer. But the literature of the Faroes is by no means insignificant. Had time permitted, I could have told something about the small, but increasing band of modern writers, among whom at least two can rank with the best — the story-teller Heðin Brú and the late Janus Djurhuus, who excelled as a lyric poet. It is unfortunate and misleading that the Oxford Book of Scandinavian Verse should ignore the poetry of the smallest of the Scandinavian nations. However, you will realise from what has been said that the ballad literature of the Faroes is certainly worthy of anybody's attention; indeed one might well say that its unique features compel attention. It is precisely this uniqueness which, in my opinion, constitutes its importance.

I am fully aware that the sphere of Faroese culture is only a very tiny one. I am certainly not forgetting that the Faroese nation is the smallest in Europe. But I hold that Faroese national culture has its own qualitative peculiarities, which belong to it only, and which are found nowhere else. It is these which go to make the Faroese contribution to the common treasury of world culture, supplementing and enriching it. And speaking in this sense, I believe that all nations are as equals, be they great or ever so small.

THE BEGINNINGS OF RUNIC STUDIES IN ENGLAND.

By J. A. W. BENNETT.

WHEN the Tudor and Stuart antiquaries who were the founders of Old English studies began to examine the Anglo-Saxon MSS. that came into their hands, they were quick to notice, if not to understand, the runic futharks that some of these MSS. have preserved for us. Thus, Richard Talbot — we have Mr. N. Ker's and Dr. C. Wright's authority for believing that it was he¹ — when he came upon the futhark in the MS. that is now Domitian A ix, copied out the rune-names there given, and their Latin glosses; and Thomas James, Sir Robert Cotton's librarian, transcribed the late runic alphabet in the manuscript that we know as Titus D xviii into the note-book which is now MS. James 6 in the Bodleian. At the same time, other antiquaries were beginning to take note of runic inscriptions. Daniel Rogers, who was Elizabeth's envoy to Denmark and made several journeys to that country, saw the Tryggevælde stone, and had a copy of its inscription, as well as of three alphabets which are described as 'Gothic' but may have been runic, as Miss Seaton implies they were.² William Camden knew of the runic monument at Jellinge in Jutland, an account of which Peter Lindberg had published in 1591; and Camden was the first of these scholars to recognise a runic inscription in England — that on the Bridekirk font, of which he gives an imperfect reproduction in the 1607 edition of his *Britannia*. He could not interpret the inscription, but he saw that the characters resembled

¹ Cf. *Medium Aevum* v. 149, vi. 170.

² E. Seaton, *Literary Relations of England and Scandinavia in the Seventeenth-Century*, Oxford, 1935, p. 223.

those on the Jellinge stone. In a note accompanying a copy of the inscription (and presumably sent to Sir Robert Cotton) he says: 'This inscription was in a stone found at Papcastle and now made a fontstone at Bridekirk; it is a curiositie wrought with fair and gallant purenes. I send it to you for the barbarouse straingnes of the characters . . . ³ And in 1615 (not in 1608, as usually stated) Cotton sent to Camden a copy of the inscription on the epistyle fragment of the Bewcastle cross that is now lost. Lord William Howard had sent Cotton this fragment via the Earl of Arundel. Three manuscripts of it by Cotton are extant, and we thus owe to him the preservation of this part of the runic text [RICÆS DRYHTNÆS].⁴ Cotton has added 'out of my Alphabetts' (by which I suppose he means those in Dom. A ix or Tit. D xviii) the Roman-letter equivalents of all the runes save Y (which is not very clear in his copy); he gives these equivalents correctly except for C, which he misreads — again forgivably — as an N.

It was this fragment that roused Sir Henry Spelman's interest in runes. When in 1628 Spelman 'discovered' Ole Worm he was reminded of this inscription, and through Palle Axelsen (Palæomon Rosenkrantz, the Danish Ambassador) began a lively correspondence on the subject of runes with this great Danish scholar. In the course of this correspondence Spelman hit upon the correct etymology of the word 'rune' itself, suggesting correctly that it is connected with the OE. *ryne*, 'a secret thing.' Worm conceded that this was a possible etymology, and went so far as to print Spelman's decisive letter on the subject in his *Literatura Runica*, 1636;⁵ and

³ MS. Cott. Jul. ciii f. 305.

⁴ The copies are in Cott. Dom. xvii, f. 37, Jul. F. vi f. 313 and Bodl. MS. Smith I (a copy of the *Britannia* which bears Cotton's signature, and was given by Thomas Smith, Cottonian Librarian, to Thomas Hearne).

⁵ Worm himself made a précis of this work for Spelman; it is now in B.M. Add. 34,600.

it is reprinted in Spelman's own posthumous *Glossarium Archaiologicum*, 1664. But Worm never fully admitted defeat on the point, and later scholars were slow to accept or even notice Spelman's view: Junius once tried to derive the word from *Rugini*; Mabillon does not mention Spelman's derivation; and Leibnitz tried to derive the word from *Romani*, or from *rhythmus*. In many quarters the word retained a vague signification till the nineteenth century.

In the seventeenth century 'Runic' was regarded as a separate language, the language in which all Old Norse literature had originally been written: hence Junius's inclusion of runic forms in his various dictionaries. But Junius knew more than anyone else in England about runes, and it was his interest in them that was responsible for what advances there were at the close of the century. In his preface to the *Gothicum Glossarium* (1665) he devotes fourteen pages to a discussion of Runic—including a table of runes and their meanings, and the text of the Norwegian Runic Poem, with a transliteration and interpretation—all based on Worm's *Literatura Runica* and on his *Fasti*, though Junius's commentary does not always agree with Worm's—and some of his independent suggestions are often worth consideration. He often cites what he calls 'cimbric' (i.e. runic) forms in the body of the *Glossarium* itself. Several of his manuscripts testify to his continued interest in runes. MS. Junius 14 once contained his copy of the Bridekirk font inscription, though it is not there now. Thomas Marshall, co-editor with Junius of the Anglo-Saxon and Gothic Gospels, and later Rector of Lincoln College, continued the study, and writing to Sir William Dugdale Junius states that Marshall 'hath gott and still doth gett manie Runike monuments I could never meet with'.⁶

⁶ Dugdale, *Correspondence*, CXLVI (3 Feb., 1668).

In a letter to Marshall in 1668 Junius says that he is sending him an 'Ishlandish dictionarie: not doubting but you shall then trie what the meaning is of the Runik inscription Mr. Dugdale and your other antiquaries desire to know the interpretation [of].'⁷ I take it that he is referring to the Bridekirk font.

Where Junius had led the way Hickes was not slow to follow. In the Anglo-Saxon Grammar, and in the general preface to the *Thesaurus* he has several discussions of runes. And it was with his approval that Wanley prepared the six fine plates entirely devoted to runes that stand at the beginning of the Icelandic Grammar. In these plates the various futharks are arranged according to whether they appear in stone, in continental or Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, or in printed sources. For continental futharks Wanley relied largely on Worm's collections, but he added the one printed by Lazius in his *De Gentium Migratione* (1692). The English manuscripts Wanley used — Otho B x, Galba A II, Dom. A IX, St. John's Oxford 17, Junius I and the Exeter MS. of Hrabanus Maurus — remain among the most important sources of English runes known to us. Wanley can be trusted not to have overlooked anything else of value. Since the first two of the manuscripts he used have perished, the *Thesaurus*, as so often, is the sole source of our information concerning them and their runic contents. Wanley does not give the names of the runes in his plates, except in the case of the difficult ones.

The plates of alphabets are followed by drawings of the Ruthwell Cross inscriptions, and facsimiles based on tracings by Wanley of the two passages in the Exeter Book containing Cynewulf's signature in runes (which both Hickes and Wanley failed, rather oddly, to recognise), together with the riddles containing runes that are also found in this MS.

⁷ Bodl. MS. Marshall 134, f. 9 (7 Feb., 1668).

In the first chapter of the Icelandic section of his *Thesaurus* Hickes gives engravings of two Runic stones from Uppland which John Robinson, Resident and Ambassador to Sweden from 1689-1702, had brought back on one of his return trips to this country, and, like the loyal Oxonian he was, deposited in the Ashmolean Museum, where they are still to be seen. Hickes adds a full description of these stones, and an accurate translation of their Norse inscriptions. On the plate opposite p. viii of the Anglo-Saxon Grammar in the *Thesaurus* is a drawing of Aethred's ring, then in the possession of Hans Sloane, and now in the British Museum; this ring, which is also illustrated on p. 115 of the *British Museum Guide to Anglo-Saxon Antiquities*, bears the legend, in a mixture of Latin and runic letters, ÆTHRED MEC AH EANRED MEC AGROF. The runic forms here baffled Hickes, who misinterprets (p. xiii). Nor could he make anything of the runes on the Sutton Shield which he reproduces at the end of the *Dissertatio Epistolaris*; but I do not think that modern scholars have made anything of them either.

What we are grateful to Hickes for is his text, printed from Wanley's transcript, of the Old English *Runic Poem* in the Cotton MS. Otho B x which was burnt in the fire of 1731. Hickes thought that the runes were a Danish aristocratic writing, and that the poem was written to expound them to the English. But he makes it quite clear that he himself has added the roman letter equivalents and the names (*nomina*). The poem occupies p. 135 of the Anglo-Saxon Grammar, and is followed by a table of the runes, and rune-names, in Dom. A ix.

It will be seen that practically all the runic material in the *Thesaurus* was contributed by Wanley. And it is to Wanley's Preface to the Catalogue of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts (Part II of the *Thesaurus*) that we must turn for the first ordered account of the history of runes

in England. In this Preface, written some years after Hickes's grammatical section of the *Thesaurus* had been printed off, Wanley sets forth his belief that runes were brought to England by the Anglo-Saxons, giving as his reasons the use of runes by other Germanic peoples, the appearance of runic letters in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, and the inclusion of *þorn* and *wyn* in Anglo-Saxon script. He goes on to explain how their use declined with the coming of Christianity and the Roman script, and became confined to stone or metal inscriptions, magical formulas, and — he is clearly thinking of the Exeter Book — to riddles.

Wanley thus lifted runes out of the realm of conjecture into that of serious study. He made a careful note of every occurrence of runic letters in the manuscripts he catalogued: his copy of Smith's Catalogue of the Cottonian Manuscripts⁸ contains his notes on all such manuscripts in that collection; and his researches led him beyond the question of the use of runes in England: on Plate III, Table 2, of the *Thesaurus* he gives a diagrammatic representation of the hypothetical derivation of runes from Greek and Latin letters, thus forestalling von Friesen. And in a letter to Hickes, dated 6 March, 1697/8⁹ he traces in detail the origin of each letter form, noting at the end that ' 'Tis so much the harder to guess at the originall of these letters in that we (in England) have no book written in them, whereby we might see in what manner the hand directed the Pen in forming them; and by the variety, seeing the same letter very often, know which is the Essential part of it, and which stroke is left to chance.' We are more sceptical nowadays about the existence of runic manuscripts and about the precise derivations Wanley proposes; but he indicated a fruitful approach. Before he was twenty-five Wanley had out-distanced

⁸ Now Gough London 154 in the Bodleian.

⁹ Bodl. MS. *Eng. hist.* c. 6, f. 21.

Worm, who had made the study of runes his lifework.¹⁰ We may note here that Wanley's belief in the existence of Runic manuscripts must have been strengthened by a supposed Runic manuscript which appears in facsimile in Vol. I of the *Thesaurus*. This Runic fragment of *Hjálmars Saga* we now know to be a forgery, but Hickes printed it in good faith, and more than one Scandinavian scholar was deceived by it. It has a curious and complicated history. It had been first published by Lucas Halpap, who claimed to have found the original manuscript in a farmhouse, and who added a Swedish translation. In 1700 Peringskiöld had republished it with a transliteration and a translation into Swedish and Latin. Hickes had already agreed with Edward Thwaites, one of his main helpers in the *Thesaurus*, to include a text based on Halpap's, when one of Thwaites's Swedish friends sent him a copy of Peringskiöld's edition. Hickes's text as we have it is an exact reprint of Peringskiöld's save that Hickes prints the Latin and an Icelandic translation side by side and omits the Swedish version. When mistaken ideas about the use of runes in manuscripts were so prevalent, it is not to be expected that Hickes should have doubted the authenticity of this saga; and there is no evidence that he ever learnt of the doubts that Sperling, Benzeliuſ, and Celsius cast on its genuineness — doubts confirmed by C. G. Nordin's careful analysis of the text in 1774, when he proved that it is a forgery compiled from *Gautreks Saga* and *Hervarar Saga* with the help of Worm's *Specimen Lexici Runici* and Verelius's *Index Linguae Gothicae*.

One other scholar besides Wanley contributed runic

¹⁰ I have not been able to identify the 'two stones with Runic Letters' which he mentions in his Diary (B.M. MS. Lansdowne 771) under date 25 Nov., 1721 as having been sent to Wimpole; or the 'band or scepter with many Runic Letters on it' mentioned in his annotations to his copy of Nicolson's *English Historical Library* (Bodl. H. 9. 5. Art) as having been brought from Ireland to London by Sir Andrew Fountaine.

material to the *Thesaurus*. This was the indefatigable William Nicolson, Canon and future Bishop of Carlisle, and the first teacher of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford. In 1684 Dr. William Musgrave had communicated the Bridekirk inscription to the Royal Society; Dugdale consulted Nicolson about it, and in the letter printed on p. 841 of Gibson's edition of Camden's *Britannia* (1695), Nicolson offers the emended version and interpretation which is reprinted on Plate II of the Icelandic Grammar in the *Thesaurus*.¹¹

Nicolson is also responsible for the fairly faithful, though incomplete, copy of the Ruthwell Cross inscription which appears on Plate IV of the Icelandic Grammar (cf. pp. 5, 198). He had first heard of this in September 1690, from the Rev. James Lawson. In April, 1697, he went to see the cross for himself, and found all the inscriptions 'very fair and legible, and almost entire.' He was very excited by this discovery and forthwith sent copies to Thoresby, Edward Lluyd, William Elstob and Arthur Charlett, and even to Winding and Peringskiöld in Sweden, in the hope that one or other could interpret it. He was obviously baffled by it himself, and wrote to Thwaites: 'You, that are skilled in Cædmon's dialect, cannot fail of being the best interpreter of such monuments.' He hoped to pay another visit in the summer of 1698, and to publish his results in the *Transactions of the Royal Society*. But he was unable to make the journey, and on second thoughts decided that it would be more appropriate for the inscription to appear in the *Thesaurus*: ' 'twould be out of countenance amongst the physical experiments of Lewenhoeck etc.'¹² He did eventually make a second

¹¹ It is perhaps worth picking up one of the few crumbs Miss Seaton has not collected, and noting that Ralph Thoresby, the Leeds historian, saw the inscription *in situ* in 1694: 'the honest parson was very obliging in showing us the famous font and register where one of his predecessors had writ a small account of it but without any knowledge of the letters' (*Diary*, p. 271).

¹² Bodl. MS. Rawl. D. 377, f. 96; 20 Oct., 1698.

visit in 1704, when he noticed some interesting new details, and sent a full account of the cross to Thwaites, with a fresh draft of the inscription; he could then read *Angelus* clearly after *ingressus*.¹³ But the plate for the *Thesaurus* had been printed by this time: hence the runes for *uuŋ* which he now made out on the fourth legend (*bismærædu uŋket*) do not appear in it.

Other travellers followed in Nicolson's track. In 1726 Alexander Gordon published two plates of the cross in his *Itinerarium Septentrionale*. But he adds no transliteration of the runes, of the meaning of which he was ignorant: occasionally his readings are better than Nicolson's, but sometimes they are worse. Pennant's account in his *Tour in Scotland*, 1772, is based on Gordon's, and he gives no plate. But he mentions 'fragments of a capital, with letters similar to the others, and on each opposite side an eagle, neatly cut in relief.'¹⁴

Nicolson also paid some attention to the inscription on the Bewcastle Cross. In 1685 he sent to Obadiah Walker at Oxford the account of that cross which was subsequently printed on p. 843 of Gibson's edition of the *Britannia*. In this he reproduces all the runes that he could read, but makes little of them; he gets as near as *Rynburi* for the *CYNIBURUG* of the North side. He hoped to deal more fully with the inscription in Part VI of his history of Northumberland; but that work was never published. On the 9th September, 1691, he sent to Thoresby the nine lines on the West face. If this letter could be traced it might be valuable, as only eight lines can now be clearly read — indeed, if we are to believe a recent report, the whole of the inscription is in danger of disappearing.

Earlier in the same year Thoresby had sent a coin with

¹³ *Ibid.*, f. 25.

¹⁴ Part of the Ruthwell inscription appears in miniature at the foot of Vertue's engraving of Junius's portrait which faces the title-page of Lye's edition of the *Etymologicon Anglicanum*, 1743.

a runic inscription for Nicolson's comments. Nicolson made out most of the runes easily enough ('I never yet saw any Runic Inscription so plain and intelligible,' he says in his reply),¹⁵ but he misinterprets two of the letters, with unfortunate results; the substance of this reply is to be found in a note on this same inscription which he supplied for Gibson's *Britannia* (Vol. I. 814). Gibson himself consulted Nicolson about some runic coins, and received from him in September, 1692, 'rude draughts of some [unspecified] Roman and Runic monuments which will be new to you';¹⁶ these doubtless included a drawing of the Bewcastle cross.

Excited by his discoveries, Nicolson began to think there might be many other such monuments. In a letter to Edward Llyud dated 18 February, 1699, he gives a list of Scottish monuments which he thought might turn out to have runic inscriptions. This was a fruitless conjecture; but he was not so far out when he suggested to Llyud, who was about to visit Anglesey, that the Danes might have left inscriptions there; and he asked him to report on them. In 1707 we find Hearne, the Oxford antiquary and diarist, announcing to Dr. Thomas Smith of the Cottonian Library that several coins, probably Danish, with Runic inscriptions, had lately been found in the Isle of Man. In May of the same year Wilson, the bishop of the island, visited Oxford, and from him Hearne learnt of several inscriptions lately discovered there which Hearne conjectured might be runic — a conjecture which was confirmed when he received from the island a copy of an inscription on a cross at Kirk Michael. His attempt at interpreting it is to be found on p. 185n of Vol. 27 of his MS. collections, and

¹⁵ Bodl. MS. Eng. hist. b. 2, f. 266.

¹⁶ Nicolson, *Letters* 13; A. S. Cook (*P.M.L.A.* xvii, p. 367) misdates this letter 1693.

Thwaites's elucidation, based on Hearne's, on p. 220 of the same volume. Thwaites read it as

Aar risti crus disi aft Kridr mudur sin.

Considering that he was working from an imperfect transcript this was a good result. It is clearly the second half of the inscription on the cross described on p. 201, and illustrated on Pl. LV, of Kermodé's *Manx Crosses*. Hearne must have had more of it, as in the draft of a letter to Bishop Wilson in February, 1711, he refers to a 'cross erected by one Thurulf to the memory of his mother'¹⁷ — and this is obviously the same cross. Wilson sent Hearne, who at this time was making a thorough study of Worm's *Literatura Runica* and *Monumenta Danica*, two other inscriptions of the same kind; but Hearne could offer no detailed explanations; he thought that they were monuments of Christian Danes, and wanted to publish them at the end of one of his volumes of Leland's *Itinerary*, which he was then issuing. In the end Bishop Wilson himself published them, in his *History of the Isle of Man*, contained in the second edition of Gibson's *Britannia* (1722). Here Wilson gives a brief account of the inscriptions on Man in 'Old Norwegian' and gives copies of four of the inscriptions — two of the Kirk Michael ones (= Kermodé, Pl. LIV, LV), one at Kirk Braddan (= Kermodé, Pl. XXXVIII), and one at Kirk Andrews (= Kermodé, Pl. LIII). Wilson's readings compare favourably with those by some later scholars, and it is surprising that Kermodé does not mention them.¹⁸

After the passing of the older scholars like Nicolson and Wanley, Hearne was evidently regarded as the

¹⁷ Hearne, *Coll.* III. 119.

¹⁸ In Gough's copy of the 1722 *Britannia*, now in the Bodleian, is a letter from William Beauford dated 8 Nov., 1787, offering new explanations of these inscriptions. In Wilson's *Collected Works*, (2nd ed. 1777. I. 459) the runic text of Kirk Michael II only, with an inferior translation, is given as 'decyphered by John Prestwich, Esq.'

authority on runes. We find Arthur Charlett sending him an 'old wooden runic book' — probably of the kind illustrated in the second edition of Worm's *Fasti*, though I can find no other record of such a book in England — unless it were a primstave, or runic almanac, of which there are three in the Ashmolean (one given by Laud). And in 1719 we find a Mr. John Leake sending Hearne the Norse phrase 'Maðr er moldar auki,' which he had evidently copied from the runes on the tablet set up in the inner quadrangle of Oriel College in that year by John Robinson, bishop of Bristol and benefactor to the college, where the tablet can still be seen. Before becoming a bishop Robinson had been chaplain to the Ambassador to Sweden, and even acted as Ambassador himself; whilst in Sweden he acquired the runic stones that, as mentioned above, figure in Hickes's Icelandic Grammar. The runes on his tablet (somewhat inaccurately cut) are taken from stanza 14 of the Norwegian Runic Poem, to which Robinson would have access either in Worm's *Literatura Runica* or Junius's *Gothicum Glossarium*. Robinson had adopted this quotation as his motto whilst in Sweden, out of compliment to Charles XII; and it is said to occur also on a stone commemorating a benefaction of the bishop at his native village of Cleasby in Yorkshire.¹⁹

In 1732 Francis Drake, the historian of York, sent Hearne a copy of a runic ring which had recently been found near Bramham Moor, and was then in the hands of a Mr. Gill, of York. The Swedish lexicographer Serenius, who was then visiting England, undertook to get an explanation of its runes from the Swedish literati, but could himself read only part of it. It appears on a plate opposite p. cii of the Appendix to Drake's *Eboracum*, 1736. No interpretation is there given beyond Serenius's reading

¹⁹ Professor Bruce Dickins tells me that it also occurs on a piece of Oriel plate, and in a window at Bristol.

of the runes which he transliterates as *Glasta . . . ponto*. But all the runes are clear on the plate, and may be transliterated *criuripon glastæ pon.tol. ærcruiift*. The inscription thus corresponds with one on a ring in the British Museum, of which Professor Dickins has printed a reading in *Archiv* for 1936, where he suggests a connection with a charm for stanching blood in the Leechdoms. Stephens lists four other rings with similar inscriptions. Gill sold this ring in 1762 for £15, Douce published it in *Archæologia*, 1827, and Thorkelin made a copy of it. But its present whereabouts seem to be unknown.

Hearne's posthumous *Ectypa Varia* (1737) contains a plate of the alphabet in Bodl. MS. Auct. F iv. 32, which Hickes had already reproduced, and which Wanley had identified as runic (*Thes.* Vol. I. 168; Vol. II. 63).

It is to *Archæologia*, the Journal of the Society of Antiquaries, which began appearing in 1770, that we must turn for the last evidences of random runic studies in the eighteenth century. In the second volume of this Journal (1773) Bishop Lyttelton gives a new account of the Bridekirk font: he accepts Nicolson's interpretation, but is more specific than Nicolson in assigning a date to the inscription, which he takes to be early eleventh-century (it is probably slightly later). Thirty years later Henry Howard visited both Bridekirk and Bewcastle. He had tracings made of the inscriptions, and presented them to the Society of Antiquaries (see *Archæologia* xiv). They show that at this time the ninth line on the West face of Bewcastle could still have been clearly read by anyone familiar with runes. In 1789 the Society published two large plates of the Ruthwell Cross, numbers 54 and 55 of its sumptuous series of *Vetusta Monumenta*. They were drawn by Adam de Cardonnel, and are much more complete and exact than Gordon's; they include the top piece and the broken base. But for the main part

of the inscription Nicolson's text in the *Thesaurus* remains far superior. The Society's plates are accompanied by three pages of commentary by Richard Gough, in which he explains and expands the Latin legend. But of the runes he could make nothing beyond a surmise that their presence in conjunction with the Latin meant that the cross had first been erected by Danes, then turned to Christian purposes by Saxons. He sent a copy of the plate to Thorkelin, asking for his opinion on the runes, but he got no answer; Thorkelin evidently gave this copy to Fin Magnussen, who later published an engraving from it, with defective transliteration, in his *Runamo*.²⁰

Thorkelin's achievement in runic studies was less than might have been hoped; yet he collected whatever runes and runic inscriptions he could find, and his copies of some of them are still in manuscript at Copenhagen. His only recorded opinion about inscriptions in this country is that those on the Isle of Man were 'of inferior work and authenticity' to similar ones in Denmark. Stephens prints a runic alphabet traced by Thorkelin as though it had independent value; but it was probably taken from Domitian A IX. Thorkelin also copied the runes in Vespasian A XVIII, which are mentioned but not printed by Wanley. James Johnstone and William Herbert, the two translators who made a serious study of Norse, contribute nothing between them beyond a note in one of Johnstone's translations that 'several Runic pillars are inscribed to Swedes who fell in Erin.' Percy's manuscript versions of the poems he published as *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* (1763) show that he knew enough about runes to transliterate them into Norse; and in his translation of Mallet's *Introduction à l'Histoire de Danemarck* he partially corrects some mis-statements about

²⁰ For references to other plates or manuscripts of the inscriptions on the crosses v. G. Baldwin Brown, *The Arts in Early England*, V. 206, 250, and the notes thereto.

runes in his original. But he cannot be said to have advanced the knowledge of the subject. The industrious local historian T. D. Whitaker recognised as runic the inscription on a slab at Lancaster (now in the British Museum) that he reproduces in his *History of Richmondshire* (1823);²¹ but he misread several of the letters, and took it to be simply 'a list of Danish personal names.' We have to wait for the acute conjectures of Kemble and the inclusive collections of Stephens in the mid-nineteenth century before the study made any great advance; and there is something of the spaciousness of Hickes and Worm about Stephens's three great volumes, something about Kemble of Wanley's range and liveliness.

²¹ II. 229-30.

REVIEW.

A HISTORY OF THE ISLE OF MAN

BY R. H. KINVIG

Liverpool: University Press, 1950. Pp. viii + 180. 7s. 6d. net.

Professor Kinvig's popular book which first appeared in 1944 has been so effectively revised in the light of post-war archaeological discoveries (such as the Viking grave at Ballateare) and insular political changes that a second edition is very welcome. The author at the same time takes the opportunity to alter some of the maps and illustrations which are liberally distributed throughout the book and to include some excellent scenic photographs and several pictures of archaeological importance. Readers interested in Scandinavian history and culture will find the thirty pages devoted to the period of Norse control entertaining and informative; the author indeed takes particular care to point out the impact that the Norsemen had upon Manx history at this time and also their lasting influence on Manx life and politics.

A commendable feature of the book is that each historical period is described not only in terms of political and military events but also as regards the social and artistic life of the people, even where, as in the prehistoric and mediæval periods, the evidence is lamentably slight and equivocal. There is an interesting account of the two features of art in which Manxmen can take particular pride — the early Christian crosses and the Scandinavian stone carving in which we find a remarkable blending of native Celtic (Manx and Irish) with Norse art in design, technique and motif.

Professor Kinvig's handling of the later history of the Island is perhaps most competent when he is dealing with the long and important reign of the Stanley family. The Illiam Dhone affair is discussed with suitable restraint though one might wish that the contemporary Manx outlook on the rising had been treated more amply to match the full account given of the English point of view. We might have been told for example what the sympathetic commemorative ballad *Baase Illiam Dhone* had to say.

Space forbids all but the barest mention of the admirable glossary of Manx place-name elements which forms an appendix to the book. The examples show the intimate fusion of Manx and Norse in names like Clett yn Stackey 'rock of the stack,' Giau yn Ellan 'cave of the island,' Eairystane '(Thor)stein's shieling.'

RANDOLPH QUIRK

HISTORY AND FICTION IN THE SAGAS OF THE ICELANDERS

BY GWYN JONES

THE Sagas of the Icelanders, as Macaulay's schoolboy would have known, are prose narratives written for the most part during the thirteenth century in Iceland. They set forth the lives of individuals and the story of leading families during the so-called Saga Age (*Söguöld*), the period 930-1030, and they are justly famous throughout Europe and North America for their varied and manifold merits. During the last thirty-five years much has been learned about their nature and art, and it has proved necessary for some of us to forget part of what we learned from Danish and German scholars and go to school again to the teachers of Iceland itself. This address seeks to answer, in a brief way, the question: What is taught in Iceland today about the truth to fact of the Sagas, and their standing as historical documents for their period?

Little or nothing will be found here which is original. We have an ancient Welsh saying: *A vo penn byd pont*: He who is chief, let him be a bridge. To my mind, Icelandic studies in the English-speaking countries now need three bridges: up-to-date editions of sagas with an apparatus in English, translations of important works of scholarship from modern Icelandic, and not-too-involved statements or summaries for the use of our students. Your courtesy, ladies and gentlemen, has made me a chief; and now, like Brân the Blest of old, 'I will myself be a bridge'. Of the third kind. 'And then, after he had lain him down across the river, hurdles were placed upon him, and his hosts passed through over him'.

But if we are to set forth a new view, it will be wise to recall the old. This was that the Sagas of the Icelanders

were the faithful records of lives lived and events enacted. They were a composite history of the Saga Age. There were other kinds of sagas, which had been written for entertainment only, but these were quite distinct from the real thing, based as that was on a sound, continuing, oral tradition. One spoke of the 'genuine' Family Histories as one spoke of hall-marked silver and 18-carat gold.

Not, of course, that any student held the extreme view that every sentence of every 'genuine' saga was historically true. That would be flying in the face of the most convincing evidence. To take a well-known example: That part of *Grettis Saga* which recounts the adventure of Thorsteinn Drómundr and the lady Spes out in Constantinople has no possible claim to historical truth. It is a version of a tale known from Benares to Alexandria, and from Constantinople to the Snæfells-jökull; known best of all as part of the Tristan romance. Thorsteinn and Spes fill the rôles of Tristan and Isolt, and Sigurðr is a feeble king Mark. The cuckolding of the husband, the resort to ordeal or compurgation, the disguised lover who lifts the lady over a bad place in the road, his falling with her, and the lady's tricky oath that her body has known the defiling touch of none save her husband (*bené*!) 'and that wretched beggar (*optimé*!) who laid his dirty hand on my thigh as I was lifted over the ditch today' — remembering Gottfried von Strassburg's ironic lines in his *Tristan*, and the mild comment of our saga ('When men thought about her oath, it seemed to them some guile had been therein, and they judged that canny men had framed for her this formula'), I imagine no further remark is called for. Again, in the same saga, that Grettir should fight with a troll-wife in Bárðardalr and kill a giant in an underwater cavern makes admirable reading, but even if we did not know that similar stories are recorded elsewhere in the North, in the Old English *Beowulf*, and in Celtic folklore, we

should be embarrassed had we to swear to its literal truth. And things of this kind, impossible adventures abroad and supernatural encounters at home, are to be found in so many sagas.

But if one were concerned to defend the old view, one might still say, and say with reason: 'Very well, let us agree that the sagas contain episodes which are patently fictitious. Let us set these aside, and when we are rid of them the truth of that great bulk of saga which remains is more amply guaranteed than before'.

But is it? Reflexion shows us that to argue thus is to beg the whole question.

Let us stay with *Grettis Saga* somewhat longer. It is, after all, among the best known and most admired of all sagas, loved with a sad passion by the Icelanders themselves, and translated into most of the languages of western and northern Europe. The most famous episode in *Grettis Saga* is concerned with the hauntings at Thórhallsstaðir and the fight between Grettir and that dreadful Glámr who would not rest in his grave. No one can deny that it is supernatural. Is it then an episode which can be set aside when we debate the historical truth of the saga? The answer is an emphatic No. For the fight at Thórhallsstaðir is the all-important turning-point in Grettir's story. At that desperate and horrible moment when the moon shone free from cloud on Glámr's eyes, Grettir's doom was pronounced. Henceforth all his deeds should turn to ill and his guardian spirit leave him. 'You will be outlawed and your lot shall be to live always alone. And this I lay on you, that these eyes of mine shall be always before your sight. You will find it hard to live alone, and at last that shall drag you to your death'. The rest of *Grettis Saga* is the working out of that doom.

It may be objected that in the most serious context prodigies and portents have ushered in events as hard as they are unhappy. I can think of no better example

than the entry for the year 793 in the Laud and Tiberius B iv manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. In that year in Northumbria fiery dragons were seen flying through the air, and straightway there was a famine, and Lindisfarne suffered robbery and slaughter at the hands of the heathen. But our two cases are distinct in the most vital particular. Take the fiery dragons out of the Chronicle and events are undisturbed: there *was* famine, there *was* robbery and slaughter in 793. But take Glámr and his curse out of *Grettis Saga*, and the most sombre and terrible strands are torn from its substance. That the mightiest outlaw of the North cannot bear to live alone, that the bravest of men should be afraid of the dark, and that he who was most zealous of fame should provoke only calamity — what kind of a dead, dull thing would Grettir's story be without these deep essentials?

The question is rhetorical, the judgment subjective. And this is right enough. For *Grettis Saga*, far from being a veracious biography of Grettir and a history of his times, is a historical novel — that is the simplest description — written about him. It is curious to find the revered Árni Magnússon expressing, *mutatis mutandis*, this very opinion (or something very near to it) some three centuries ago. 'Grettis saga gengr nær fabulæ en historíæ; er full með fabulas, parachronismos . . þessi saga er fabulis plena'.¹

¹ G. Vigfússon, *Sturlunga Saga*, Oxford, 1878, I, 1, note. Any discussion of the authorship (and therefore the historicity) of *Grettis Saga* starts with Árni. Árni thought of Sturla Thórðarson as the real author of a *Grettis Saga fabulosa*, and held that the saga as we now have it was recast or interpolated from his work. Gudbrandr Vigfússon thought that there was a yet earlier version, rewritten first by Sturla and then by a second (that is, the present) author. Boer allowed Sturla no part in the composition of the saga, but thought that the original version had been recast two or three times by later writers, the first of these being a pupil of Sturla. Finnur Jónsson, Jón Helgason, and the latest editor of the saga, Guðni Jónsson, look on the saga as the single composition of a single author, during the period 1310-20. The likeliest man to have written it, Guðni thinks, was Haflíði Steinsson, priest of Breiðabólstaðr in Vestrhóp, but the evidence takes us no further

Once we accept this idea (and accept it we must), we shall think not less but more highly of *Grettis Saga*. The mythical, fabulous, and romantic features which are sand under the eyelids of the inquirer after historical truth will now be found part of the design and essential to the composition. Grettir's path shows plain, from Thórhallsstaðir to Drangey. The revenge out in Miklagarðr, even the story of Spes, were parts of the author's plan. 'Sitt er hvárt, gæfa eða gervileikr', says Jökull to Grettir: 'Good parts are one thing, good luck another' — which is key enough to the author's purpose. What results is an unequal but powerful narrative, the work of a deliberate but far from infallible artist, with good models to work from. He has collected all the traditions associated with his hero, has given them order and proportion (not always of the best), and in the event offers us a study of man and his inescapable destiny as valid today as it was six hundred and fifty years ago. 'Þú ert Grettir, þjóðin mín!' Few works of their wonderful literature lie so close to the hearts of the Icelanders as this saga *nær fabulæ en historiæ*.

But it will very properly be asked by any to whom these assertions carry the shock of novelty: 'Why should

than a bare possibility. Sigurður Nordal thinks that the first author of the saga was Sturla Thórðarson, who wrote a biography of Grettir about 1280. His main source of information was Halldórr Oddsson, descended from a branch of Grettir's family, and a close connexion of the Sturlungs. *Grettis Saga* as we now have it is the work of a second author, based upon Sturla's version, and to him we owe the opening chapters about Grettir's ancestors (based on Sturla's *Landnámabók*) and the story of Spes. It was he too who in seeking to account for every year of Grettir's life, and especially his outlawry, bedevilled the chronology of the saga, to the grief of every subsequent commentator. The last stage in the textual history of the saga was reached when a third author collated Sturla's version with the second, interpolated version, and restored some of Sturla's material. The resultant collated version was the original of the so-called A-class manuscripts. Since the second of these versions proved more popular than Sturla's, Sturla's sank before it. But Árni Magnússon saw a fragment of Sturla's version in his youth, and therefore his account of the saga's genesis and 'interpolation' is likely to be correct. See Sigurður Nordal, *Sturla Þórðarson og Grettis Saga* (*Íslenzk Fræði*, 4), Reykjavík, 1938.

we accept any saga as an historical novel? Where is your proof?’

Assuredly, it will not be found in one magically illuminating sentence. The theories now being advanced from Iceland, and relayed so-to-speak in Great Britain by our younger scholars, are both complicated and delicately inter-dependent. But their effect has been to transform, — or is not the word revolutionize? — much of our former thinking. Some of these theories have proved unwelcome in Iceland itself, for no people likes to hear criticism destructive of what it has for centuries regarded as historical records of its past. Poggio in his *Facetiæ* tells the story of a fifteenth-century worthy who grew inconsolable when he heard from a wandering minstrel that the paladin Roland had died at Roncesvaux. For the ideal, the essential Roland lived still in his imagination. And true enough, we all have our Roland, our Arthur, our Brutus, our Hrafnkell, in whose existence we believe as firmly as in our own, and whose death by that pen which is mightier than the sword can seem a little death within ourselves.

I have mentioned Hrafnkell. By common consent his saga, *Hrafnkels Saga Freysgoða*, stands first in merit among the shorter Icelandic sagas. If ever there was a ‘classic’ saga, in style, composition, narrative method, unity of theme, in characterisation and tone, Hrafnkell’s was that saga. And if any saga had the very ring of historical truth, this was it. The events it described were consonant with reason and nature, and could be confidently attributed to the fourth and fifth decades of the tenth century. Indeed, its reader can almost feel that he was their beholder. It had none of those features which arouse scepticism or sharpen doubt: no trolls, no ghosts, no viking expeditions, neither clerkly interpolations nor romantic interest. From its first editor in 1839 to its latest translator in 1935, a host of the wise and the not-so-wise have celebrated its authenticity and

demonstrated its truth. So much so that when a historical record like *Landnámabók*, the "Book of the Settlements," did not agree with *Hrafnkels Saga*, then so much the worse for *Landnámabók* — so much the worse for history.

It occurred to none of us that *Hrafnkels Saga* might be rather like Mary Tycannol's famous weather-glass, which was more reliable than the weather itself, and when the weather went against it, then it was the weather which was at fault.

But alas for our faith! In 1940 Sigurður Nordal published his essay *Hrafnkatla* in *Íslenzk Fræði*. His had long been a name to conjure with in this country, for his work on Snorri Sturluson and his editorial labours with the *Íslenzk Fornrit* edition of the sagas. He had gone further, we knew, than any other scholar in arguing that the sagas were first and foremost literary compositions, and that some of the historically most-authenticated among them were works of fiction. The three stages of the revelation were marked by his 100-page Introduction to the *Fornrit* edition of *Egils Saga Skallagrímssonar* in 1933, by the 140-page Introduction to the *Borgfirðinga Sögur* in 1938, and by *Hrafnkatla*.² I think it true to say that whether Professor Nordal's views are accepted in their entirety or not, the study of the origin, development, and nature of the sagas, their composition and provenance, must henceforth be profoundly different from what it has been in the past. For my own part I confess that as a student raised on Finnur Jónsson and Andreas Heusler (whose names let us ever honour), I was so shaken by Nordal's demonstration of the fictitious nature of *Hænsa Þóris Saga* that in a review of the *Borgfirðinga Sögur* for *Medium Ævum* I passed the matter over in a cowardly

² For a summary and assessment of Nordal's work, see R. George Thomas, *Studia Islandica*, in *Modern Language Quarterly*, XI, 3, pp. 281-97, and XI, 4, 391-403 (1950). I am much indebted to Dr. Thomas.

(at the time I told myself, a discreet) silence. Since I had been convinced by his cogent arguments for the authorship and composition of *Egils Saga*, and had welcomed with open arms the Fornrit *Grettis Saga*, this was to strain at a gnat after swallowing two camels — though as a country-dweller I can assure all who have never swallowed a gnat that it is not so unharrassing a process as the proverb assumes. But swallowed in time it was, and a singularly nourishing gnat it proved to be. In 1939, too, a posthumously edited essay of the late Professor E. V. Gordon in *Medium Ævum* permitted us a Pisgah glance over the ground where Professor Nordal was delving. Yet *Hrafnkatla* eclipsed expectation. For in it he destroyed *Hrafnkels Saga's* claim to historical truth, in sum and in detail, with so majestic a finality that one doubts whether the argument can ever again be re-opened.

Remember: this was a saga which ranked among the very highest for historical truth. This was the hall-marked silver and the 18-carat gold.

Briefly, Nordal proved that the major events which *Hrafnkels Saga* describes had not taken place at all, and that the minor could not have taken place as recorded. And he proved that of its four principal actors, two had never existed, and that we cannot rely on what we hear of the other two. Chronology, place names and topography, which had long been invoked as proofs of the saga's authenticity, were now invoked to disprove it. Genealogies, histories and analogues were marshalled to discredit it. The prop of a dubious archæology was knocked from under it. The old religion, the old laws and the old constitution were brought to witness against it. And devastating though this is, it is not the whole of the demonstration. Style, composition, syntax, sources, date and authorship, were all subjected to examination. The conclusion — that the most historical saga was

quite unhistorical — has not, so far as I know, been convincingly challenged.³

Let me now turn, and I hope not arbitrarily, to *Víga-Glúms Saga*. It belongs among what I may call the 'next-best-known' sagas for English students; if its readers are less numerous than those of *Njála*, *Gretta*, and *Laxdæla*, they are as the sands of the sea compared with the readers of its companion saga *Reykduela*, or many another work known to all save the specialist rather by title than content. Further, it is a good, interesting, and enjoyable saga, and it has been edited for the English student by our own Secretary, Mr. Turville-Petre, with what is far and away the best Introduction ever set before an English edition of a saga. And an Introduction very much to my present purpose.

First, it is certain that *Víga-Glúms Saga* is much altered from the form its first author (or compiler) gave it. From a consideration of the *Mǫðruvallabók* version, the fragments of *Vatshyrna*, and A.M. 445 C 4to, and from the parallel case of *Egils Saga Skallagrímssonar*, Mr. Turville-Petre came to the conclusion that the original *Víga-Glúms Saga* was first lengthened by interpolation, and then, probably in the first half of the fourteenth century, was compressed into the present *Mǫðruvallabók* text. The important word here is 'compressed', for it was the old belief that the longer versions of sagas were necessarily late and inevitably degenerate. This was because the 'classic' saga stood nearer to oral tradition, and to this oral tradition it was customary to ascribe all that was best, if not all that was good, in the sagas. But in recent years scholars have found evidence to convince them that spare and compact versions of many sagas are likely to be late rather than early; that a briefer style, a firmer expression, and a

³ For example, by Knut Liestøl in his *Tradisjonene i Hrafnkels Saga Freysgoða*, *Arv*, 1946 pp. 94 ff.; a renewed argument for the importance of oral tradition in the saga. See too the edition of *Hrafnkels Saga* by Jón Jóhannesson, in *Austfirðinga Sögur* (Íslenzk Fornrit, XI, 1950).

better trim are signs of literary development; and that we must change our minds about the processes and results of oral tradition when we find the versions of sagas judged closest thereto clumsier and more diffuse than the versions which succeeded them. Thus, Professor Nordal has shown that the fragments of *Egils Saga* which are older than *Mǫðruvallabók* are longer and more detailed than their counterparts in *Mǫðruvallabók*; but the style of the *Mǫðruvallabók* version in comparison with these fragments is clearly much perfected. Professor Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Mr. A. E. Boucher reach a not dissimilar conclusion with respect to the longer (Ó) and shorter (M) versions of *Hallfreðar Saga*: the shorter is the later. Similar conclusions have been reached (some of them tentatively, it is true) for *Bandamanna Saga*, *Eiríks Saga Rauða*, *Reykðæla Saga*, and the puzzling *Fóstbræðra Saga*. It must, of course, be emphasized that in general we do not possess the first drafts of these or other sagas.⁴ But it is a first foothold when we learn that of those successive drafts we do possess, the most admired are just those which show most clearly the hand of the literary artist.

To return to *Víga-Glúms Saga*. In his discussion of the twofold reworking of the saga, Mr. Turville-Petre necessarily raised the question of its historical value. Are we to regard it as history freely and perhaps not impartially presented, or is it a work of the imagination based on tradition? It seemed to me in 1940, when Mr. Turville-Petre's book appeared, that much of the evidence pointed to the second alternative. It seems so to me still; but Mr. Turville-Petre, though not (as I thought) without qualification, preferred the former. 'This is not, of course, to assert that *V'Gl* is a work of fiction. Its author's primary purpose was perhaps artistic, but he was using genuine historical sources. On such sources this saga was based, as were most of the family sagas. If *V'Gl* is examined as an historical

¹ Nordal thinks we have none such.

source, it will be found to contain much valuable information' But if Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* is examined as an historical source, it will be found to contain at least as much valuable information as *Víga-Glúms Saga*. And so will *Hrafnkels Saga*. Cannot the same be said of *War and Peace*? Or a recent historical novel, Miss Hope Muntz's *The Golden Warrior*, a veritable *Haralds Saga Guðinasonar ok Vilhjálms Bastarðs Englakonungs*? Or any reputable historical novel based on fact as well as fancy? Though Defoe's is the first novel which comes to mind in such a context as this, for its sobriety, its verisimilitude, its deft manipulation of fact and fiction, its uncanny powers of persuasion, and its insistent claim to historical truth. It seems to me safer to regard *Víga-Glúms Saga* rather as historical fiction than as history. The reasons for so regarding it are these. The early chapters (pp. 1-11 in Mr. Turville-Petre's edition) follow the saga convention of adventures abroad, and Glúmr has affinities with other youthful heroes who in their day were lumpish and slack (the *kolbitr* motif); the Kálfr episode (pp. 21-25), whether we agree with Cederschiöld, Knut Liestøl, or Björn Sigfússon, has no foundation in Icelandic events of the tenth century, but is one form of a wide-spread fable, and related in some way or another to a parable in the early twelfth-century *Disciplina Clericalis* of the Spaniard Petrus Alphonsi; the Editor's close analysis of the famous chapter XVI (pp. 25-28, Glúmr's dealings with Víga-Skúta Áskelsson), following Lotspeich, makes it certain this was no part of the original saga; the riddling oath-ring episode (pp. 44-5), so fiercely attacked by Vigfússon and Powell earlier, is clearly fiction not fact — the listeners could never have been such credulous fools as the narrator makes them out to be; the omission of the *þáttir* of Ögmundr Dyttir from *Mpðruvallabók* shows that calculated rejection as well as interpolation was part of the author's technique. Again, the evidence for legal procedure in *Víga-Glúms*

Saga, while always interesting, is sometimes dubious and once or twice incorrect.⁵ The insistence on Glúmr's cloak and spear as the embodiments, or repositories, of Glúmr's good luck, and the crash of his fortunes when he is so unbelievably stupid as to give them away, are legend and literary device, not history; and if, as Mr. Turville-Petre argues, *Víga-Glúms Saga* is the story of 'a clash between religious cults' (of Óðinn and Freyr), we see still more clearly the shaping hand of a craftsman. On the confusion of genealogies and persons in this saga no particular stress need be laid, but the undoubted if vague resemblance of *Víga-Glúms Saga* to *Egils Saga Skallagrímssonar* is important (or at least relevant), as suggesting that our author was not without his models. Again, what could be more admirable than the last chapter of *Víga-Glúms Saga* — and with all this talk of fiction as against history, I come not to bury Glúmr but to praise him! Glúmr may very well have thought, said, and done what is here ascribed to him; but it is prudent to notice the remarkable correspondences between the story of blind old Glúmr's last murderous plot against the brothers Guðmundr and Einarr and that of blind king Hrórekr's attack on the life of king Óláfr the Saint. One can add to this nearly related pair the almost blind

⁵ Thus, the saga's account of the outlawry of Vigfúss cannot be right as it stands. If Vigfúss were not a full outlaw, *skóggangsaðr*, there was no reason why he should not stay at home. The reason given, *fyrir helgi staðarins*, seems to me unconvincing. Freyr is already Glúmr's enemy, he has accepted Thorkell's sacrifice, and Glúmr must sooner or later be driven from his land. It is not clear past doubt whether the sentence on Vigfúss is a legal one or part of an arbitration, nor can we be sure that he did stay at home with his father. At first sight it appears so, but see p. 33, 30-1.

Again, after the 'Hrístegr-mowing', *Víga-Glúms Saga* states specifically that it was the law at that time (*Þat vǫru lög þar*) that when the same number of men fell on both sides it should be reckoned an equal slaughter, though there were some difference of rank; but they that had the worse of it should choose one man as subject of a lawsuit. But the saga is wrong. All the evidence of other sagas and lawbooks is against it. Our author is here building up the clever trick whereby Glúmr gets off scot-free and has young Guðbrandr banished into the bargain. Nothing could be more in character for Glúmr. But the episode is neither law nor history, but fiction.

old viking Thórarinn in *Þorsteins þáttur Stangarhøggs*, who tried to stab Bjarni frá Hofi. Bersi, in *Kormáks Saga*, was another old man who as his strength failed was minded to kill one man more by stratagem, and the terrible old man Egill made a last killing, of two thralls, when he buried his treasure at the end of his life. So probably here again in *Víga-Glúms Saga* we have to do with a type and a tradition. Between them the items set out above account for a considerable portion of the saga. Nor is this all. Vigfússon and Powell, the earlier editors of *Víga-Glúms Saga*, read the saga in their own way: they praised the hero extravagantly and thought he had been much maligned by the author of the saga as we now have it. They were wrong, for as Mr. Turville-Petre points out, Glúmr, like Egill, was a whole-hearted disciple of the *Hávamál*, but their opinion is a valuable sidelight on the historicity of the saga as it appeared to scholars examining it from a point of view entirely different from the present one.

So far we have paid no attention to one feature of many sagas, and touched only parenthetically upon a second, which must be borne constantly in mind when we are considering the historical exactitude of accounts written in thirteenth-century Christian Iceland of events that occurred in the pagan tenth century. That the thirteenth and not the twelfth century was the age of saga-writing is, — need I say? — one of the most assured facts established by modern, native Icelandic scholarship. That the art of saga-writing shows a rise, glory, and decline between *Heiðarvíga Saga* and, — shall we say? — *Víglundar Saga*, is another. That the sanctity of oral tradition has been grievously questioned by the new criticism is yet a third. A fourth and a fifth are that the sagas, not only in composition but in prose style, are less uniform than foreign readers had suspected, and that certain ‘schools’ of saga-writing are to be sometimes

tentatively and sometimes clearly discerned.⁶ But to revert from these important and fascinating 'new bearings' in Icelandic studies, what is the significance of Christianity, and what the significance of foreign literature, for our present investigation? We can learn something of this from *Vatnsdæla Saga*, a latish saga written down towards the end of the thirteenth century, at or under the influence of the Benedictine foundation of Thingeyrar in Húnathing, in the north of Iceland (it may have been written down in Vatnsdalr itself).

The saga is not a biography of one man but a rather determined 'family saga' about four generations of the Vatnsdalr men. But the first half of the saga is Ingimundr's, and Ingimundr is one of the best examples to be found of the heroic ideal as it was tempered by Christian belief.⁷ *Landnámabók* calls him Ingimundr enn gamli, Ingimundr the Old, and he dominates its narrative of the fortunes of his house even more than he does *Vatnsdæla Saga*. He is a noble figure at Hof, with a valorous past behind him. He is a religious man always, a worshipper of Freyr, with a sense of destiny. His viking raids apart, he is a kindly, home-loving man; and in Iceland he becomes the patriarch, a good father to his family, a fine *goði* to his thingmen, a man of mark and native stateliness. He is an individual, yet he conforms to a type — that blending of pagan and Christian good perhaps best exemplified by the Geat Beowulf. Beowulf

⁶ For the Oddaverjar in the South, see Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Sagnarritun Oddaverja (Íslensk Fræði*, 1, Reykjavík, 1937). For the Northern school at Thingeyrar, see the same author's *Sagnarritun í Húnafingi* in the Introduction to the Fornrit *Vatnsdæla Saga*. For Thverá in Eyjafjörðr, see G. Turville-Petre's Introduction to *Víga-Glúms Saga*, *passim*. For the Borgarfjörðr school, see Sigurður Nordal's Introductions to *Egils Saga* and *Borgfirðinga Sögur*, already cited. Summaries and citations in R. G. Thomas, *Studia Islandica* and 'The Sturlung Age as an Age of Saga Writing', in *The Germanic Review*, pp. 50-66 (1950); and in G. Turville-Petre's important 'The Intellectual History of the Icelanders' in *History*, XXVII, No. 106.

⁷ In this paragraph I have drawn freely on the Introduction to my translation of *The Vatnsdalers' Saga*, Princeton University Press for the American-Scandinavian Foundation, New York, 1944.

could say, at point of death: 'I have ruled this people fifty winters; there was not a folk-king of my neighbours durst attack me with weapons, oppress me with fear. In my own land I awaited the destined hour, kept my own well, picked no base quarrels, swore not an oath unjustly'. So Ingimundr: 'He was dashing in attack and a fierce fighter, trusty of heart and weapon, a faithful friend and kindly, staunch to those near him, and might well be (what he indeed was) the best endowed chieftain of the olden time. Nothing is told here of his Thing-dealings, that he had great lawsuits against anybody, for to most he was kindly and no aggressor and all along he kept his good will, liberality, and clear wits' Ingimundr even forgives his slayer, though he knows his sons will not. 'But we can comfort ourselves with this', says Thorsteinn Ingimundarson, 'what a great difference there was between him and Hrolleifr. And my father will get his reward from Him who made the sun and all creation, whoever He may be. For it is certain that Someone must have made it'. Ingimundr, it is clear, is bound for the Christian heaven. There are other statements of the same kind, none of them dogmatic — for our author had sense in plenty — till Bishop Friðrekr came to the North Quarter with his offer of the new religion. To cure Thórir's fits Thorsteinn 'will now call on Him who made the sun', and he talks of Him 'who created mankind'; and Thorkell krafla speaks of the old faith of the Vatnsdalers: 'They believed in Him who made the sun and ruled all things'. This sounds not much like Freyr, and there is reason in the Bishop's reply: 'That same faith I offer you, but with this difference, that you shall believe in the One God, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and let yourself be baptized in His name'. Nor is the Christian sentiment of the saga always expressed by plain statement. Thorsteinn Ingimundarson is clearly a vehicle of Christian humility when he waits on the guests at Thorgrímr's wedding;

and thirty years later Thorkell krafla will be found following his example. This strong Christian bias helps us sense the individuality of its author; the individuality of an author is important in any assessment of the objectivity or historicity of what he writes.

If now we turn to a brief consideration of foreign influences upon *Vatnsdæla Saga*, it is with the proviso that other sagas like *Grettis Saga* or *Laxdæla Saga* would offer an easier task and a more lavish witness. First, we may note that Iceland during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries was in no way severed from northern and western Europe.⁸ The British peoples will readily accept the thesis that for those with good hearts and good ships the sea is no sundering flood but the safest and least destructible of bridges. The twelfth century was a period 'when Icelandic scholars were pillaging the newly-discovered riches of European literature'⁹ By the middle of the thirteenth, there were translations into Norwegian and Icelandic of many romantic tales about Charlemagne, Flores and Blanchiflor, Owein, Tristan, Gawain and the like. Their influence was in many ways notable. Sometimes they were responsible for episodes like that of Thorsteinn and Spes, already mentioned. Sometimes they introduce new relationships between men and their lord, or new attitudes towards women and the tenderer emotions. Usually such influences are not hard to determine, but there are significant indications that borrowings from foreign literature were on occasion much more integrated into the very texture of a saga. It is now agreed that the story of king Ólafr Tryggvason's conversion to Christianity by a hermit in the Scilly Isles, as told in *Heimskringla*, is not Norwegian history but a story derived

⁸ See in particular, G. Turville-Petre, 'The Intellectual History of the Icelanders', already cited; J. E. Turville-Petre, *The Story of Rauð and his Sons*, Viking Society, 1947; Margaret Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland*, Princeton, 1934.

⁹ J. E. Turville-Petre, *The Story of Rauð and his Sons*, p. 14.

from one of the Dialogues of Gregory the Great.¹⁰ And we have already seen that the story of Kálfr in *Víga-Glúms Saga* is related not to Icelandic history of the tenth century, but in one way or another to a parable in the *Disciplina Clericalis* of Petrus Alphonsi. One wonders whether other borrowings have been given such protective colouring that they will never be detected.¹¹

Vatnsdæla Saga owes something to the *Fornaldarsögur*, the Sagas of Old Times, and to the *Riddara Sögur*, the Romantic or Knightly Sagas. The story of Thorsteinn Ketilsson's encounter with the highwayman Jökull illustrates the one; Thorkell krafla's knightly adventures abroad, and especially his ridiculous discovery of treasure in a castle wall in Scotland, the other. Further, the description of Jökull entering his hall, and many details of its furniture, are of a romantic pattern. So with such words as *kurteisi*, *kastali*, *lén*, *kumpán* — these are borrowings from a different world of story. And the 'clerkly' quality of some of the writing is just what we should expect from a learned church-trained writer, well acquainted with foreign literature either in translations (we know that there were such translations) or in the original Latin or French. It is Professor Einar Ól. Sveinsson's opinion that *Laxdæla* was much present to the mind of the author of *Vatnsdæla Saga*, and with his comment that both these were learned writers, Christian and chivalric, we must all agree. As we must agree with Mr. Turville-Petre's judgment: 'The Family Sagas are the work not of tenth-century

¹⁰ Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla*, I, p. 104 (Reykjavík, 1941).

¹¹ It has happened to me lately to come to the reading and translating of *Egils Saga* fresh from the reading of much Arthurian romance in French and Welsh. In Friðgeirr's weeping sister I felt I recognized an old acquaintance: the tearful, pallid, featureless, wordless, spiritless 'virgin sacrifice to howling Troy' whom Owain and Percival and Gawain rescue from a monstrous suitor in various corners of the romances. If this is no delusion, then Egill has here been cast by his author for the rôle of knight-errant, and one must admire the skilful references to Arinbjörn which lend the episode such little credibility as it has.

story-tellers, but of thirteenth-century authors, both clerics and laymen. Behind them lay five or six generations of learning and literary study, native and European. The authors of the sagas owed a debt both to native Scandinavian tradition and to European culture. Even though unreliable in detail, the sagas are valuable as history, but they are yet more valuable as literature'.¹²

The analogy of a *Comédie Humaine* has often been used for the Sagas of the Icelanders. A considerable number of narratives, *sögur* and *þættir* (not less than one hundred and twenty are included in the *Íslendingasagnaútgáfan* edited by Guðni Jónsson from Reykjavík, the first complete edition to be made), are concerned with the events and personages of the Saga-Age, the period 930-1030. They are thus a national literature, but it will be seen that they are a family literature too, for the population of Iceland at that time could hardly have exceeded 80,000, and the firm anchorage of most sagas in the different geographical divisions of the island, the importance of the great gatherings for law, and the interest of the sagamen in pedigrees and family connexions, ensured that many men and a fair number of events will be found mentioned in sagas other than those primarily concerned with them. No better example can be found of the one than Guðmundr enn ríki, Guðmundr the Mighty, leader of the Mǫðrvellings, but the circumstance is too obvious and too well-recognised to need illustration. Similarly, though on a more restricted scale, with events. We have already noticed how *Víga-Glúms Saga* and *Reykðæla Saga* have material in common, and extensive sections of *Vatnsdæla Saga* must be read against parallel accounts in *Hallfreðar Saga* and *Finnboga Saga*; but here too illustration is unnecessary. Nor need one do more than mention the invaluable correspondences between sagas or parts of sagas and such historical works as *Landnámabók* and the *Íslendingabók* of Ari the Learned.

¹² *The Intellectual History of the Icelanders*, p. 123.

Clearly, this is a circumstance of first importance in assessing the historicity of a saga. Had we the lost sagas of the Icelanders, can we doubt that the correspondences would be richer still, and the checks and balances more striking and valuable? But for the moment I must be content to notice that these correspondences, these checks and balances, are not less useful for establishing the non-historicity of some sagas than they have been for authenticating the traditions incorporated in others. Let us then briefly consider the plot or substance of one particular saga, with this end in view.

There lived in Iceland a young poet, headstrong, moody, and bitter of tongue. It was his custom to pay visits to a young woman, rather against the wishes of her kinsfolk. However, it was settled at last that there might be a wedding between them, but strangely enough the poet now hangs back, the woman is given to another, and the poet writes bitter and frustrated verses thereafter. In time he fares abroad and makes acquaintance with a royal court; then he returns to Iceland, and, the chance presenting itself, sleeps one night with his former love. At parting he wishes to give her a treasured gift, but she will have none of it. He writes lampoons upon her husband, and a challenge to holmgang follows. A final settlement between lover and husband depends upon the payment of two treasures to the latter. The poet again fares miserably abroad; he finds happiness nowhere, and dies a straw-death at sea, still composing verses in his last sickness.

This, I have said, is the substance of one particular saga. *Kormáks Saga*, clearly. Or have I made a mistake? Is it not *Hallfreðar Saga* rather? We shall need more detail before we can decide; for the summary as it stands will serve for either. Einar Ól. Sveinsson has listed twelve close parallels between these two sagas in the Introduction to his Fornrit *Vatnsdæla Saga* (p. lxviii); in his unpublished study of *Hallfreðar Saga*;

Mr. A. E. Boucher has listed seventeen. Is it possible to avoid the conclusion that one of these sagas was inspired by the other? If too we think of the substance and personages of *Gunnlaugs Saga* and parts of *Bjarnar Saga Híttdælakappa*, can we avoid the further conclusion that the worm-tongued poet, bent for frustration and an early death, was rather a fictional type than a regularly repeated individual? If it were objected that tenth-century Iceland was exceptionally dowered with such poets, and that each was thought to deserve a biographer, it would still be incredible that their lives followed so close a pattern that a summary of the saga of one of them, by a mere change of names, reads like a summary of the saga of another. For this is emphatically so as between Kormákr and Hallfreðr. Since *Kormáks Saga* came first in time, it is as certain as such things can be that *Hallfreðar Saga* cannot be historical biography, but must be what we should now call an historical novel on the model of the earlier work. There undoubtedly was a colourful person named Hallfreðr Vandræðaskald; some thirty verses were traditionally regarded as his or were associated with him; he is referred to briefly in reputable histories, and is not unknown in that corpus of oral and written tradition which was the raw material of other sagas. Could there be a more promising subject for a reconstructed life? The author set to work, his model before him, compiling and arranging and borrowing. What could be more natural? One has done the very thing oneself.

This inter-relationship of the sagas of Kormákr and Hallfreðr must be the clearest of all such in saga literature. But there is many another. Often these parallels and analogues pose difficult and some times seemingly insoluble problems. But it would seem wise for the student of such things to see with his mental eye, inscribed in their margins, the laconic old proverb used by Thorkell Lock (who, Professor Nordal has shown, never existed):

Má mér þat, sem yfir margan gengr, 'What happens to many can happen to me'. In other words, parallel accounts are not inevitably the more authentic for their parallelism, especially when they are fitted to different persons in different localities. They may prove to be evidence of borrowing, of imitation. The validity of each instance must therefore be decided on its merits and not by rule of thumb.

I end this necessarily brief discussion of the historical authenticity of the Sagas of the Icelanders with five observations. The first is that I have limited myself to a mention of *Grettis Saga*, *Hrafnkels Saga Freysgoða*, *Víga-Glúms Saga*, *Vatnsdæla Saga*, and the related pair, *Kormáks Saga* and *Hallfreðar Saga*. But other groups (*Laxdæla Saga*, *Hænsa-Þóris Saga*, *Ljósvetninga Saga*, *Gísla Saga* and *Droplaugarsona Saga*, for example) would prove not less tractable material. My choice of sagas, that is, has been personal but not arbitrary.

Second, a full discussion of the historicity of any saga involves more than a consideration of its subject matter. A study of its style, composition and provenance, with all that is involved when we talk of oral and written sources, authorship and date, is indispensable before we reach a decision. Only one saga hitherto has been the subject of such a study in print: *Hrafnkels Saga Freysgoða*.¹³ As a result, what was probably the most firmly believed in of all sagas has been demonstrated a fiction. But is it unfair to say, in the light of what we have learned from *Íslenzk Fornrit* and *Íslenzk Fræði*, that henceforth it will be for editors

¹³ *Njála* itself has been the subject of such a study by Einar Ól. Sveinsson. The first volume of his *Um Njálu* appeared in 1933; we await the second volume and his edition of the Saga as events of outstanding importance for the study of authorship and composition, tradition, history and creative writing in the saga literature of Iceland. It is already clear that his work must prove fatal to the old theory of saga-writing by accretion. His view of *Njála* is of a saga written in Skafafellssýsla about the year 1300 as an artistic whole by a deliberate and individual author.

and students to prove the historical truth of a saga rather than assume it?

Third, as Professor Nordal insists, to disprove the authenticity of one saga does not in itself disprove the authenticity of any other. To disprove the historicity of any part of a saga does not in itself disprove the historicity of any other part. But all such things do show the need for a thorough assessment of every saga and every part of every saga.

Fourth, I might summarise all I have said in this way. We used to assume the truth of a saga unless what we read was patently unbelievable. Now we are confronted with the question: 'Is this history, though freely and perhaps not impartially presented, or is it a work of the imagination based upon oral and written sources?'

And last, Iceland, its sagas, and their readers have nothing to lose should it be established that what was thought to be a factual chronicle is a work of the imagination. The importance of the sagas for our knowledge and awareness of four centuries of Icelandic life and thought is unimpaired. Perhaps it is strengthened. Life is a vaster and more complicated study than a sorting of events in chronicle form; we do not prize *Njála* only in as much as we can vouch for its details; the pang and rapture with which one first beholds lonely Bjarg and lonelier Drangey are of the heart still more than of the head. I conclude with two sentences of Sigurður Nordal's, from *Hrafnkatla*: 'Would it not be a poor exchange to possess the True Memoirs of Grettir named Ásmundarson instead of *Grettis Saga*? Truth exists in many ways, and truth about life itself is often to be found more clearly in poetry than in scholarship or in historical studies even'. The sagas in this sense, as works of the creative imagination, *are* poetry. That is the most important thing about them.

SOME EXCEPTIONAL WOMEN IN THE SAGAS

By R. GEORGE THOMAS

FOURTEEN years ago I decided to find out what the Family Sagas had to say about the position of women in the Saga Age. In 1937, I believed, with many others, that much of the saga evidence was based on firm historical grounds and that, with certain reservations, they gave a faithful picture of conditions of life in the Saga Age. I think that view is untenable today. The writings of Sigurður Nordal¹ have given us a fuller awareness of the presence in many of the sagas of artists telling a good story, and his suggestion that the Family Sagas should be regarded as works of literature, not of history, makes the task of social historians more difficult if they try to use the sagas as source-books. In time Nordal's emphasis will do nothing but good: it will force Icelandic historians to search for new sources of evidence to corroborate or disprove that of the sagas, and in the end the literary historian will gain too, because the climate of opinion in which the sagas were written will be recaptured more securely and cleanly than heretofore.

It is not without interest to record the findings of my investigation made fourteen years ago. I found, then — to my great surprise, now — that the sagas agreed on the picture they presented of women in society. Most marriages were arranged by parents, although love matches are given some prominence. Few widows and fewer maids chose their husbands, and, therefore, provisions were made for unsuccessful marriages in the ready legal facilities for divorce. There was a real and necessary division of labour between men and women and the wife had complete charge of the inner household

¹ See *Studia Islandica in Modern Language Quarterly* xi, 1950, pp. 281-297 and 391-403.

— which included the preparation of all winter stocks of dairy produce. But the respect shown to the many able women is offset by a refusal to allow women to obtain legal redress directly, despite the laws of inheritance favourable to women and laws for protection against offence. Nevertheless, a contemptuous attitude towards female physical inferiority — since women, like boys, were incapable of bearing weapons — and an acute sensitiveness to the honour of kinswomen is illustrated by the frequent pillorizing of the berserks, by the fair treatment of women while conducting a feud, and by the honourable treatment of concubines and slaves.² A further trace of this respect shown to the sex underlies the esteem shown to prophetesses and to witches with influence over the elements and to those well versed in “white magic” (Surely this latter respect can more profitably be regarded as evidence of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Icelandic beliefs instead of being used as an adventitious prop to support Tacitus).

So far there is reasonable unanimity, taking into account the different aims of the saga writers and the different schools of saga writing. The saga writers seem to have the same picture of Saga Age society in their minds: their writings mirror a society which may be Iceland in the tenth, the thirteenth or even the early fourteenth centuries, but in that society, whatever the period in which the author is writing, the part played by women is constant, their conduct generally follows the same rules. No one can deny the place of art in the sagas; yet, why do so many writers succeed in giving such a uniform picture of similar happenings? Why is the conduct of the feud the same in sagas which were written, possibly, a hundred and fifty years apart? And why do Christian writers, who had been subject to Christian influences — including literary ones — for over two hundred years, give such a

² The story of Melkorka in the *Laxdæla saga* (ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson in *Íslensk Fornrit V*, 1934) is typical of the saga-writers' accounts of concubines.

vivid, sympathetic and fairly uniform account of an essentially pagan ethos? Many more such questions need to be asked, because the uniformity does not necessarily imply fidelity to fact. (We have only to compare the great "Western" myth, not only in its hold on English juvenile imaginations through Buffalo Bill, but in its hold on the adult American public in the novels about Hoppalong Cassidy. The unanimity is there in details of conduct, costume, economy, law and custom, but the one thing missing is fidelity to fact.).

There are at least two possible explanations for this uniformity — neither of which can be dealt with fully here. First, that the status of women shown in the sagas is simply the status of women in the Sturlung Age, with a few antiquarian details added. In that later age when every powerful man fought for himself, the ruthless "barter" marriage (Dasent's term)³ was part of the corrupt atmosphere and necessary practice of men seeking to gain larger bands of adherents. The female control of a large share of domestic economy agrees with one's picture of an age when many chiefs were outlaws or in hiding, or away on fighting expeditions, or in Norway. Hence the comparison of events in *Sturlunga saga* and *Biskupa sögur* with those in the major Family Sagas is a field of study which should yield profitable results for a truer understanding of the sagaman's picture of the Saga Age.

A second explanation of this unanimity of treatment is nearer to our topic. The sagas drew heavily on local oral traditions and particularly on stories of feuds and quarrels. Inevitably the sagas would perpetuate traditions about the more abnormal conditions of Saga Age society; since every-day existence is often free from incident and not worth recording. The valuable bargain

³ *The Story of Burnt Njal*, translated by G. W. Dasent, I, 1861, Introduction, p. xxvi: "the marriage itself remained till the latest times a matter of sale and barter in deed as well as name".

marriage would naturally be sought by the weaker man in a feud; the outlaw or viking warrior would rely on his wife's discretion in controlling the household during his absence; the famous love matches commemorated in verse — often the occasions of feuds — would also find their place in traditions and, eventually, in sagas. It has been asserted that the number of plots available to novelists is limited in number; this kind of limitation of one important source of saga material would help to give a false appearance of uniformity to the saga picture of the Saga Age.

So far I have dealt with the uniform picture of women's life given in the sagas; in the rest of this paper I shall try to indicate the lack of uniformity which characterizes the sagamen's treatment of some outstanding women. The first claim on our attention is the evidence for "romantic love" in the sagas. Bergþóra has typified this attitude for all saga readers ("I was given to Njáll young and I promised him then that we should both share the same fate"); but the clearest picture of such love in action is given in *Gísla saga* and *Laxdæla saga*. What I am looking for is evidence that some heroines find the whole motivating power for living in their love for their husbands even when such love conflicts with love of kin and the form and pressure of the times. The account of Hrefna's death after the slaying of Kjartan,⁴ has interest for this theme:—

The Mýramen and the men of Víðidal rode to Hjarðarholt. Þorsteinn Kuggason asked to foster Ásgeir, Kjartan's son, as a comfort for Hrefna. But Hrefna went north with her brothers and was weighed down with grief. Nevertheless she showed her good breeding and was kindly in speech with everyone. She did not marry after Kjartan's death. She lived but a short time after she came north, and most people say that she died of a broken heart.

This passivity is not the reaction of Auðr, the wife of Gísli, as Eyjólfur found to his cost when he tried to bribe

⁴ *Laxdæla saga* Ch. L.

her with silver into revealing the whereabouts of her husband, the outlawed Gísli. Here is the climax of their encounter:⁵

Auðr takes the silver, places it in a large purse, and then stands up. She strikes Eyjólfur on the nose with the purse of silver, so that the blood gushed out all over him, saying: "Take that for your easy credulity and be damned to you."⁶ How could you expect me to deliver my husband into the hands of a wicked man like you. Take this back and with it shame and disgrace. Wretched fellow, you shall remember as long as you live that a woman has struck you. Neither will you find what you came for" . . . Moreover men thought Eyjólfur's expedition most contemptible.

Auðr's story is a significant one and she is chiefly remembered as the occasion for one of the three memorable saga utterances by or about women. Hers was no easy life. Once Gísli was outlawed she lived in a desolate spot; she saw him in the summer only and, then, she was continually on the watch. Her brother Vésteinn had been treacherously killed early in the story and this, together with privation, had tempered her nature to a steely consistency. It is not surprising that in the final, fatal attack on Gísli she should feel the need for physical action and that she should have defended him ably with her cudgel until she was caught and held. She is fully drawn for us, and the bloody nature of her attack on Eyjólfur and the physical defence of Gísli after years of plotting on his behalf are sound touches of character portrayal. This, surely, is a character drawn either from life or from accurately preserved memory. I feel, however, that the saga author is not really interested in Auðr for herself; for him she is only an agent in the story of Gísli. Once Gísli is dead she is dismissed from the story with a host of others. "She went South (to Rome) and did not return".⁷ What is more significant for this failure to preserve her complete story — she

⁵ *Gísla saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson in *Íslensk Fornrit* VI, 1943. pp. 100-1.

⁶ A loose translation of: *haf nú þetta fyrir auðtryggi þína ok hvert ógagn með.*

⁷ *Gísla saga*, p. 118.

left no descendants. Yet this saga writer gives to Eyjólfur a moment of insight into her lot as Gísli's wife,⁸ when he dangles before her the improvement in her lot if she were to betray Gísli :—

I shall arrange a marriage for you far superior to your present one. For you must be aware how uncongenial it will be for you to continue living in this uninhabited fjord, bearing with the consequences of Gísli's lucklessness and never seeing your kinsmen and near relations.

It is probable that in this speech Eyjólfur keeps the weightiest argument until the end. "To the mind of primitive man there are few facts which affect the individual alone. Practically everything he does, be it ever so trivial, affects his group. By obeying the moral code he may bring good fortune to himself and to his people; by neglecting it, not only will he himself suffer, but all his fellows with him".⁹ The word "primitive" is often used loosely, but the Saga Age Icelanders depicted in the Family Sagas retain some of the habits of thought of a "primitive society", thus defined. The common Germanic ideas of the Heroic Age were developed in Iceland in a way that, to quote W. P. Ker,¹⁰ "had been unknown in the German nations who were called upon to match themselves against Rome" and those ideas, with their sacred duties of revenge and their stress upon the ties of kinship, belong to what has been called the 'co-conscious' level of thinking.¹¹ Much that the sagas tell us about the Saga Age gives support to Eyjólfur's argument that Auður should place duty to kin before life with an outlaw husband.

⁸ Ibid., p. 99.

⁹ *General Anthropology*, ed. Franz Boas, 1938, p. 479.

¹⁰ *Epic and Romance*, 1908, pp. 57-8. This view is disputed with a wealth of evidence by Dame B. S. Phillpotts in *Kindred and Clan*, 1913, pp. 37, 46, 246, 255, 270. I think Ker is too definite, but I am not convinced that evidence drawn from the laws reflects accurately for my purpose here either the 'feel' of a community or a later author's imaginative reconstruction of what it was like to live in a past age.

¹¹ Gerald Heard, *The Ascent of Humanity*, 1929. The term is borrowed without accepting the author's general thesis.

The saga writer throws more light on this theme later on in *Gísli saga*¹² :—

Now (i.e., after the slaying of Gísli) Eyjólfur with eleven others rode south from home to meet Þorkr the Fat and told him the news and all the details. Þorkr was pleased with the news and asks Þórdís (his wife, the sister of the slain Gísli) to make Eyjólfur welcome, "and remember the great affection which you showed to Þorgrímr my brother,¹³ and entertain Eyjólfur hospitably". "I shall weep for Gísli my brother", said she, "but will it not be a sufficient welcome for Gísli's slayer if gruel is cooked and served to him?" In the evening when she was serving the food Þórdís dropped the tray containing the spoons. Eyjólfur had placed the sword which he had taken from Gísli between the bench and his feet. Þórdís recognizes the sword and as she stoops for the spoons she seized the grip of the sword and strikes at Eyjólfur, intending to run him through the middle. She did not notice that the hilt was pointed upwards and struck against the table (where it was held); her blow landed lower than she intended, caught him on the thigh and gave him a severe wound. Þorkr seizes Þórdís and snatches the sword from her. They all leapt up and overturned the tables and the food. Þorkr offered self-doom for that wound and Eyjólfur took the full 'wergild', declaring he would have demanded more if Þorkr had made a less generous offer. Þórdís then names witnesses and declares herself separated from Þorkr and swore that she would never again enter the same bed with him. She carried this out and went to live at Þórdísarstaðir out in Eyrr.

Þórdís' course of action was made easier and clearer because there was not much love between her and Þorkr. This separation must have been the safety valve for a long suppressed hatred which maternal love and wifely duty had helped to hide if not to assuage. At such a crisis a man and his wife may find a distinct cleavage between them, but only an exceptional woman, like Þórdís, would carry the cleavage to the logical conclusion of a separation — particularly when she could expect little support from her male relations.

A similar incident in *Laxdæla saga* (the story of Vigdís and her husband, Þórðr goddi¹⁴) shows that Þórdís was

¹² Edition cited, pp. 116-7.

¹³ Þorgrímr was Þórdís's first husband and Þorkr had married her after Þorgrímr had been slain and while she was carrying Þorgrímr's child.

¹⁴ *Laxdæla saga*, edition cited, Chs. XIV-XVI.

not the only woman capable of such independent action once the tension produced by a feud had disturbed the relationship between husband and wife. It is safe to assume from the context that the sudden and complete demands made upon Vigdís by the feud formed the pretext, and not the real cause, of the separation. Vigdís objected to those actions of her husband which apparently did not fit her conception of a manly character. However it is difficult to decide what her standards were since Hǫskuldr (who is consistently presented to us in a favourable light) upheld the attitude of Þórðr. At such a time of crisis it becomes clear that the men had settled opinions of what a wife's behaviour should be and that they allowed no deviation from it. The importance of Þórdís and Vigdís for our theme is that these two are determined to follow their personal convictions, although it meant flouting convention. It is doubtful whether they thought of their relations with their husbands as something personal — a loyalty between two individuals — since both of them owe an equally communal duty to kin which contradicts their duty as wives. Still the prominence given in the sagas to the few women who sought divorce suggests that either the majority of wives chose their husbands before their kinsmen when the choice had to be made, or that wives were rarely called upon to make this choice. The demand for separation must have been deepseated before it was resorted to, since the position of a wife as head of the inner household gave her ample opportunities for the display of power, and these able women would not have been insensible to the loss of such power when they chose separation. Viewed thus, Auðr's decision to stay with Gísli is truly surprising and we can agree with Gísli "that he was fortunate in his wife".

These women are exceptional, then, because the sagas rarely give examples of women who believe in a love which can support a husband when he differs sharply from

the communal code of honour. On the contrary, the saga writers' favourite role for a woman is to use her to revive the man's fading spirit of revenge. (The sagaman, like Shakespeare, is not averse to using a ghost for this purpose, but the best writers prefer to use a woman). Here, surely, Guðrún in *Laxdæla* claims pride of place, but let us for the present look at some less distinguished women.

In the sagas, the over-powering sense of duty to the slain kinsman and the almost subconscious desire for bloody revenge is frequently stronger in the woman than in the man. It is over fifteen years since Professor Gwyn Jones initiated me into the mysteries of Old Icelandic through the medium of *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*. There are many dramatic and exciting moments in that carefully planned and well proportioned narrative, but one remained in my memory¹⁵ — "There was a woman by the lake washing her linen and she notices men passing by. That slave-woman sweeps her clothes together and dashes home, throws them down outside near the wood-pile and rushes indoors. Hrafnkell had not then risen. She started talking as she entered"—and by her relentless stirring up of unhealed wounds to his pride, she set in train Hrafnkell's revenge and Sámr's final and complete discomfiture. We are left to assume that without her intervention, Hrafnkell would have let Eyvindr Bjarnason pass unscathed. Why did the author, so aptly and feelingly place the onus on this unknown slavewoman? If, as Nordal suggests,¹⁶ this author was well versed in saga-literature and was writing late in the thirteenth century, he would know the typical saga situation in which a woman eggs on a diffident husband or son to bloody deeds of revenge. How in *Heiðarviga saga*¹⁷ Þuríðr incites her sons to avenge their brother Hallr

¹⁵ *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, ed. F. S. Cawley, 1932, p. 28.

¹⁶ *Hrafnkatla* in *Íslenzk Fræði* VII, 1940, pp. 52-5.

¹⁷ Ed. S. Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, *Íslenzk Fornrit* III, 1938, p. 277.

while she is serving food; how in *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja*,¹⁸ Þorbjörg, after swearing to be the death of the men who had killed her brother, wrests the support of her husband for this revenge at the point of the dagger while they are in bed; and, finally, he would know how, in *Hávarðar saga Ísfrðings*,¹⁹ Bjargey prosecutes the revenge for her son, Óláfr, over a period of three years while her husband, Hávarðr the Halt, had taken to his bed, apparently in despair. Further, if our author knew *Laxdæla saga* (which is possible) he would remember how Þorgerðr²⁰ overcame all squeamishness and was present at Bolli's death —

Bolli supported himself against the dairy wall while Halldórr and his brothers rushed inside. Þorgerðr also went in. Bolli then said: "It is safe, brothers, to come nearer than you have done hitherto:" and intimated that he expected his defence to be brief. It was Þorgerðr who answered him and said there was no need to shrink from dealing boldly with Bolli and told them to finish him off. Then Steinnleif leapt at Bolli and struck at his neck with a large axe just above his shoulders so that the head flew off at once. Þorgerðr congratulated him and said that Guðrún would now have quite a few red hairs to trim for Bolli for some time to come.

In each example here cited the women try the temper of the men and attempt to shame them in public in order to cause them sufficient "loss of face" to force them to undertake vengeance. Why are they so unnecessarily violent and fierce? Perhaps the saga author is writing in retrospect of something he never fully visualized and, consequently, he ennobled such ferocity, when men like Njáll and Gunnarr sought to allay it. For despite their ferocity, the saga writers seem to hold a high opinion of such women. This is the conclusion of *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja*²¹ :—

¹⁸ Ed. Guðni Jónsson in *Íslendinga Sögur* (Íslendingasagnaútgáfan), XII, 1947, p. 284.

¹⁹ Ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, *Íslensk Fornrit* VI, 1943, pp. 308-9, 315-21.

²⁰ *Laxdæla Saga*, Ch. LV.

²¹ Edition cited, p. 290.

Four and twenty men were slain in revenge for Hǫrðr and no compensation was paid for one of them. The sons of Hǫrðr slew some and his friends and kinsmen slew others, and some Hróarr slew. Almost all were slain with the counsel of Þorbjörg Grimkelsdóttir. She is thought to have been a woman of great spirit.

The saga writers are distinguished for their balanced judgment, and if it is to their purpose, the workaday world peeps through the story. So that when the evidence begins to suggest that even the mothers applauded slayings done by mere boys,²² we are not spared the full expression of Ásdís's bitter resignation²³ when Grettir and the young Illugi set out on the last ill-fated journey to Drangey. Thus the balance of probability is restored. Similarly, in *Eyrbyggja saga*, the story of Þorgerðr, the widow of Vigfúss,²⁴ hints at the mental turmoil — indeed, the weariness of spirit — which could underlie this external appearance of female ruthlessness. She is counselled to "go home and have the corpse of Vigfúss, your husband, dug up and take his head and bring it to Arnkell and say to him thus, that that head would not have bargained with others for the taking up of a bloodsuit after him, if there had been need for it." Þorgerðr replied that she did not know what benefit there would be in these counsels, but she said that she could see that they spared her neither labour nor trial of her endurance. "Yet, even this will I undergo, if thereby the lot of my foes may be made heavier than before"

Possibly, these women demand bloody revenge more keenly than the men because they were less "realistic" in their outlook and allowed their emotions to discount the overwhelming odds which frequently the men could foresee and assess. Further, the men might have realized the utter waste of the old system of bloodshed and

²² Like Bera in *Egils saga* (ed. S. Nordal, *Íslensk Fornrit* II, 1933, p. 109), Þorgerðr in *Kjalnesinga saga* (ed. Guðni Jónsson, *Íslendinga Sögur* XII, 1947, pp. 327-9), and Ásdís in *Grettis saga* (*Íslensk Fornrit* VII, 1936, p. 155).

²³ *Grettis saga*, edition cited, pp. 223-4.

²⁴ *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Íslensk Fornrit* IV, 1935, Ch. XXVII.

grasped, in essence, the newer idea of commutation, while the women, traditionally conservative, still clung to the older ideas. The opportunities for travel, which chiefly belonged to men, would have assisted in this loosening of the older Germanic code of honour which, according to W. P. Ker,²⁵ remained in Iceland long after it was defunct elsewhere in Europe. Moreover, under Christian influence, the saga writers of the thirteenth century would have understood the idea of commutation and might have endowed their favourite male heroes with some of their own ideas.

The evidence so far presented suggests that the sagamen interpreted their women characters as living in a man-made world: their behaviour is approved or disapproved by masculine codes of conduct.²⁶ Two women, at least, are shown acting entirely for their own ends, unhindered by the duties and loyalties to be expected of people who were conditioned by a communal way of thinking. Their actions, as they are presented to us, are governed by no principles except those of personal satisfaction. They are Hildiguðr — the wife of Hǫskuldr goði of Hvítanes (in *Njála*²⁷), and Freydís Eiríksdóttir in the saga of Eric the Red.²⁸

Even before her marriage Hildiguðr will spare nothing to get her way and after Hǫskuldr's death she forces Flosi to take revenge when he was about to seek a settlement: her method is the familiar saga way for a woman:— public humiliation after a meal by some physical demonstration of the need for revenge²⁹ :—

²⁵ *Epic and Romance*, edition cited, p. 58.

²⁶ The Family Sagas contain but eighteen direct and oblique references to the legal status of women. The more important are in *Njáls saga* (ed. Guðni Jónsson, *Íslendinga Sögur* XI, 1947, pp. 45, 114, 386, 397), *Grettis saga* (edition cited, pp. 256-9), and *Laxdæla saga* (edition cited, Ch. XVII).

²⁷ *Njáls saga*, edition cited, pp. 224, 226-7, 260-1, 266-8.

²⁸ *Grænlandinga saga*, ed. Matthías Þórðarson, *Íslensk Fornrit* IV, 1935, Ch. VIII.

²⁹ *Njáls saga*, edition cited, p. 268.

Flosi had finished his meal and the table had been cleared. She threw the cloak (of the slain Hǫskuldr) over Flosi. The gore rattled down all over him. Then she said: "Flosi, this cloak was given to Hǫskuldr by you and now I wish to return it to you. In this he was slain. I call to witness God and all just men that I adjure you, by all the miracles of your Christ and by your own manhood and humanity, to avenge all the wounds which Hǫskuldr had on his dead body, or else be looked upon by everyone as a cowardly poltroon". Flosi tossed the cloak from him and flung it back into her arms and said: "You are the foulest hag to wish us to follow that course of action which will turn out worse for all of us; but women's counsels are ever cold"

The whole conversation between them³⁰ illustrates the opposed attitudes of men and women towards the question of settling a feud by commutation. It might be objected that Hildiguðr was motivated by some regard for the unsatisfied soul or stained fame of Hǫskuldr, that, to use E. V. Gordon's nice distinction,³¹ she was moved by the "sacred duty of revenge" and not by "private satisfaction". Against this view two things should be weighed. First, the thumbnail character sketch of Hildiguðr given by the sagaman taken together with Flosi's reproach on first meeting her ("You must be sorely troubled, niece, if you weep, but still it is well that you should weep for a good man.") Both of these suggest that Hildiguðr was not deeply touched by the personal loss of Hǫskuldr as a beloved husband. Second, the conclusion of the saga tells of her marriage to Kári, the chief protagonist of Flosi and one of the participants in the slaying of Hǫskuldr. The influence of ideas later than those of the Saga Age is very apparent in this latter portion of the saga — in fact, it is crucial for any complete understanding of what the author of *Njála* is trying to do — but such a marriage would not have taken place if the "sacred duty of revenge" had been paramount in Hildiguðr's mind. The author of *Njála* demands to be treated as an artist who knew the full value of each character in his story. There are many

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 266-9.

³¹ *An Introduction to Old Norse*, 1944, Introduction, p. xxxiii.

strands of "might-have-been", lines of action which, if they had been pursued, might have prevented the crime of burning a man in his house, but it seems to me fitting and artistically appropriate that this "cold counsel of a woman" should balance the long stored up anger of Hallgerðr which caused Gunnarr's death in the first half of the saga. It is a trivial but irrevocable act that brings on the great tragedies — we are reminded, as often in the sagas, that the threads of human destiny are spun too heedlessly. Often we forget this emphasis because the sagaman is so eager to record events and so apt to compress motives into a short, but effective, gnomic phrase.³² Like Gunnarr's death, one aspect of the tragic burning of Njáll is that it starts from a woman's pique and not from a passionate desire to accomplish the sacred duty of revenge.

It is not pique, but evil, that governs Freydís's ill-starred career, culminating in her execution of five women in Wineland the Good. The difficulties attending life in a new country like Greenland, and the consequent undermining of all communal ties might explain this strong individualistic behaviour of Freydís; but the whole story has an air of improbability about it.³³ To me she seems to be conceived and presented as a foil to that exceptional — but colourless — lady, Guðríðr, the grandmother of Bishops Brandr and Þorlákr. Freydís is the 'bad hat' whose ill-fame is so frequently treasured in oral tales and is perhaps, too synthetic for our theme. (In this she resembles that most incredible woman, Yngvildr Fair-cheek, in *Svarfðæla saga*, who for her power of endurance alone merits our attention; but space will not

³² The women in *Njála* are neither unimportant to the development of the story nor unimpressive in themselves: Gunnhildr the Queen Mother, Hallgerðr, Rannveig, Hildiguðr and Bergþóra — an impressive gallery of portraits.

³³ I sense this improbability in the curious manner in which, after the return to Greenland, the whisper spreads but no action is taken against Freydís. Possibly a clash between witchcraft in the oral tradition and the Christian outlook of the sagaman may explain this, but the subject is too involved and too important to be dealt with summarily here.

allow us to deal here with her proud story and its pathetic end).³⁴

Hildiguðr and Freydís are portrayed as unusual but, perhaps, unfeminine natures; Sigrfljóð (in *Fóstbræðra saga*),³⁵ Þorbjörg (in *Grettis saga*),³⁶ and Unnr the Deepminded (in *Laxdæla*)³⁷ are unusual in the status they accept for themselves. The status of women in the sagas was determined by a "realistic" recognition of their limitation of intellect, character, and power to command. Since a self-supporting household demanded a division of labour and authority, certain chores and duties were ruled exclusively by the mother, wife, or widow, although the final authority in all spheres was the male head of the household. Rarely did a wife initiate a course of action which might lead to a feud without her husband's consent. So the status enjoyed by these three women (and, incidentally by Guðrún in *Laxdæla*) deserves some consideration.

Sigrfljóð, the widow at Jökulsfirðir, had egged on the foster-brothers, Þorgeirr and Þormóðr, to slay her enemies, who were also the enemies of her kinsman, Vermundr. She then visits Vermundr and tells him of the slaying. She defends their action because crime, robbery and plunder must be punished and should have been punished by the district's leading man (i.e. Vermundr). She offers Vermundr "three hundred of silver" with which to buy peace for Þorgeirr and Þormóðr, and Vermundr accepts her offer. Now, it is not unusual for a woman to incite a man to a slaying, but in the conclusion of this tale, the author has given Sigrfljóð the viewpoint of a man. Her speech to Vermundr might well have been spoken by Njáll or Snorri Goði.

³⁴ *Svarfdæla saga*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, *Íslendinga Sögur* VIII, 1947, pp. 173-6, 201-14.

³⁵ Ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson, and Guðni Jónsson, *Íslensk Fornrit* VI, 1943, pp. 134-5, 136-7, 139, 141.

³⁶ Edition cited, pp. 168-72; cf. *Fóstbræðra saga*, edition cited, pp. 121-2.

³⁷ Edition cited, Chs. I-VII.

Such successful female intervention, amounting to an assessment of the value of the slain men, is a rare occurrence in the Family Sagas.

The part played by Þorbjörg the Proud in Grettir's story is well known.³⁸ If we assume that *Grettis saga*, as we now have it, is a later composition than *Fóstbræðra saga*, then it is significant that the author of *Grettis saga* makes Þorbjörg explain her actions to her husband.³⁹ In this explanation one detects the reasons of the historian (Sturla?)⁴⁰ and not the recaptured memory of oral tradition: "There were many reasons. The first is that you should be considered a greater chieftain than before for having a wife who would dare do such a thing. And, secondly, his kinswoman, Hrefna, would not have wished that I should let him be slain. The third reason is, because, in many ways, he is a most valiant man". "You are a wise woman in most things", replied Vermundr, "accept my thanks". The author does not spare his eulogies when introducing her to us, while all the details of this episode: the respectful saluting of her by the farmers, the phrase, "my thingmen", which she uses, the promises she extracts from Grettir and the rating she gives him, and her invitation to Grettir — an outlaw — to stay with her, — all this suggests a great matriarch and bears a close resemblance to the character of her ancestor, Unnr. Þorbjörg herself admits that her action was not quite in keeping with a wife's usual status and yet her husband pays respect to her astute judgment in purely male affairs, which in this case — since Grettir was an outlaw and the farmers were in the right — engaged Vermundr's personal honour. If the imprint of Sturla Þórðarson's hand can be distinguished in our present

³⁸ I suggest, with much diffidence, that this nickname is more suitable than the usual "the Fat" for the daughter of Ólafr Peacock, although aware that "Proud" is only a secondary meaning (cf. English 'stout' and 'stouthearted').

³⁹ *Grettis saga*, edition cited, p. 170.

⁴⁰ Cf. S. Nordal, *Sturla Þórðarson og Grettis Saga in Íslensk Fræði* IV, 1938.

Gretla, we may suggest that this treatment of Þorbjörg the Proud is important for any close understanding of the relationship between the Sturlung Age concept of a woman's place in society and the picture of a woman's life in the Saga Age as painted in the Family Sagas.

The same may be said of Unnr the Deepminded, who, in some ways, dominates a saga much concerned with women's affairs. It is unnecessary to elaborate her well-known story in detail but it is obvious that for the saga writer she was the ideal standard by which all other women were judged: she was the Brynhildr of the Viking Age — wherever possible her name is included in genealogies and her exploits are recorded in more than one saga. Yet nowhere is it implied that she is a pattern of what all women could become; on the contrary, the saga man does not tire of emphasizing (or underlining by incident) her difference from all other women. Her uniqueness is her claim to fame and the reason for her lengthened name. Mainly, women's names are lengthened by reference to their physical characteristics;⁴¹ here is an epithet which would have befitted Burnt Njáll or Ari the Learned.

Compared with Þorbjörg and Unnr, Hildiguðr and Freydís are creatures of impulse and emotion, but, together with Sigrfljóð, they seem to throw into relief the more common nature and spirit of the average woman. Here are women who have decided to resolve the conflict between sacred duty and private satisfaction, by refusing to acknowledge the sacredness of the duty except when it suited their own purposes. Considering these five women, alone, it might be argued that this race had a genius for producing women worthy and capable of gaining respect and important concessions for their sex. The sagas give two versions of the status of women in the Saga Age Society — theoretically, and legally, a low and unimportant place, but, in practice, an honoured and

⁴¹ Cf. Coalbrows, Slimlegs, Faircheek.

effective one. Dare we suggest, then, that it was the favourable working of the laws of heredity that accounts for the difference. An alternative suggestion is that a system under which women played a prominent part in the domestic economy, because so many fjords were isolated, gave favourable opportunities for women of exceptional ability to develop into legendary figures worthy of comparison with the more famous heroes of the North. But neither the biological nor the economic theory is valid until we have learned to discount the part played by the author's fiction in presenting the characters to us.

The persistence of the ideals of the Heroic Age in the Family Sagas has been noted many times. In particular both W. P. Ker⁴² and Knut Liestøl⁴³ notice that "Guðrun's comment on the death of Kjartan is a repetition of Brynhild's phrase on the death of Sigurd." This recrudescence of the heroic spirit in Guðrún is connected with the bitter repression of her love for Kjartan and a thinly disguised hatred of Bolli. The saga author leaves us in no doubt.⁴⁴ She married Bolli under pressure and there was little love between them. When Kjartan returned to Iceland, unmarried, "it was obvious that she was ill-pleased, for many said that she pined greatly for Kjartan although she concealed it."⁴⁵ The theft of the head-dress and all the petty rivalry by means of which Guðrún set the two brothers at enmity are but perversions of this repressed love. It is in keeping with the character created for us, that she does not flinch from causing Kjartan's death.

However, her character is not straightforward and, unlike Brynhildr, she does not end her life on a funeral pyre. For in some ways, they managed things more simply in the less complex society of the Heroic Age.

⁴² *Epic and Romance*, edition cited, p. 222.

⁴³ *The Origin of the Icelandic Family Sagas*, 1930, p. 173.

⁴⁴ *Laxdæla Saga*, edition cited, Chs. XLII-III.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

Thus although her whole life presents that baffling elemental quality found in Brynhildr (hatred of husband conspiring subconsciously with love of an earlier wooer to accomplish that wooer's death), yet she further complicates the story by bending all her energies to revenge the death of her own husband. There is ironical consistency here, since, by causing Kjartan's death, she was responsible for Bolli's death too. When such an attempt is made to resolve two dramatically opposed loyalties, it is small wonder that to Guðrún it seemed as though everlasting fate had yielded to fickle chance and chaos judged the strife: to wait upon vengeance for Bolli was her only inspiration. This was the ironic sublimation of her love for him "to whom she had behaved worst". The first nun and recluse in Iceland⁴⁶ carried a full experience and bitter memories into retirement; we are left to infer that her gnomic utterance is a result of such seclusion. I believe it is presented to us by the author, not as an echo of the Heroic Age, but as at once explanation and expiation.

For in Brynhildr there is a conflict between three forces: her fierce individuality, her desire to be a wife, and her passion for revenge. The demand of the community — that she be faithful to Gunnarr and that Sigurðr should remain faithful to Guðrún — are inescapable for her. There is but one solution: both she and Sigurðr must die.⁴⁷

This kind of struggle is paralleled in the life of Hallgerðr in *Njála*: she does not love Gunnarr, therefore he must die that she may be free, (not in any individual sense), but because his being alive and not loving her is

⁴⁶ For this is the sagaman's claim for the aging Guðrún who made this confession (*Laxdæla Saga*, p. 228).

⁴⁷ It might be objected to this simplified interpretation that Brynhildr is obsessed by her own desires, and that we are not quite certain that she really loves Sigurðr. However, since personal fidelity to Sigurðr is expressed only in *Helreið Brynhildar* (ed. Guðni Jónsson in *Eddukvæði* II, 1949, pp. 359-63), it is better to regard her character as a struggle between the three forces suggested above.

too great a public shame for both of them. Bergþóra and Auðr act in a way more comprehensible to a modern reader and seem to be more "advanced" in their outlook than the Saga Age in which their story is set (if "advanced" and "primitive" societies are still intelligible terms). As they are presented to us, they have discarded the older communal loyalty and have discovered new loyalties in contrast with Hallgerðr and Guðrún, who by the very nature of events, are represented as calculating self-seekers, although much of their behaviour, I suggest, is patterned on the communal loyalties of a previous and more primitive age. Thus it seems to me, that those Family Sagas we have examined do not portray certain women who are exceptional because they are living in the shadow of the characters of the Eddic Age, but women who are struggling between loyalty to an older code of behaviour and a growing sense of self-consciousness which, in the finer spirits, leads towards a new way of life not uninfluenced by Christianity.

If we accept the view that the majority of the Family Sagas were composed in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, then it becomes easier to understand the conflicting views of women's conduct, outlined in this paper. The uniformity of outlook is there, but the saga author served two ideals: the love of historical truth and the desire to tell an entertaining story. Frequently, the essential framework of his story was fixed by long-cherished oral tradition and thus some of his characters had to say and do things which, even to the author, were inexplicable. The wonder is, not that so many readers have been so long deceived into believing in the intrinsic historicity of the sagas—that is not surprising when, for instance, the author of *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* takes such pains to give his fiction the appearance of history—but that so much of the habits of thought and the way of life of the Saga Age has survived in sagas which were written either during the disastrous

Sturlung civil wars or after the loss of independence in 1264. My hope is that this diversified and imperfect treatment of a fascinating subject has not served to dispel that wonder.

ERLING SKAKKE'S DISPUTE WITH KING VALDEMAR.

By G. M. GATHORNE-HARDY.

THERE are, as is well known, two independent accounts of the conflict which broke out between King Valdemar of Denmark and Erling Skakke as Regent of Norway, immediately after the coronation of Magnus Erlingson. The origins and progress of the dispute are described from the Danish angle by Saxo, in the 14th book of his *Gesta Danorum*, and from that of Norway by *Fagrskinna* and by Snorre in his saga of Magnus Erlingson. These two Icelandic accounts are clearly compiled at second hand from a common source no longer in existence; we can only conjecture how far the original narrative has been modified or misunderstood in the process; neither of the existing works was written till more than fifty years after the events with which we are here concerned. Saxo, on the other hand, was not only a contemporary of King Valdemar, but was intimately associated with his great friend and counsellor, Archbishop Absalon; his testimony, therefore, though sometimes biased and tendentious, carries unusually high authority; for this reason his version is naturally preferred by all modern historians, so far as the chronology and sequence of events are concerned.

There can in fact be no question that in these respects the Icelandic or Norwegian version is extremely inaccurate and misleading. Some of the material dates are capable of independent control: we know, for instance, that the final settlement of the dispute coincided with the coronation of Valdemar's young son, Knud, in the year 1170, and again that Erling's raid on Denmark, which

was one of the incidents of the struggle, was made as part of a plot with Buris Henrikson, for which Buris was arrested and imprisoned by Valdemar, who rendered him harmless for the future by blinding and castrating him. There is abundant evidence to fix this event in the year 1167. The Icelandic account cannot be reconciled with either of these dates. In fact, it telescopes the whole business in such a way as to omit all its later stages prior to the final settlement, and to treat the rising in Norway of the pretender Olav Gudbrandson as a subsequent event, whereas it was clearly contemporaneous. There is in *Sturlunga Saga*¹ a most detailed and circumstantial account of the movements of an Icclander, Ari Thorgeirson, who fought and died under Erling's leadership during the rising in question; from this it is quite plain that Olav first appeared in the winter 1165-6, i.e. not later than April in the latter year.

All this may now be regarded as common ground among historians, but, somewhat surprisingly, none of them follow their preference for Saxo's account to its logical conclusion. When it comes to the point where the rival versions are in most complete conflict — the reason which they assign for the whole episode, all, so far as I can ascertain, Danish as well as Norwegian, change their attitude and adopt the statements found in Snorre and *Fagrskinna*. It calls, perhaps, for some temerity, or even impudence, to question such a consensus of opinion, but that, nevertheless, is what I propose to do. I am going to suggest that in this respect as in others Saxo's version is the correct one, and that the alternative story must be, at any rate in its main feature, rejected.

Summarized briefly, the issue is as follows. Snorre and *Fagrskinna* say that the whole trouble was occasioned by Erling's breach of a sworn undertaking made with King Valdemar in 1161. Saxo, on the other hand, never gives the slightest hint of any such cause for Valdemar's

¹ Ed. G. Vigfusson, Oxford 1878, I, 89-91.

hostility; he says that he intervened in Norway in response to an appeal from the anti-Erling party, made early in 1164, when their scattered remnants fled to Denmark — an event confirmed by the rival version — after the collapse of the rising under Sigurd Markusfostre, who was captured in the previous summer and executed at Michaelmas 1163. Having at the moment no local candidate for the Norwegian throne, they first approached the King of Sweden with an offer of the position, and on his refusal made the same offer to Valdemar, who was indeed a nephew of King Sigurd the Crusader, and might therefore be considered to have some connection with the Norwegian royal family. The fact that the followers of Sigurd Markusfostre carried on a guerilla warfare against Erling for several months after their leader's execution shows that their real concern was to overthrow Erling and his regime at any price; the legal title of their candidate for the throne was a very secondary consideration; indeed, the credentials of their next pretender, Olav Gudbrandson, suffered from precisely the same defect as those of his opponent, Magnus Erlingson. Both were grandsons, in the female line, of a former King.

There is therefore no inherent difficulty in accepting Saxo's story. But, apart from any further objections, I suggest that Saxo's silence on the subject of Erling's alleged perfidy makes the alternative version practically incredible. If, as the Icelandic historians say, Valdemar had so good a justification for his action as a flagrant breach of a sworn promise, if, as they tell us, he was loudly and indignantly denouncing Erling as an oath-breaker and preparing for that reason to invade Norway, it seems to me absolutely impossible that Saxo should never have heard a hint of anything of the kind, and equally impossible that, if he had heard of it, he would not eagerly have seized the opportunity of publicizing a story so much more creditable to his hero, Valdemar, and so discreditable to his opponent. An inference

a silentio may not ordinarily carry much conviction, but in this instance it is surely conclusive. We find, therefore, at the very outset, an almost overwhelming reason for rejecting the charge of deliberate perfidy brought against the Norwegian regent.

This does not, of course, mean that the Norwegian tradition is without any foundation in fact. As the proverb reminds us, — There can be no smoke without fire. In endeavouring to reconstruct the true history of the whole incident, it is necessary to pay attention to the evidence from both sources, and on certain details it is probable that Norway was better informed than Denmark. In regard, however, to the main issue as to whether the dispute originated in the breach by Erling of a sworn promise, further examination of this kind will, I think, only confirm the view for which I am contending.

In the first place, the action imputed to Erling is contrary to everything which we know of his character. He had, no doubt, serious faults; he was unnecessarily ruthless and brutal, and he shared the common failings of his age — intemperance and sexual infidelity. But no serious moral stigma was then attached to any of these things. Even Saint Olav had an illegitimate son, and heavy drinking was universal. The systematic extermination of possible rival claimants to the throne had scriptural warrant; for example, Jehu's drastic treatment of the family of Ahab received express divine approval (II Kings, x. 30). But by the standard of his time Erling was a most zealous Christian, extremely punctilious in his regard for all religious obligations. I lay no stress on the crusade, on which he accompanied Saint Ragnvald of Orkney; the motives prompting such adventures were notoriously varied and uncertain. But the portrait which we derive from the sagas shows a singularly and scrupulously godfearing man. When about to fight with Sigurd of Royr, he refuses to attack by night, since this practice was associated with pagan sorceries and the power

of the Prince of Darkness; during the subsequent advance, he orders his men to sing the Paternoster and the Kyrie Eleison. Later, on the occasion of his narrow escape from Olav the Unlucky, he is saved by his restless anxiety to attend the service known as *óttusöngur*, which was held in the darkness before daybreak, and we are told that this was his habitual practice — *at venju sinni*, and that when that service was finished “he remained seated and sang a psalm” (*Sturlunga Saga*, I, p. 91). I suggest that such a man would be the very last to break an oath, or worse, to swear with no intention of honouring his word. By Erling, an oath would certainly have been taken very seriously indeed; to break it would not only be dishonourable, but something perilously near a mortal sin. He could no doubt be tricky enough in his use of an ordinary *ruse de guerre*, but it was quite out of his character to be deliberately forsworn.

Erling had, moreover, the reputation of a particularly astute and far-sighted man; as such, it is equally inconsistent with his character that he should ever have pledged himself to accept the terms which King Valdemar is said to have proposed to him. For these were no less than the cession to Denmark of the whole district of Viken, in south-eastern Norway, in return for Valdemar's assistance in establishing Magnus firmly on the throne and disposing of his enemies. There is reason to believe that the feudal suzerainty over the whole of Norway may also have been demanded.

There is no difficulty in accepting the statement that such a proposal was actually made by Valdemar. When Erling visited him in the beginning of 1161, the true situation in Norway was probably quite obscure to him, and Erling and his followers were almost complete strangers. Apart from such slight preference as he might feel through his kinship with the young King and his mother Kristina, he had no motive for any substantial commitment of the forces of Denmark on one side or the

other. After his experience of the conduct of his own relatives in the Danish royal family, ties of blood were not likely to concern Valdemar very deeply. But he could see that the internal state of Norway might offer a promising opportunity of augmenting the power of Denmark. It must have seemed to him quite reminiscent of the historical situation which he is said to have cited as the basis of his claim to Viken, when his remote predecessor, King Harald Gormson, had acquired control of that district during the struggle between Haakon Jarl and the sons of Erik Blood-axe, nearly two centuries previously. But on that occasion the Danish King had intervened with a force said to have been no less than 720 ships.²

It is probable that Valdemar, like his chronicler, greatly exaggerated the straits to which Erling and his party had been reduced by the battle in which King Inge had fallen immediately before. Saxo treats Erling at this juncture as a fugitive survivor of a crushing disaster, and speaks of his visit as *exilium*.³ But this was very far from being the true situation. From Erling's standpoint, there could be no incentive to accept such terms as were offered. Haakon Herdebrei, until his almost accidental success in killing Gregorius Dagson in the beginning of January, and the victory over King Inge which immediately followed, had never seemed a really formidable antagonist. His troops were in a permanent inferiority, both in numbers and quality. The main problem had lain in his elusive, guerilla tactics, which had prevented a decisive encounter.

Erling's retirement to Denmark was not exclusively for the purpose of appealing for foreign assistance. It had a very clear strategic motive. If he came merely as a suppliant, his surprisingly formidable escort would be difficult to explain. It seems to have included

² *Sex hundræd skipa*; Snorre, *Heimskringla*, *Olav Trygvassons Saga*, cap. 15.

³ Saxo, Bk. XIV, p. 553. Page refs. to Holder's edition, Strassburg, 1886.

practically the whole of his immediately available forces. These filled no less than ten ships, and included *inter alia* all the retainers (*alla handgengna menn*) of the Inge party who had been summoned to the meeting in Bergen at which Magnus was chosen King. His purpose was thus not only to appeal to Valdemar for help, but to keep practically his whole striking force together at a point which offered advantages not only for defence but for attack.

The effect of the move, strategically, was to force his opponent to leave the friendly environment of Trøndelag and come south into Viken, where he had to divide his forces between Konungahella on the eastern and Tønsberg on the north-western shore of the Skager Rak, in order to guard against the threat of attack from Denmark. Had Erling and his supporters remained in Norway — say, in Bergen — the position would have been reversed. Haakon would then be free to pursue his habitual tactics of utilising the land route between Viken and Trøndelag, and appearing in the north or south as circumstances might dictate. To deal with this situation would have required a force of sufficient strength to be divided, so as to deal with two such widely separated points simultaneously. On the other hand, the division of Haakon's forces gave Erling an opportunity of bringing off a successful attack with the depleted forces which the catastrophe in Oslo had left him, and this, as we know, he actually achieved. By steering first to Bergen, where no doubt he collected intelligence of the enemy's whereabouts, and then turning back along the Norwegian coast, he evaded the watch posted at Konungahella, and took Haakon, in Tønsberg, by surprise. By the ingenious use of a smoke-screen and a threat of fire to the town, he obtained its surrender without serious fighting, and forced Haakon to retire overland, leaving the whole fleet which he had in the locality to be captured intact. We are justified, therefore, in believing that the strategic

motive of his visit to Denmark had an important place in Erling's plans, and that he was not merely concerned to obtain help.

But in any case, the cession of Viken to Denmark would have entailed an almost unthinkable sacrifice. Viken was the part of the kingdom which at all times displayed the most conspicuous loyalty to the party which Erling represented. It was, moreover, recognized by both sides as the key to the situation. To see this we have only to look at the large proportion of important battles which were fought in this area throughout the entire struggle. The normal birthplace, base and shelter of each successive rising lay no doubt in the remote interior of east central Norway: here its forces were relatively safe, and through this region they could move unmolested either north or south; but neither they nor their opponents could achieve a decisive result except by the use of sea-power, and therefore on or near the coast. With Trøndelag disaffected, Viken became Erling's indispensable stronghold, to capture which was the goal of his opponents' ambition.

Besides this, the most obvious lesson of the whole period of civil war was the necessity for a single and unified sovereignty; two or more Kings within the Norwegian frontiers led inevitably to internecine conflict. It was, as Professor Koht has convincingly argued,⁴ with the object of making any part of Norway inalienable that, at Magnus's coronation, the curious procedure was adopted whereby the kingdom was conveyed to the perpetual overlordship of Saint Olav and held as a fief from him by the living occupant of the throne. The importance attached to this provision was repeatedly emphasized in later years by Magnus Erlingson, who, incidentally, in this way showed what tremendous validity he — and therefore presumably his

⁴ 'Noreg eit Len av St. Olav,' *Historisk Tidsskrift (Norsk)*, XXX, 81.

father — attached to a solemn oath. To quote one example:—

“I was consecrated and crowned by the Legate from Rome and with the consent of all the people. I swore at my consecration to keep the law of the land and to defend this land, with the sword which I received at my consecration, from the ambition and hostility of evil men. I also declared that I would rather lose my life than depart from the words of this oath. Now God decide how long my life shall last, but there is no question of my breaking my coronation oath through cowardice in such wise as to divide the land with you. And it is certain that I will either keep the whole of Norway or lose it all and my life with it”.⁵

For all these reasons, it seems most improbable that Erling could ever have agreed for a moment to the terms proposed by Valdemar. But there is even better ground for assuming that he did not. If such a condition was either stipulated or agreed, it could only have been in consideration of such a degree of Danish help as unmistakeably affected the result: a personal intervention by Valdemar, if not on the prodigious scale attributed to his predecessor Harold Gormson, at least as serious as the effort he subsequently made on his own behalf. But it is demonstrably certain that no assistance on anything approaching such a scale was ever given. Erling never obtained any reinforcement worth anything like the price which Valdemar was demanding. Saxo indeed states — with some possible exaggeration — that the expenses of his ‘exile’ were lavishly defrayed, and that he received a plentiful provision of supplies, but he clearly indicates that this was only because of the close ties of blood between Magnus and the Danish King.⁶ Be that as it may, it can be proved that Erling on his departure was not noticeably stronger either in man-power or shipping than he was when he arrived in Denmark. As has been pointed out, he had then ten ships; after the

⁵ *Sverris Saga*, cap. 60.

⁶ Saxo, Bk. XIV, p. 553. “Magno . . . ad Waldemarum artam materni generis propinquitatem habente, . . . uberes exilii impensas et amplissima comineatum instrumenta percepit.”

attack on Tønsberg he captured the whole local fleet of his opponent; he spent the winter undisturbed in Bergen, where he was in a position to add considerably to his strength; yet, when he made his final and successful attack on Haakon at Sekken, he still had no more than 21 ships,⁷ which are thus fully accounted for. There is no room for the hypothesis of any reinforcement at all commensurate with the high price said to have been asked and conceded. In other words, if such a price was asked, the bargain was never concluded.

Erling can never have accepted the terms proposed. If he had, he was quite astute enough to have made sure that the other side of the bargain was adequately implemented. I do not suppose, or suggest, that he flatly rejected the offer. Having good cause to preserve friendly relations — another reason why he would hardly have sworn with the settled intention of breaking his oath — he presumably said, as most of us would have said, that he must think it over and consult with his advisers in Norway, and thereupon sailed home, with such slight advantages as he had been able to secure on grounds of kinship.

Valdemar may perhaps have been slightly annoyed as time elapsed and he heard no more of the matter, but if he made any protest, it certainly was not loud enough to reach the attentive ears of Saxo. But later Norwegian chroniclers, hearing vaguely of these negotiations, and knowing that the King of Denmark afterwards took steps to assert a title to Viken, may have put two and two together — and made it five !

There may perhaps be an alternative explanation of the legend of a broken oath. It occurs to me as possible that the arrival of so large a force in Denmark may have led Valdemar to stipulate for some guarantee of its loyalty and peaceful behaviour during its stay. May he not, in these circumstances, have exacted a *conditional* oath of

⁷ Snorre, *Magnus Erlingsons Saga*, cap. 6.

falty to himself, similar to that subsequently given, according to Saxo, by Orm Kingsbrother:— “salva fide, quam Magno dedisset, obsequia pollicetur”?⁸ Since this would be quite independent of the negotiations for assistance, Valdemar may conceivably have argued that it was broken when Erling later interfered in the internal affairs of Denmark by entering into a treasonable conspiracy with Buris Henrikson. But since by this time Valdemar was an open enemy, there would not have been much real substance in the contention, and the conjecture is perhaps unduly speculative.

But the more we study the evidence as the incident develops, the more we find to support Saxo's explanation of its origin, and to discredit the rival hypothesis. There is first the episode of the secret mission from Denmark to Trondheim, its members travelling in the guise of innocent pilgrims to St. Olav's shrine. As is perhaps natural, since the scene was laid in Norway, this episode is treated in far greater detail by the Icelandic sources, but its authenticity is confirmed by Saxo, and his explanation appears to be far the more probable. When approached by Erling's opponents in the spring of 1164, Valdemar, he says, though impressed by their representations and tempted by their offer, thought it would be foolish to undertake so serious an operation as the invasion of Norway on their bare word, until he had tested public feeling by means of a secret mission.⁹ This is completely reasonable. On the other hand, to the 'breach of pledge' hypothesis various objections at once suggest themselves. Investigation of public support in Trondheim, involving a delay of several months, seems far more appropriate to a decision as to whether Valdemar should accept a candidature for the Norwegian monarchy than to the question of a punitive expedition to Viken, undertaken in anger at Erling's alleged breach of faith. But an even

⁸ Saxo, Bk. XIV, p. 555.

⁹ Saxo, Bk. XIV, p. 554.

more serious objection is that on the latter hypothesis hardly any time is left for the preparation and dispatch of this mission. Valdemar could not have had any ground for demanding the fulfilment of the supposed agreement until Magnus seemed to have disposed of all opposition in Norway and to be firmly seated on the throne; we may safely say — not before the late summer of 1164.¹⁰ He had then to send to Erling and receive his repudiation of the arrangement, which, according to Snorre, was not finally given till the autumn, and he then had to consider his future course of action. All this would take time. Yet the Danish pseudo-pilgrims are said by *Fagrskinna* (cap. 95) to have come to Trondheim in the autumn or early winter — i.e. about mid-October — of the same year. They were equipped with letters and full information as to the men to be approached. Valdemar's action, if grounded in Erling's refusal, seems therefore impossibly prompt, while Saxo's hypothesis leaves plenty of time for the necessary arrangements.

For the next stage, we are dependent on the Icelandic narratives alone, but these are at this point so circumstantial that they may readily be accepted. Erling received information of the conspiracy, paid a surprise visit to Trondheim on 11th May 1165, attacked and killed many of the ringleaders, confronted the remainder with conclusive evidence of their treason, and imposed severe penalties.

Meanwhile, King Valdemar had invaded Viken. Here it becomes once more possible to collate and reconcile both

¹⁰ I state this in general terms, but personally I am convinced that Magnus was not crowned till the summer of 1164. The arguments of Hertzberg (*Historisk Tidsskrift*, 4 R, iii, 30-35) and Koht (Id. xxx, 98 ff), dating the coronation in 1163, altogether fail to convince me. The argument cannot be developed here, but the coronation can hardly have taken place till the followers of Sigurd Markusfostre were finally disposed of in the spring of 1164. In the summer of 1163, Sigurd and his foster-father were at large off the west coast of Norway. The arrangements for the coronation were very elaborate, and must have taken considerable time, and for Bergen, during the whole summer of 1163, Erling has a formidable *alibi*.

versions of the story. Saxo confirms that Erling was absent at the time in a remote part of Norway, though he erroneously attributes this to fear of the Danes rather than the business of suppressing the Trondheim plot. But for our purposes the important consideration is the peculiar conduct attributed to Valdemar by all the sources while leading this expedition. According to the Icelandic theory, he is actuated by indignation at Erling's perfidy. Yet he makes not the slightest attempt to get in touch with him. Both Snorre and *Fagrskinna* make use of the same surprising words — "quietly and peacefully," in describing his progress.¹¹ Both make him state his unwillingness to harry a Christian country. Saxo appears equally puzzled to account for this singular lack of bellicosity. If only he had pressed his enemies more energetically, he says, without doubt he could have annexed Norway. He also confirms the remarkable moderation of his treatment of a small contingent of the Erling party who had taken up a defensive position on the rock of Tønsberg.¹² Both versions agree that he was acclaimed as King by an *ad hoc* meeting of the Haugating, though the Danish and Icelandic accounts are in violent conflict as to the attitude of the general population. In fact, it cannot be doubted that this was most unfriendly, though Saxo naturally makes the most of such support as Valdemar received. For there is no dispute that, without engaging in any fighting worth the name, the Danish King almost immediately withdrew, to turn his attention to a different objective, the Wends of the Baltic coast.

All this is surely quite inconsistent with the notion of a punitive expedition, undertaken in anger at a gross breach of faith. On the other hand, it fits exactly with the reason assigned by Saxo for Valdemar's action. He

¹¹ "Friðsamliga ok spakliga" (Snorre); "stillilegha oc friðsamlegha" (*Fagrskinna*).

¹² Saxo, p. 554. "Religionem saevitiae preferens, vicum incendere passus non est."

had evidently arrived in Norway with quite misleading information as to the state of public opinion. He had been led to expect a friendly reception, from a population groaning under an intolerable tyranny. He found on the contrary a bitter hostility, to which his 'quiet and peaceful' approach was quite inapplicable. He therefore retired in disappointment, and it looks as if he would never have renewed the attack if Erling had thereupon been content to leave him alone. The situation, in fact, suggests a very recent parallel. In December 1939, Quisling gave to Hitler a similarly inaccurate and tendentious impression of the state of opinion in Norway, with the similar object of engaging his support to overthrow the existing government. When, therefore, the German invasion took place, it was hoped, at first, to conduct it "*stillilegha oc friðsamlegha*," in the guise of friends and liberators. (Cf. *Instilling fra Undersøkelses-kommisjonen av 1945*, Bilag I, page 25: "*Denne mangel på orientering om de norske myndigheters instilling var den største svakhet ved planen*"). It is hard to believe that any mediæval monarch would have abandoned his design so easily if he believed his title to Viken was the subject of a solemn contractual obligation.

Erling, anyhow, was made of sterner stuff. For the moment, preparations for reprisal were interrupted by the outbreak of the rising of Olav Gudbrandson, which, as already mentioned, began in the winter of the same year (1165-6). The new pretender seems to have been an energetic and cunning guerilla, who needed Erling's undivided attention. On 1st November 1166, a remarkable forced march by Olav and his followers gave the Regent a dangerously narrow escape, but from this date onwards the pretender ceased to be formidable, and became known as Olav the Unlucky. In the following year, therefore, Erling was able to turn his attention to Valdemar. Though the conspiracy which he had entered into on this occasion with Buris Henrikson, — a grandson of King

Svend Estridson of Denmark and also a half-brother to Inge of Norway — failed through its untimely disclosure, Erling succeeded in capturing a number of Danish warships laid up on the east coast of Jutland with their commanders on furlough. Soon after, however, he returned home, having no doubt received news of the arrest of Buris.

Erling's action provoked Valdemar into a fresh invasion of Norway, about which the Icelandic sources are altogether silent. It was no doubt regarded in Norway as a phase of the contemporaneous struggle with the local pretender, with whom Valdemar evidently entered into secret negotiations during the following winter. Olav no doubt was more than ready to pay Valdemar's price, the cession of Viken, for such assistance as he would offer. His arrival in the spring of 1168 emboldened Olav to join forces with him, which is no doubt the explanation of the cordial welcome to Tønsberg with which Saxo credits Valdemar on this occasion. The Danish troops, however, grew mutinous and discontented, supplies ran short, and very soon he finally abandoned the struggle, contenting himself with imposing an embargo on Dano-Norwegian trade, which had the desired effect of encouraging overtures for a peace settlement.

It seems possible that the terms eventually agreed on in 1170 may in some way have given rise to the idea that the whole dispute had originated in a sworn promise by Erling to surrender Viken. For in form he now acknowledged Valdemar's title to the disputed territory. This however had no necessary connection with any antecedent bargain, since Valdemar had in the meanwhile established some sort of independent claim through occupation and his acceptance by the Haugating. But in reality the peace settlement was an almost complete victory for the Norwegian Regent. It meant that the King of Denmark abandoned the substance for the shadow, and the whole transaction was merely a piece

of face-saving. Erling continued to exercise the same power as before, technically as a feudatory, but actually with complete independence. For Valdemar invested him with the title of Jarl, which, incidentally, hardly suggests that he ever regarded his actions as untrustworthy or dishonourable. Erling and the Norwegian people clearly took pride in his new distinction, by which he was thenceforward universally known; even after his death his son described himself as Sigurd Jarlson. The terms of peace therefore give no support to a charge which I hope I have now sufficiently proved to be unwarranted. The point may perhaps be said to be of trifling historical importance, but the character of Erling Skakke has, I feel, suffered so unfairly from the anti-aristocratic bias of some leading Norwegian historians that I should like to contribute my quota to its rehabilitation.

THE PLACE-NAMES OF BORNHOLM.¹

BY H. A. KOEFOED

THE Danish Place-Name Society in Copenhagen has recently completed its publication no. 10, containing the place-names of Bornholm.² This comprehensive and scholarly edition offers an excellent opportunity of giving a survey of the Bornholm place-name material. The work on these names, however, is by no means finished in this edition, which only presents the material at present available for the use of scholars. In the following pages an attempt is made, on the basis of this recent edition, to give a picture of the character and peculiarities of the place-names from a rather isolated and therefore more homogeneous district, pointing out some of the special problems of a geographical and historical nature which are offered by these names as distinct from the main bulk of Danish place-names.

Bornholm is only a small island by international standards. It comprises roughly 240 sq. miles. It is situated in the Baltic about 25 miles south-east of Scania. Thus it is rather remote from the Denmark of the present day, being the last remnant of our eastern provinces which were ceded to Sweden in 1660.

Although small in size, the island contains a comparatively large number of place-names. *Bornholms Stednavne* contains roughly 3,800 habitation-names, and 8,200 nature-names, which makes 12,000 in all. For comparison the island of Samsø, which is about one-fifth the size

¹ I am indebted to Professor Kr. Hald, Copenhagen, Professor R. J. McClean and Mr. P. Foote, London, for reading the manuscript, and making helpful suggestions.

² *Bornholms Stednavne*. Udgivet af Stednavneudvalget. København 1951 (G. E. C. Gad). — For the history and general principles of Scandinavian place-name research, see: Kr. Hald, *Vore Stednavne*, Copenhagen 1950, and E. Blohmé, *The Study of Swedish Place-Names*, Groningen-Djakarta 1950.

of Bornholm (45.6 sq. miles) has about 1,800 place-names. The county of Viborg in Jutland, which is 1,223 sq. miles (over 5 times as large as Bornholm) has only 5,340 names. The vast uncultivated heath districts in this county account for the very low figure; nor are all minor names included. Similarly the very high figure for Bornholm is due to natural features which differ considerably from those of the rest of Denmark, being more closely related to the Swedish landscape, with rocks and skerries where every crag and stone calls for a name.

The names may be arranged according to place-name elements in order to show what factors have determined the special character of the material. The survey on the following pages will comprise nature-names as well as habitation-names, and will take into consideration on the one hand the natural conditions which have determined the types of names, and on the other hand the way in which the industries of the inhabitants have influenced the process of name-giving. The examples have been chosen so as to depict something of the history and culture of the people as mirrored in the place-name material. For practical reasons the names will normally be given in the standard Danish written form.

As a consequence of its rocky substratum the Bornholm landscape is hilly, undulating and altogether very varied. Indicative of this type of scenery are names like those ending in: *-klippe* (rock):³ *Lyseklippen* (candle-); *-hald* (stone, flat rock often projecting from the surface of the ground, ON *hallr*): *Blegehald* (where clothes were bleached), *Hallegård* (-farm); *-knald* (a. small protruding rock, skerry in the sea; b. small barren hill): *Jenses Knald* (a fishing bank), *Halleknalden* (of a rocky, barren hill); *-klint* (cliff, either on the coast or in the country, ON *klettr*): *Klinten*, *på Klint*; *-hammer* (mainly: rocky promontory, large rocky hill; various subsidiary meanings; ON *hamarr*): *Salthammer*, *Hammeren*, *Hammershus* (the famous castle

³ For a detailed account of the elements cf. *Bornholms Stednavne* p. xi ff.

ruin); *-brødde* (steep road cut through a hill, still with steep slopes on each side; ON *brjóta*): *Bobbebrødde*; *-kløv(e)* (steep and deep rocky wall, ON *kleif* to *klífa*, climb; perhaps coalescence with ON *klauf* from *kljúfa*, cleave): *Hvid-* (white-), *Rødkløven* (red-); a derivative in *-a* from *kløv* is: *Randkløve*; *-skær* (skerry): *Kirreskær* (tern-, the bird); *-flej* (flat rock, projecting from the coast under water; also used in place-names about small, low skerries, MLG *vli*, *vlig*, skin): *Mågeflej* (gull-).

In common with the rest of Denmark, Bornholm has names and name-elements for hills and slopes which are not rock formations, such as: *-ås* (ridge): *Sandåsen*; *-bakke* (rise, hill): *Bavnebakke* (beacon-); *-banke* (bank, hill): *Davidshanke* (a fishing bank, first part a proper name); *-bjerg* (mountain; in Bornholm-names = hill): *Blæsbjerg* (vb. blow-; farm name); *-høj* (hill, barrow): *Kumlehøj* (OD *kumbl*, cenotaph); *-kuld* (small hill, ON *kollr*): *Lusekuld* (louse-). Names which indicate flatter country are: *-slet* (plain): *Hylleslet* (elder-); and, more typical in Bornholm, *-val* (plain, ON *vollr*): *på Valle*; *-dal* (valley): *Humledal* (*humle*, either hops or bumble-bee); with the derivative ending *-a*: *Årsdale* (backside-); — in the dialect *-a* is equivalent to standard Danish *-e* in endings.

Woods and copses are common in scenery of the Bornholm type. Most of the names are found in the rest of Denmark, too: *-skov* (wood): *Skuleskov* (hide-); *-busk(e)* (bush): *Gåsebusk* (goose-); *-lund* (grove): *Stavelund*. More characteristic are: *-lyng* (area covered with heather): *Blemmelyng*; *-krak* (scrub): *Nørrekrak* (north-); *-re(n)* (hedgerow, ON *rein*): *Snogerén* (grass snake-); *-ris* (scrub): *i Risen*, *Risegård*.

Typical for Bornholm are the many neuter derivations (*ia*-stems, usually with *i*-mutation) from names of trees: *-eske* (*ask*, ash): *Esket*; *-elle* (*el*, alder): *Smedeellet* (smith-); *-birke* (*birk*, birch): *Brandsbirke* (proper name); *-byske* (*busk*, bush): *Præstebysket* (parson-); *-krække* (*krak*,

scrub): *Krækket*. Without mutation: *-aspe* (*asþ*, aspen): *Aspesgård*; *-hasle* (*hassel*, hazel): *Hasle* (a town).

We find many names for lakes, rivulets, ponds, moors: *-å* (rivulet): *Bagåen* (proper name); *-bæk* (brook): *Hallebækken* (i.e. *Hallegårdsbækken*); *-dam* (pond): *Gamledam* (old-); *-hul* (hole): *Gåsehullet*; *-høl* (deep hole in stream, ON *hylr*): *Geddehølen* (pike-); *-kilde* (spring): *Rødkilde*; *-kær* (pool, marsh): *Nykær* (new-), *Kær(e)by*; *-mose* (bog, moor): *Præstemosen*; *-myr* (swampy moorland): *Skelsmyr* (*skel*, boundary line); *-sø* (lake): *Borgsø* (castle-), *Smaragdsø* (emerald-); *-vad* (ford): *Brandsvad*.

Many names are connected with the coast and the shallow waters nearby, where the fishermen have their own peculiar and ancient names for stones and banks. Here we find names in *-bugt* (bay): *Sandebugten*; *-huk* (small promontory, MLG *hōk*): *Næbbehukken* (beak-); *-odde*: *Skibsvrageodden* (where shipwrecks frequently occurred); *-rev* (reef): *Sorthatrevet* (black hat-); *-vig* (creek): *Vragvigen* (wreck-).

Names of fishing banks: *-brante*, *-bratte* (derived from *brant*, *brat*, steep): *Aspesbratterne*; *-grund* (ground, bank): *Sortegrund* (black-); *-tøj* (word for bank; the meaning taken from Dutch *tui*, mooring): *Ankertøjet* (in the dialect *Akkara*-, cf. ON *akkeri*). In order to mark, define or determine the position of a particular fishing ground, the fishermen take intersecting bearings from certain landmarks, which are called *mede* (ON *mið*), and it sometimes occurs as an element in the names: *Tårnmederne* is a fishing bank where two church towers are used as marks.

In the names given by fishermen we can sometimes trace their peculiar tabu-language. When at sea, they are not allowed to mention certain ordinary words, e.g. *mølle* (mill) because it will cause some misfortune, but have to use a synonym, in this case *trunte* (trunk of a tree). Thus they give or used to give the name *Næbbetrunte* to a mill known to landlubbers as *Frydenlunds Mølle*.

To return to names in connection with sea and coast,

there is *-havn* (harbour), which is used of a natural creek or bay among the rocks where a boat can take shelter: *Grønberghavn*; and *-kås* which is very common. It is of obscure origin, perhaps related to ON *kjóss*, creek, but seems in place-names to designate a natural harbour: *Kåsen*, *Jernkås*. The element is very common also in South Swedish fishing villages. *Boderne* (cf. Swedish *-boda*) indicates a place on the coast where fishermen (or farmers who also went fishing) had huts to keep their tackle in during the fishing season.

In mentioning the names used in particular by fishermen, I have touched on names which are indicative not only of topography, but also of the occupations of the inhabitants. They were created because people must be able to identify the places where they do their work. This applies to names of fishing banks, and it also applies to field names. Both groups belong to the nature-names. It is easy to see that the island population is one of fishermen and farmers.

The elements found in field names are first various words for "field" with a descriptive or defining element: *-ager* (field): *Bredager* (broad-), *Langager* (long-), *Stenager* (stone-), *Skadeager* (magpie-); *-bakke* (hill): *Fårebakken* (sheep-); *-bidde* (bit, used of a small (part of a) field): *Ringlebiden* (ring-); *-dræt* (the length of a normal ploughed field; related to the ON *draga*, to pull): *Drætten*, *Langedræt*; *-eng* (meadow): *Skoleengen* (school-); *-krog* (nook, corner): *Sultekrogen* (hunger-; of very barren soil); *-land*: *på Ovenland*, *Hvedelandet* (wheat-); *-lod* (allotment): *Knarrelodden* (the family name Knarr); *-løkke* (barren enclosure with stones, bushes, trees, used for pasture): *Galløkken* (the old execution place outside Ronne; originally *Galge*-, gallows); *-mark* (field): *Kirkemarken* (church-); *-skifte* (piece of land for rotational crops): *Damskiftet* (pond-); *-stykke* (piece (of land)): *Kirkestykket* (indication of situation or ownership), *Tobiasstykket* (indication of ownership), *Stenstykket* (indication of

quality of soil), *Kil(e)stykket* (wedge-); *-vang* (field; in Bornholm usually the ground belonging to a town or fishing village): *Jydevang* (Jutlander-).

Many of the minor names cannot be resolved into elements, but consist solely of a descriptive word; they result from a comparison or reference, and bear witness to the subtle imagination, and often humour, of the namegivers, the people. Many of them might be called nicknames. Names of this kind are late, from the Middle Ages and after.⁴ But they are numerous and interesting in particular to the philologist, because they illustrate the imaginative mode of thought and the linguistic creative force of the common people.

Metaphoric names of this kind are: for stones, rocks and fishing banks: *Blak* (the bright one), *Dynerne* (the featherbeds), *Horungen* (the illegitimate child), *Islænderne* (the Icelanders, a breed of horse), *Trommeren* (the drummer, because of the noise of the breakers on the rock), *Eriken*, *Svend* (from personal names), *Degnestolen* (the verger's chair), *Døbefonten* (the font), *Kyllingehønen* (hen with chicks), *Ringetyren* (the bull from Ringe), *Sanct Peder*, *Den sorte Gryde* (the black pot), *Bukserne* (the trousers), *Hægten* (the bank where the hooks and nets get caught and stuck), *Rønnetitten* (the bank which is found in the place where one can just catch a glimpse of the tower of Rønne church behind the promontory; cf. *titte*, to peep).

For fields, woods and districts: *Fuglesangen* (a wood: the birds' song), *Lerien* (field, mainly consisting of clay), *Støvleengen* (shaped like a boot), *Svinerumpen* (the pig's tail), *Rødehose* (red stocking), *Ræveskindet* (the fox's hide), *Blåskinde* (the blue fell or hide; very common of fields which are flooded by water in the winter and frozen, or of a field covered with blue flowers; the name is also used about the sea); *Håndklædet* (the towel; the income of the property was used for providing towels for the parish

⁴ Kr. Hald, *Vore Stednavne* p. 192 ff.

church in Catholic times), *Melpave* (from a person's nickname: the flour Pope, because he had stolen some flour), *Brudesengen* (the bridal bed, a wood and valley where, according to legend, a newly married couple were killed when their carriage overturned and fell down the slope); *Helvede* (Hell), *i Paradis* (Paradise). Sometimes places are named after foreign localities: *Klondyke* (where people dug for clay), *Gøngeherred* (goes back to the seventeenth century: a group of houses named after the one where evidently a man from Göinge in Scania had settled), *Prøjsen*, *Sibirien*, *i Tyskland*. *Vestindietojet* (West Indies) is a fishing bank.

On the whole, it may be said that the names hitherto mentioned cannot be very old, i.e. pre-medieval, because the meaning of the components, which are words still in living use as appellatives in the dialect, is immediately evident.

Before continuing with the question of the age of the Bornholm place-names, however, a group of habitation-names should be mentioned in connection with which the problems of chronology are usually treated, and in which scholars have generally taken more interest. From a sociological point of view the habitation-names (of which some have already been mentioned casually among the nature-names) will confirm the impression that the Bornholm population consists of fishermen and farmers. But they have had merchants and craftsmen in their number, and the towns must also be considered. Since the latter represent a very late form of habitation, I shall confine myself to details relating to the farm-names, because they form a central group and will carry us further — though not all the way — towards a solution of the question of the age of the place-name material.

The great majority of the Bornholm farm-names end in *-gård* (farm), which in itself indicates that the name is of no considerable age.⁵ Moreover, many of them are used

⁵ Kr. Hald, *Vore Stednavne* p. 139.

with the definite article following certain rules,⁶ and the definite article did not come into common use in Danish until the early Middle Ages.⁷ None of the names can be dated as far back as the ancient Norwegian farm-names, some of which are supposed to go back to the early Iron Age.⁸ There are exceptions to the *gård*-type but these do not indicate great age either, rather the reverse. They sometimes bear the character of nicknames: *Barkvist* (bare-twist), *Blåkær* (-marsh), *Brødløse* (bread-lacking; seventeenth-century), *Lyngholt* (heather-), *Rosendale* (rose-), *Tuleborg*.

Looking at the first element of the farm-names in *-gård*, one usually finds that it consists of either a personal name, or a word indicating the position of the farm in relation to the surrounding countryside, or to one single feature of the landscape: a hill, rivulet, etc.

Names belonging to the first group are: *Assergård* (the name Asser is known from the Danish runic inscriptions, among them one in Bornholm,⁹ but has been used far down towards our day¹⁰), *Baggård* (from *Bagge*, known from sources of the thirteenth century),¹¹ *Erandsgård*, *Ingemarsgård* (both names known from twelfth-century sources; they seem to be East Danish personal names),¹² *Sejersgård* (*Sejer*, from older *Sigarr*, seems to be particularly a West Danish name, but it is also found in place-names on Zealand).¹³ *Stangegård*, *Køllergård* contain typical Bornholm family names. *Vibegård*, *Bukkegård* and probably also *Bjørnegård* contain personal names derived from names of animals (peewit, buck and bear). *Rosmannegård*, *Blykobbegård*

⁶ Aage Rohmann in *Gammelt å Nyt*, Rønne 1930 p. 58 ff.

⁷ P. Skautrup, *Det danske Sprogs Historie* I, Copenhagen 1944, pp. 137, 269.

⁸ Magnus Olsen in *Nordisk Kultur* V, Stockholm 1939, p. 40 ff.

⁹ Klemensker stone 8. *Danmarks Runeindskrifter*, Tekst, Copenhagen 1942, p. 465.

¹⁰ *Danmarks gamle Personnavne* I, Copenhagen 1936-1948, p. 84 ff.

¹¹ *Ib.* p. 90.

¹² *Ib.*, pp. 253 ff., 634 ff.

¹³ *Ib.* p. 1218 ff.

contain names of Low German origin. Nicknames (or metaphorical names?) are found in *Smørjeppegård*, *Træbenegård* (after a mill standing on wooden poles? or, preferably, after a person with an artificial leg. There is probably no connection between the place-name and the name on the runic inscription Vester Marie 5: *trebinu syni*).¹⁴ Other farm-names referring to persons and their origin are: *Fynergård*, *Jydegård*, *Tyskegård* (owners from Funen, Jutland, Germany). References to the trade of the owner are found in: *Bagergård* (baker-), *Degnegård* (verger or parish clerk), *Smedegård* (blacksmith), *Kannikegård* (canon; a farm belonging to the Archbishopric of Lund in Catholic times). *Munkegård*, which would appear to be of the same type, contains in fact a secondary personal name.

Farms named after their situation or the surrounding landscape are: (after woods and scrubs) *Skovgård*, *Skrubbegård*, *Buskegård*, *Krakgård*; (trees) *Almegård*; (rocks) *Klippegård*; (flat barren country) *Vallegård*, *Torpegård*; (hills and the opposite) *Bakkegård*, *Dalegård*; (rivulets, ponds) *Ågård*, *Bækkegård*, *Dammegård*; (swampy ground) *Maegård* (meadow-), *Engegård*.

Other types: *Brogård* (at the bridge), *Gadegård* (at the street — in the sense of road, leading from the farm to the outfield); *Loftsgård* seems to be reminiscent of an ancient type of dwelling, now only remaining in Norway in the name *loft* for a separate farm building (on poles), in two storeys with a gallery. *Spidlegård* reminds us that in the Middle Ages there was a leper hospital there.

Adjectives form the first part in *Frigård* (free-), *Lillegård* (small-), *Melgård* (i.e. the farm which lies in between others, or in the middle), *Nygård* (new-), *Norregård* (north-), *Vestergård* (west-), etc.

When we try to date these names, we suffer from a lack of sufficiently early evidence; in this respect Bornholm

¹⁴ *Danmarks Runeindskrifter* p. 444 f. Discussed by Gunnar Knudsen in *Danske Studier* 1934 p. 121 ff., esp. p. 125.

is worse off than the rest of Denmark, which in its turn, compared with England, has very few old sources. We have to rely on chance references in documents dating from the late Middle Ages, and land-registers from still later times. It is not often that we find evidence earlier than the sixteenth century for farm-names and other habitation-names with the exception of town- and parish-names. And it is only in the name of the island itself that we find evidence dating from before the year 1000 A.D.

One is not justified in concluding that since the name *Asser* is known from a runic inscription, the farm-name *Assergård* must be equally ancient. When the farm is first mentioned (1668), it was inhabited by a man Asser Andersen (1648-68), and in all probability it takes its name from him.

In farm-names with a nature-element as first component, we are on still more uncertain ground as to chronology. There is something to be said for the theory that these names are older than the type with a personal name as the first component, but there are few means by which we can fix their date exactly, and in their present form, ending in *-gård*, they are unlikely to be much older than the former group, that is from the sixteenth century. And there is evidence that even up to the late nineteenth century the forms in *-gård* have been considered more or less official names, not used in daily parlance, but coined by some official for administrative purposes.¹⁵

Nevertheless the Bornholm farm-names are generally older than those of the rest of Denmark, which are very recent, dating mainly back to the dissolution of the old village community in the late eighteenth century. In

¹⁵ Cf. Gunnar Knudsen in *Danske Studier* 1917, p. 96: the farm-names occur in land-registers and censuses from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth; and *ib.* 1934, p. 124: in most cases the farm-names can be assigned to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The names now current were fixed for the greater part in the eighteenth century.

Bornholm there have never been villages as in the rest of Denmark, and consequently the individual farm had to be named in some way or other at an earlier date.

The farms were settled, of course, long before the sixteenth century, and it is sometimes possible to assign the names to an earlier age. In many cases there is, together with the names in *-gård* (where the first part designates natural features), another identification, often a prepositional compound, which has survived up to very recent times, as indicated by the dialect forms. This illustrates the tradition among the local population existing besides the official usage in legal documents etc., and suggests a very ancient origin. It seems that the ordinary farmer did not want to show off by having a particular name attached to his farm. He was therefore identified by the locality where he lived. Habitation-names thus often originate in nature-names. *Tuleborg* was formerly named *på Borre*; *Skovgård: i Skoven*; *Højegård: under Højen*; *Torpegård: på Torpe*; *Risegård: ved Risen*.

With regard to the prepositional names, Bornholm is unique in present Danish territory, although the use of such names is now on the wane and only used by the oldest generation in the countryside. The type is well known from ancient Norse literature and is still alive in Iceland, the Faroes, and Shetland. It is not unknown in Norway and England. It survives less frequently in Sweden, and is almost lost in Denmark except in Bornholm.

The few examples above do not do justice to the very great frequency in Bornholm of the prepositional names in use until recent times. They are not restricted to habitation-names, but are also used of purely natural conditions: *på Ringe, i Krakken, på Ovenland, på By*. There is no doubt that this type of name-giving is very old, dating at least from the Viking Age, if not from a still earlier period; it seems to be common Germanic, but on the other hand the individual names may be very young,

since it is evidently a type which has been productive down to modern times.

Attempts have been made to determine the chronology of the prepositional names, but it seems a difficult task. The oldest (heathen) forms are supposed to be those with preposition + noun in the indefinite form: *i Blemme*, *i Sose*, *på Klint*, *ved Halle*.¹⁶ Yet one should not imagine that the Bornholm prepositional names are very old, since we do not find traces of case inflection in them, although inflection (dative form) was not given up in East Denmark until about 1300.¹⁷ But perhaps this only shows that the type has been productive through hundreds of years, and submitted to the ordinary linguistic changes of the dialect.

Another ancient type of farm-name is compounded with *-by* (town, habitation; related to ON *búa* and *bær*), which also points back to a time before it was usual to give each farm its individual name. *-by* is a very familiar place-name element, known all over Scandinavia and in Iceland and England. Its occurrence in England takes it back to the Viking Age, but one cannot be sure of later creations, especially as the meaning of the element differs largely in different parts of Scandinavia. When used in place-names in Norway and Iceland, it means a single farm, but in Denmark and South Sweden a village (in Värmland and Dalarna, a single farm). The simplex appellation in Danish means town, in Swedish village.

In Bornholm the element has acquired or developed its own particular meaning: group of (two to six) farms. The original general meaning from which the special one has developed seems to be "inhabited place."

Examples of names of (groups of) farms in *-by* are: (first component containing names of woods, trees, etc.) *Bolby* (trunk-), *Egeby* (oak-; first mentioned 1433),

¹⁶ Gunnar Knudsen in *Studier tilegnede Verner Dahlerup*, 1933, p. 25 ff. On the use of the definite article cf. note 7 above.

¹⁷ Skautrup, *Det danske Sprogs Historie* I p. 267.

Risby; (indicating material) *Dyndeby* (mud-), *Grødby* (ON *grjót*, stone), *Lersby* (clay-); (indicating situation) *Åby*, *Kåsby*, *Klinteby* (1489), *Kærby*, *Muleby* (muzzle, used metaphorically of a headland where two rivers join), *Myreby*; (indicating description of some kind) *Ringeby* (the farms lying in a circle), *Lyrby* (from *lyrehus*, a house with an opening in the roof to let out smoke and let in light; ON *ljóri*). Not quite clear are *Mæby*, *Stenseby*. *Kelseby* seems to be the only case where a personal name forms the first part (cf. Ketil on Klemensker stone 5).¹⁸ A nickname may indicate later analogous formations: *Kællingeby* (*kælling*, old woman; according to legend a farmer bought a farm in a group for each of his daughters),¹⁹ *Studeby* (bullock-), *Smørby* (butter-).

Not belonging to the farm-names are *Åkirkeby*, a real town which grew up in the Middle Ages round the important church *Åkirke*, and *Sladderby* (gossip-), a typical nickname of young formation. *På By* is a nature-name perhaps indicating former habitation.²⁰

The *-by* names are also found together with the preposition *i*: *i Åby*, *i Kærby*, *i Bolby*.

Much seems to indicate that we find the oldest farm-names still preserved among those of the *-by* type. Some of them may very well date back to the Viking Age, although others are of secondary formation. That is the time in which ordinary Danish *-by* names are also placed.²¹ This does not imply, however, that the habitations as such cannot be much older. And perhaps the *-by* names represent the oldest places of habitation after farms came into being, situated, as they are, in localities where the ground invited cultivation at an early period.²²

The difficulty in dating the Bornholm habitation-names

¹⁸ *Danmarks Runeindskrifter* p. 462.

¹⁹ *Danske Studier* 1922, p. 173.

²⁰ *Bornholms Stednavne*, p. xii.

²¹ Kr. Hald, *Vore Stednavne*, p. 95.

²² *Bornholmernes Land I*, Rønne 1944, p. 208; M. K. Zahrtmann, *Borringholmenes Historiebog I*, Rønne 1934, p. 45; Kr. Hald, *Vore Stednavne* p. 37.

is partly due to the fact that most of the old place-name elements, commonly occurring in Denmark and Sweden, are missing in Bornholm, or if they are found they have a different meaning or origin. This holds good of the frequent types: *-inge* (Common Germanic; from the time of the great migrations and probably derived from names of inhabitants in *-ingar*), *-um* (either dat. pl. or *-heim*), *-løse* (meadow, pasture), *-lev* (something left, inheritance; the greater part of these names are from the time of the migrations), *-sted* (ON *staðr*; in Denmark most of these names are from before the Viking period), *-by* and *-toft* (space for habitation; both found in the Danelaw and typical names of the Viking period), *-torp* (an element the meaning of which is very difficult to trace and express. In Denmark it seems to indicate a new settlement from an old village. In the form *-thorpe* it is, after *-by*, the most common Scandinavian place-name element in the Danelaw. It seems to be younger than *-by*. Most of the names are from the Viking period or early Middle Ages), *-bøl* (derived from ON *ból*, *býli*; probably from the early Middle Ages).

A special group (probably productive up to the twelfth century) includes the names connected with settlements through clearance of woodland, begun in the Viking period: *-holt*, *-rød*, *-tved* (ON *þveit*, clearing).

Swedish types apart from these are: *-boda*, *-vin*, *-tun*.²³

Names in *-lev*, *-bøl*, *-tved*, *-rød*, are completely missing in Bornholm. The only *-holt* name is *Lyngholt* from 1889.²⁴

Genuine *-inge* names are not found in Bornholm. When the ending does occur, and it is rather frequent, it has a younger origin, due to special developments in the dialect pronunciation. Thus in the town *Allinge* the ending is *-und* (common in island names); in *Gudmingegård* we find the personal name *Gudmund* hidden. In *Svartingedalen*

²³ For details of the interpretation of these name-elements, their age and distribution in Scandinavia, reference must be made to treatments elsewhere, e.g. in *Nordisk Kultur* V, Kr. Hald, *Vore Stednavne*, and for a short survey to Blohmé, *The study of Swedish Place-names*.

²⁴ *Bornholmernes Land* I, p. 159.

it is the definite article or a derivation from *svart*, black, referring to a black horse. In *Smørenge* and *Aspinge* it is the word for meadow.

Among names in *-um* or *-heim*, the only Bornholm case is *Gudhjem*.

The *-by* names have been dealt with already.

Names in *-sted* (pronounced *stā* or *stǣ*) are fairly frequent along the north coast of Bornholm: *Bådsted* (boat-), *Bølsted* (*bøddel*, executioner), *Melsted* (from ON *melr*, bank of sand), *Røsted*, *Ypnasted*. The word here is probably not ON *staðr* (as in the Danish village names), but ON *stǫð*, landing place where ships were dragged ashore. Only one name, in the middle of the island, (*på*) *Tingsted* suggests an origin in *staðr* like the rest of the Danish *-sted* names.

Like the names and elements *Hammeren*, *Boderne*, *-havn*, *-kås*, the Bornholm *-sted* names indicate a connection between the fishing population of Bornholm and South Sweden from early times, but less contact between the farming populations. In Scania names of the types *-løse*, *-lev*, *-by* (village), *-torp*, *-holt* are extremely frequent. Some of them (*-løse*, *-torp* and *-toft*) do occur in Bornholm, but again in a special sense and with special connections.

-løse is found in quite young nicknames like *Brødløse* (bread-less), and in *Åløse*, *Stenløse*, *Løsebæk*. According to Gunnar Knudsen,²⁵ the meaning (slope, cf. ON *lúta*) and its occurrence as the first element in *Løsebæk* indicate late origin.

Nor does the occurrence of the word *toft* (*på Toft*, *Toftehus*, *Toftegård*, *Toften*, *Toftehøj*) suggest any connection with Danish or Swedish village names in *-toft(e)*. The same applies to *torp*: *Torpegård* (*på Torpe*), *Elletorpet*, *Torpeng*, derived from a special Bornholm sense of the word: piece of dry land for pasture, upland meadow.²⁶

²⁵ *Danske Studier* 1922, p. 172 ff.

²⁶ Gunnar Knudsen in *Namn och Bygd* 1946, p. 24 ff.

Why is it that Bornholm shows a picture so different from the rest of Denmark in its habitation-names? It has led some historians and archæologists to put forward the theory of an interruption in the habitation of Bornholm in prehistoric times.²⁷ From the period 300-550 A.D. (to which some of the oldest place-name elements in question are usually assigned) there are very few archæological finds in the island, which might suggest that during this period it was almost empty after the population had emigrated. And this population was supposed to be the Burgundians, who according to Ptolemy and Pliny lived in the coastal districts between the Oder and the Vistula in the early centuries of the Christian era, and were named (according to the old theory) after their place of origin: Bornholm. After the year 550 A.D. a new population was supposed to have immigrated into Bornholm from Øland and Gotland (which display similarities in archæological finds from that period), and the Mälar provinces of Sweden. A place-name *Saltuna* has among others been taken to support the theory as a typical Swedish *-tun* name. It is obvious, however, that this name is to be divided as *Salt — una* (*un* in Bornholm dialect, oven), a place where salt was produced by boiling brine.²⁸

In order to clear up this interesting problem of the history of the settlement of Bornholm, which affects the study of its place-names, the origin and meaning of the name of the island itself must be discussed (cf. *Bornholms Stednavne* p. 1 ff.).

The first time that Bornholm is mentioned in written form is about 900 in Wulfstan's description of his voyage from *Hedeby* through the Baltic.²⁹ The recorded forms of the name are the following: Wulfstan about 900: *Burgenda land*, *æfter Burgenda lande*. Icelandic forms

²⁷ Knut Stjerna, *Bidrag till Bornholms Befolkningshistoria under Järnåldern*, Stockholm 1905.

²⁸ *Bornholms Stednavne* p. 356.

²⁹ *King Alfred's Orosius* ed. Henry Sweet, 1883, p. 19 f.

in some scaldic poetry, *Krákumál* (twelfth or thirteenth century): *fir borghvndar holmi*, and in the *Jómsvíkinga Saga* (thirteenth century): *j borgvnnðar holme*; also *Heimskringla*: *i Borgundarhólmi* and the *Knyttlinga Saga* (about 1260): *Borgundarholm*.

Saxo (early thirteenth century): *Burgunda insula*. A Danish law-text (*Slesvig Stadsret*, about 1300) has: *Burgunde holm*.

Other sources have: *Burghæندهolm* (1231), *Borendholm* (1264), *Borundholm* (early fourteenth century), *Boræندهolm* (fifteenth century).

The form *Borringholm* is common from the sixteenth century onwards.

From the thirteenth century (1260) and later, sources of MLG origin have forms such as: *borneholme*, *borenholm*, *Bornholm* which have determined the modern written form.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries many mixed forms are found: *Borgenholm*, *Bordenholm*, *Bordingholm*, *Borrindholm*.

In some of the old sources, the island is mentioned only as *Holmen*. That is still the way fishermen (and people from Scania) talk about it. Farmers formerly said *Landet* (cf. *Wulfstan*). About 996 *Hallfrøðr vand-ræðaskáld* (MS of thirteenth century) has *at hólme*; a Swedish runic inscription³⁰ from the beginning of the eleventh century: *o hulmi*; Adam of Bremen about 1075: *Ulmo, in Hulmo insula, Holmus*.

The old interpretation of the name *Bornholm* presupposes that the first element is genitive singular (cf. the Icelandic forms), and derives the name from *borg* (high rock) + the suffix *-und*. The name of the people *Burgundiones* is then derived from the name of the island.

The latest theory,³¹ however, postulates a genitive

³⁰ *Sveriges Runinskrifter* II, Stockholm 1911, p. 81.

³¹ *Bornholms Stednavne* p. 3 ff.

plural in the first component, considering the Icelandic forms unreliable, and attaching more importance to Wulfstan's form. Then the name would mean "the island of the Burgundians" — not the place where they came from and which gave them their name, but the place which they took possession of and named after themselves. The name of the people in that case must be cognate with Sanskrit *bṛhant*, "tall."

According to this theory, Bornholm was not the home of the great Burgundian people, which in any case, considering the small size of the island, would seem unlikely, but a place which they raided and conquered. It may be that *Holm(en)* was the old name and that after the conquest it was qualified as "the holm which the Burgundians possessed" some time between 300-500 A.D.³²

The question of chronology is a very tricky matter, but presumably the latest theory fits in with it better than the old one of an emigration which would have had to have taken place before 300 A.D. to be in accordance with the information in Ptolemy and Pliny.

It has already been mentioned that archæologists have been puzzled by the fact that there were so very few finds from the period 300-550 in Bornholm. But just recently, during excavations in the summers of 1949-51 very important discoveries³³ have been made just from these obscure years, which at least prove that the island was not empty. Among other things there were very well preserved relics of an Iron Age habitation in Ibsker. Archæologists can tell from the ruins that there were several successive layers of habitation as far back as the second century B.C. The houses have several times been burnt down and rebuilt, and in the last case there is

³² Cf. however, Kr. Hald, *Vore Stednavne* p. 210. It seems as if the above theory will not be allowed to stand unchallenged. Professor Hald has under preparation a criticism of the interpretation in *Bornholms Stednavne*, where the old hypothesis will be modified, but he will still maintain that the name of Bornholm is an *-und* derivation.

³³ Cf. *Fra Nationalmuseets Arbejdsmark* for the years in question.

evidence that the inhabitants were taken by surprise, buried their treasures, and fled before foreign invaders, never to return.

It is very tempting to connect the archæological evidence with our theories about the Burgundians and their supposed invasion of Bornholm. But still it is unlikely that in Bornholm the lack of ordinary Danish place-name types, such as *-inge*, *-løse*, *-lev*, *-sted*, has anything to do with a break in the history of the settlement, *circa* 500 A.D., when the whole population emigrated or was wiped out in raids. Types like *-torp*, *-tved*, *-rød*, *-holt*, *-bøl*, which are decidedly later, are also missing. We must therefore look for other explanations.

First of all, the remote position of the island may account for the fact that customs from the other Danish lands — including those of name-giving — rarely or never reached it. We have already heard that villages on the Danish model never came into existence in Bornholm, and most of the Danish habitation-names of current types are attached precisely to such villages.

With special regard to the late types of place-names, the natural conditions of the island have not afforded the opportunity for new settlements to be made in the same way as in the rest of Denmark. There were no large woods, awaiting clearance, but rocky barren soil. The interior of the island was covered with heather, which it remained for much later ages to put under plough.

The general consequence is that the problems of dating Bornholm place-names are quite different from those of the rest of the country, and far more difficult to solve. Some consider the names, as a whole, to be very late, others maintain that they are comparatively old,³⁴ but what is an old age when talking about place-names?

The names of the towns — *Ronne* (charter from 1319), *Nexo* (1346), *Svaneke* (1500), *Allinge*, *Sandvig*, *Hasle* (1500) — are generally considered to be old; but *Åkirkeby*

³⁴ *Bornholms Stednavne* p. x.

(1346) must have originated after the introduction of Christianity into the island,³⁵ and so also the peculiar names of the parishes, which for the most part are called after the saint to whom the church is dedicated (with the exception of *Åker(sen)*, *Nyker(sen)*, *Rutsker(sen)*, *Rø(sen)*): e.g. *Knudsker(sen)* i.e. St. Canute's church parish. The *-sen* (from *sogn*) and sometimes *-kersen* (*kirkesogn*) is now usually omitted: *Bodilsker(sen)*, *Ibsker(sen)*, *Klemensker(sen)*, *Nylars(kersen)*, *Olsker(sen)*, *Pedersker(sen)*, *Poulsker(sen)*, *Vester Marie (-markersen)*, *Øster Lars(kersen)*, *Øster Marie (-markersen)*.

Undoubtedly of very ancient origin, perhaps going back to the Iron Age — though at present there are no means of proving this — are the obscure short-names: ancient derivations, which have always puzzled the scholars, and which have not yet been fully explained, such as: (i) *Bæla*, *Glæppe*, *Slamra*, *Skrulle*, *Sose*. On the other hand *Levka* looks obscure and of the same type, but nevertheless conceals a personal name of recent date, the seventeenth century.³⁶ Such is the nature of place-name research: it continually puzzles the scholar, and it is that which makes it fascinating.

³⁵ Shortly after 1060 A.D. *Bornholmernes Land* I, p. 124.

³⁶ *Bornholms Stednavne* p. 40.

JÓN STEFÁNSSON

BY EIRÍKUR BENEDIKZ

DR. Jón Stefánsson, one of the founder members of the Viking Society (or Viking Club as it was first called) died in Reykjavík on the 20th July, 1952.

Dr. Stefánsson was born in Iceland on 4th November, 1862. He was educated at the Reykjavík Grammar School and went afterwards to the University of Copenhagen where he studied English Language and Literature under Professor George Stephens.

During his undergraduate days he was awarded the University's Gold Medal for an essay on dialects in Wycliffe's Bible translation. In 1889 he graduated as M.A. and two years later the University accepted his doctor's thesis on Robert Browning (*Robert Browning (1812-1889); et literaturbillede fra det moderne England*). Dr. Stefánsson's book on Browning was one of the first serious attempts to make this poet known to the literary public of the Scandinavian countries.

At about this time the chair of English in the University of Copenhagen became vacant and it was generally considered that Dr. Stefánsson would be appointed to this post. This was, however, not to be, as Dr. Otto Jespersen, who had attacked Dr. Stefánsson's book on Browning just before a decision was made on the appointment, obtained the post.

Shortly after Professor Jespersen's appointment Dr. Stefánsson left Copenhagen and went to London where he was to spend more than fifty years of his life with short breaks only.

In London he soon became acquainted with many well-known scholars, especially those who were interested

in Icelandic literature and language. Among these were William Morris, Sir Israel Gollancz, W. P. Ker, Viscount Bryce and A. W. Johnstone, the founder and secretary of the Viking Society.

During his long stay in London Dr. Stefánsson never had any permanent post, except that he was for a few years lecturer in Icelandic and Danish at King's College. In fact I do not think it suited his temperament to be tied down to an office or a teaching post. He had to be free to work on what interested him most at the time and to do it in his own way. Although Dr. Stefánsson undoubtedly acquired a vast amount of learning during his long life of research work in the British Museum, his printed works are surprisingly few. They mostly consist of articles in newspapers and periodicals, British, Scandinavian, French and German.

In 1899 he published, in collaboration with W. G. Collingwood, a book called *A Pilgrimage to the Saga-steads of Iceland*. Dr. Stefánsson was responsible for the text but the illustrations were by Collingwood.

His largest printed work, apart from his memoirs, appeared in 1916, in the *Stories of the Nations Series* and is called the *History of Denmark and Sweden with Iceland and Finland*. In addition to these he left behind him in MS a history of Iceland in English.

In 1918 Dr. Stefánsson married a French lady from Mauritius. Shortly after the wedding they went to live there, but it seemed as if he could not settle away from London so they parted and he returned to his studies at the British Museum. Here he lived until late in the year 1948 when he went back to Reykjavík to spend there the last few years of his life. In 1949 his memoirs were published in Reykjavík, under the title *Uti í Heim*.