

# The Norse Discovery of America



## Book II

### Icelandic Records

# **Introduction to a Study of Icelandic Records.**

BY N. L. BEAMISH

## **SKETCH OF THE RISE, EMINENCE, AND EXTINCTION OF ICELANDIC HISTORICAL LITERATURE**

THE national literature of Iceland holds a distinct and eminent position in the literature of Europe. In that remote and cheerless isle, separated by a wide and stormy ocean from the more genial climates of southern lands, religion and learning took up their tranquil abode, before the south of Europe had yet emerged from the mental darkness which followed the fall of the Roman Empire. There the unerring memories of the Skalds and Sagamen were the depositories of past events, which, handed down from age to age in one unbroken line of historical tradition, were committed to writing on the introduction of Christianity, and now come before us with an internal evidence of their truth, which places them among the highest order of historical records.

To investigate the origin of this remarkable advancement in mental culture, and trace the progressive steps by which Icelandic literature attained an eminence which even now imparts a lustre to that barren land, is an object of interesting and instructive inquiry, and will, it is presumed, form an acceptable introduction to the perusal of the ancient Icelandic manuscripts, which constitute the text of the present volume. [150]The author has, therefore, availed himself of an able essay by Bishop Muller on this interesting subject, to put before his readers, in a concise form, the leading characteristics of that peculiar state of society, which generated these evidences of peaceful and civilized pursuits, and gave birth to productions, which, like their own Aurora, stood forth the Northmen's meteor in the shades of night!

Among no other people of Europe can the conception and birth of historical literature be more clearly traced than amongst the people of Iceland. Here it can be shown how memory took root, and gave birth to narrative; how narrative multiplied and increased until it was committed to writing; how the written relation became eventually sifted and arranged in chronological order, until at length, in the withering course of time, the breath which had given life and character to the whole fled hence, and only the dead letter remained behind.

But why was it Icelanders, in particular, who kindled the torch of history in the North. How came its light to spread so far from this remote and unimportant island? What cause led Icelanders more than any other people to a minute observation of both the present and the past? How came they to clothe these recollections in connected narratives, and eventually to commit them to writing?--are questions which first naturally present themselves, and the true solution of which can alone lead to a correct estimate of the value of Icelandic annals.

It is well known, that when towards the end of the ninth century Iceland had been

discovered by the roving northern Vikings, the imperious sway of Harald Haarfager led many Norwegians to seek safety and independence in that distant island. But its remote position rendered the voyage [151] thither both difficult and dangerous; not one amongst hundreds of fugitives,--scarcely the chiefs themselves, who possessed large ships,--could provide the necessary outfit for a voyage, which often lasted for half the year; and the colonization of the new country was necessarily slow and progressive, and confined, at first, to the high-minded and more wealthy chieftains of the western coast. But the intelligence was soon abroad that brave and daring men had established themselves in a new country, where the cattle could provide for themselves in winter, where the waters were full of fish, and the land abounding in wood; and many therefore determined upon removing to this favoured region. The tide of emigration from Norway progressively increased, and soon became so great that Harald, fearing that his kingdom would, eventually, be left desolate, prohibited it altogether, and laid a tax upon every voyager to Iceland.

The chiefs took their families, servants, slaves, and cattle; and many kinsmen and relatives, who were accustomed to follow the fortunes of the chief, accompanied him also on this new venture. The particular locality of their future residence was determined by the wind and weather, united with an implicit faith in the superintending guidance of the tutelary idol, under whose invocation the seat-posts were cast into the sea, and wherever these happened to be washed ashore was the dwelling raised.

In the course of sixty years the whole island had become thus colonized. Meantime the first settlers had acquired no means of circumscribing the movements of the last, who with the same independent spirit as their predecessors, took possession of that particular tract of country which appeared to them most eligible; and the extent of the land, the [152] difficulties of the voyage, and the limited number of the population, admitted, for some time, the continuance of this arbitrary appropriation. Amicable restrictions were the only checks that could be at first opposed to such unconstrained and uncertain movements, and these were all either of Norwegian origin, or brought directly from Norway. For many of the settlers were related by ties of blood; the greater number had made common cause against Harald; in their native land they had been accustomed to meet together at the Court (Thing), in the temple, at the great feast of Yule, at the periodical offerings to their idols--and thus, naturally, and with one accord, they were led to establish a form of self-government somewhat similar to that under which they had lived in Norway. The absence of any despotic ruler gave, however, the new community a great advantage over the parent state, and hence arose a constitution more free than the model upon which it had been formed.

This little republic was held together solely by moral laws. Some of the richer emigrants had slaves, which after putting to cultivate some particular lands, they liberated; all others were free; the sturdy yeoman was the unrestricted lord of his own soil; if he came into collision with his neighbour, and thought himself more powerful, he slew him without scruple, but thereupon immediately endeavoured either through the intercession of the chief of the district or some other influential person, to screen himself from reproach, or effect a reconciliation with the friends of the deceased, by the payment of a fine.

The situation of chief generally arose from the relative position of the ship's-company in the mother country, which led to one particular individual among the crew taking [153] possession of the new district in his own name; but it oftener depended upon property or personal bravery. Was he a gallant warrior, or could afford to keep more servants and slaves than his neighbors, his assistance became of importance in settling disputes: and the same cause produced a reciprocal feeling in support of the chief, on the part of those whom he assisted.

Before a certain number of statutes had been collected and formally established, the people followed the old customs of their native land, the parties themselves naming their judges from amongst the neighbouring yeomen; but although there was no want of legal forms to which they could appeal, or chicanery by which justice could be evaded, the result more often depended upon the relative strength and influence of the party than upon the merits of the case. At the district courts (Herredstinget), the influence of the Chief was considerable, but not altogether paramount; many of the more wealthy yeomen could offer him effective resistance: his influence at the superior court (Althinget), depended upon his personal reputation, the power of his friends, and the number of his followers.

The income of the Chief was principally derived from the tract of land, of which he had taken possession on his arrival; he was also, in most cases, the Hofgode, or priest of the temple; and for the duties of this office, in which providing the altar with offerings was included, he received a small contribution (hoftollr) from every farm in the neighbourhood. To this was afterwards added compensation for journeys to the Althing, and he also received fees from those whose causes he conducted, as well as a small payment from the ships which landed their cargoes on his ground. But all these various sources did not furnish him [154] with any considerable income, and his land remained his principal means of support. The office was hereditary, as in Norway, but it could also be sold or resigned, and sometimes was lost by being appropriated to the payment of a judicial fine.

Notwithstanding this elevated position of the chief, it not unfrequently happened that a powerful individual in the province acquired a higher reputation, and obtained more clients than his superior. Thus after Olaf Paa had returned from his celebrated expedition to Ireland, married the daughter of the powerful Egil Skalagrim, and became possessed of his father-in-law's property, many people flocked around him, and he became a great chief, without being actually a Godordsman, or pontiff.

So long as the colonization continued, the extent of the island secured internal peace; the Landnamsmen, as the first settlers were called, had few disputes amongst themselves, for every one was taken up with his own affairs and although it might sometimes happen, that a quarrelsome individual by single combat (Holmgang) (74) or the threat of personal encounter, would drive another from his farm, disputes and contests were of rare occurrence. Another local circumstances of no inconsiderable importance as connected with the tranquillity of the country, was the diminutive character of the forests in Iceland.

These consisted of dwarf trees, ill suited to ship building, and therefore only small vessels could be built upon the island; whoever wished to trade with Norway, entered into partnership with some Norwegian merchant, or bought a vessel which had been already brought out from the parent state. Such vessels [155] could not, however, be used for piratical expeditions, and those who wished to engage in such adventures were obliged to join some kindred spirits in Norway who possessed what was called a long ship (Langskip). These difficulties of outfit, connected with the want of sufficient hands for warlike purposes, and the long distance from the coasts, where they were accustomed to carry on their piratical proceedings, was doubtless the cause of so few of the new settlers being concerned in sea-roving, while in all other matters they followed the customs of their ancestors.

Thus did this remote and comparatively barren island give freedom and peace to many of Norway's bravest sons, far from their native land. Instead of participating in the dangers of the perilous voyage, or aiding in the obstinate encounter, or sharing in the lawless spoil, when plunder conferred upon the Sea-King both a fortune and a name, they now sat down peacefully in their tranquil homes, or directed the agricultural labours of their servants and dependants. And now did faithful memory carry them back in imagination to the old and warlike time, which appeared the more attractive when contrasted with the tranquility of their present pursuits; personal deeds led to the remembrance of those of the father, for it was often in avenging his death that their prowess had been first called forth, or from his kinsmen or associates that they had received the first assistance. The colonists were, besides, men of high family; the Scandinavians were accustomed to set great weight upon this circumstance; the fewer were the outward distinctions that characterized the individual, the more important was that prerogative considered which promised magnanimity and valour. The stranger was therefore minutely questioned about his family, and even [156] the peasant girl despised the suitor whose lineage was unknown. In the mother country the remembrance of the old families lived amongst the people of the district; they had travelled together to the national assembly; the paternal barrow, and the ancient hall bore testimony to their noble birth,--but of this, nothing save the relation could accompany them to Iceland, and therefore was the new settler so careful in detailing to his sons and posterity the history and achievements of their kinsmen in Norway. The son equally tenacious of ancestral fame failed not to propagate the same minute details amongst his immediate descendants, and thus was insensibly formed, among the Icelanders, connected oral narratives of the families, fortunes, and actions of their ancestors.

These Sagas, or traditions, did not generally go further back than the time of the father and grandfather; but the recollections preserved in the songs of the Skalds were of much older date, and a number of historical songs can be pointed out which the Icelanders must have brought with them to the new country. Others were historical in a more limited sense, being thrown into rhyme for the occasion, to flatter the vanity of some powerful chief, by a poetical representation of his genealogy; but the more numerous were those in which all the achievements of a hero were specifically enumerated.

These compositions bore little evidence of Brage's [\(75\)](#) favour. Under the jingle of rude

rhymes and alliteration a pictorial expression was given to sword-cuts and slaughter, which brought to remembrance the order in which the several achievements had succeeded each other. The poetical form is more visible in the earlier songs, such as: Hornklove's [157] Ode on Harald Haarfager, particularly his description of the battle of Hafursfjord (76) than in the later, such as Ottar Svartes Ode on the combats of Olaf the Saint; and those compositions have still more poetical worth in which, like Eyvind Skialdespilders Ode in praise of the fallen king Hakon Adelsteen, the writers express the feeling which the events call forth.

It may be readily supposed that heroic verses, sung by the Skalds themselves in the courts of heroes, were committed to memory, and that at a time when this was the only means of recording their achievements such verses would pass orally through many generations. The memory was also sometimes aided by carving the verses in Runic letters (77) upon a staff. The dying Halmund is introduced in Gretter's Saga, saying to his daughter:--"Thou shalt now listen whilst I relate my deeds, and sing thereof a song, which thou shalt afterwards cut upon a staff." In Egil's Saga, also, Thorgerd, addressing her father Egil Skalagrimson, whose grief for the loss of his son Bodvar had made him resolve on putting an end to his existence, says:--"I wish, father, that we might live long enough for you to sing a funeral song upon Bodvar, and for me to cut it upon a staff."

Sometimes verses were immediately committed to memory by a number of persons. When King Olaf the Saint drew up his army for the battle of Stikklestad (1030), he directed the Skalds to stand within the circle (Skioldborg), which the bravest men had formed around the king. "Ye shall," said he, "stand here, and see what passes, and thus [158] will ye not require to depend on the sagas of others for what ye afterwards relate and sing." The Skalds now consulted with each other, and said that it would be fitting to indite some memorial of that which was about to happen, upon which each improvised a strophe, and the historian adds: "these verses the people immediately learned." In the same manner much older songs were held in remembrance, and there is still extant in that part of Snorre's Edda, called Kenningar, a fragment of Brage the Skald's ode on Ragnor Lodbrok, by means of which he, in the 7th century, moderated the anger of Bjorn Jernside against himself. In the same poem are fragments of an old ode on the fall of Rolf Krake, which St. Olaf directed the Skald, Thormod Kolbran, to sing when the battle of Stikklestad was to commence. The whole army, says the Saga, was pleased at hearing this old song, which they called the Soldier's Whetstone, and the king thanked the bard, and gave him a gold ring that weighed half a mark.

But it was more particularly the Skalds themselves who preserved the older songs in remembrance. By hearing these, their own poetical character had been formed, their memories sharpened; and a knowledge of the past was necessary for the acquisition of those mythic and historical allusions which were considered indispensable to poetical expression. An instance of their historical knowledge is thus mentioned in the Landnamabok: (78) when King Harald [159] Haardraade lay with his army in Holland, two large barrows were observed on the edge of the strand, but no one knew who was interred there; however, on the return of the army to Norway, Kare the black, a kinsman of the famous Skald Theodolf of Hvine, was enabled to state that the graves contained the

bodies of Snial and Hiald, the two warlike sons of the old Norwegian King Vatnar. This historical knowledge of the Skalds led to their being held in high respect throughout Scandinavia, and, we find them allotted the first place at the courts of Kings. Harald Haarfager is stated to have had more respect for the Skalds than for all the rest of his courtiers, and more than a century later they appear to have been held in equal estimation by the Swedish King, Olaf Skiodkonning, who is stated to have taken great delight in their freedom of speech.

The northern pagan Skalds must not however be looked upon as the Grecian Aonides, whose only province was to sing; they bear a nearer resemblance to the Provencal Knights, who were also Troubadours. The Scandinavian bards were besides of goodly lineage, for only the higher and more independent conditions of life could call forth Brage's favour; they were also well versed in warlike exercises; the song was the accompaniment to, the combat, and we have nearly as many records of their heroic deeds as of their poetical effusions. They were also, at times, the favourites or confidants of kings, like Theodolf of Hvine, who was the bosom friend of Harald Haarfager, and Flein, to whom the Danish King, Eisteen, gave his daughter in marriage.

Thus were the Skalds well furnished with knowledge of both the present and the past, and therefore has the [160] sagacious Snorre Sturleson truly said, in the Preface to his work:--"The principal foundation is taken from the songs that were sung before the chiefs, or their children, and we hold all that to be true, which is there stated, of their deeds and combats. It was, no doubt, the practice of the Skalds to praise those the most in whose presence they stood, but no one even so circumstanced would venture to tell of actions which both he and all those who heard him knew to be false, for that would be an affront instead of a compliment."

Besides heroic songs, or Drapas, single strophes were often improvised, not only by Skalds but by many other individuals, of both sexes, in a critical moment; and these, by being committed to memory, preserved the remembrance on the occasion which called them forth. Like the Orientalists, the Northmen loved to shew their wit by an enigmatical and antithetical mode of speaking, and from thence, the ear having been once accustomed to the simple measure, the transition was easy to the formation of a strophe, by means of alliteration or rhyme.

The means of preserving the recollections of past events, which have been here pointed out, were for the most part common both to those who remained in Norway and those who emigrated to the new country; but in the parent state the stream of present events carried away and obscured the recollections of the past. The changes which came upon the whole nation from Harald Haarfager's time were naturally looked upon by the Norwegians as more important than the events in which only individual persons or families had been previously concerned. The Icelanders, on the other hand, viewed the one as affecting their home, while the other appeared to be the transactions of a foreign [161] country, and thus the recollections which up to the time of the migration had been preserved in the several detached districts of Norway were transferred to and became united in Iceland, as the one settler enumerated to the other the valorous deeds and

achievements of his forefathers.

Besides, it was amongst the families of high birth that these ancient traditions were best preserved. Such families maintained an unbroken succession in Iceland, whereas in Norway they became extinct, first, in consequence of the many events under the immediate successors of Harald Haarfager, and next, from the furious zeal of Olaf in the propagation of Christianity, which brought ruin to the more tenacious adherents of the old faith, and these were just the individuals amongst whom the ancient Sagas were best preserved. Not less destructive to the old families was the unfortunate expedition to England and Ireland under Harald Haardraade and Magnus Barfoot, in the 11th century, as also the long civil wars in the 12th century, which ended with the fall of the Optimists. The other parts of Scandinavia also produced Skalds, and several, both Danish and Swedish, are mentioned in the ancient Sagas; but these countries were of much greater extent, and ruled by much more powerful monarchs, than Norway, previous to the 9th century; and thus did the heroic age terminate and the songs of the Skalds become silent at an earlier period there than in the neighbouring kingdom.

## **SECOND PERIOD**

WE have thus seen how the desire to tell of old times arose and was propagated amongst the inhabitants of the new colony. But the remembrance and relation of individual exploits, and the transmission of these records from one generation to the other, would perhaps have never led to the Icelanders becoming historians had not such habits been



united with a strong feeling for poetry, a desire for fame, and that peculiar state of society which had been formed amongst them.

The Island had been colonized in peace; each enterprising navigator as he touched its shore took possession of a tract of land without impediment, and became the independent proprietor of his small estate; but now these settlements approached each other; interests began to clash; individual demeanour to become developed. The social bonds had been too loosely attached to keep within due limits the wild self will of so many impetuous Northmen. True, their ancient Norwegian customs had been spontaneously resumed on their arrival, and fifty years later (A. D. 928), the laws of Ulflot had given a form and consistency to the moral code; but these checks had little weight when individual power or interest were enabled to oppose them. Personal strength was necessary for personal safety; and the many narratives which have been preserved, detailing the untimely fate of the most respectable families in the course of the first two centuries, exhibit a long list of feuds and deeds of violence unchecked by the laws or the judicial authority of the land. [163] These civil broils were not, however, in general, of a very sanguinary character, and often consisted of individual encounters, where courage and presence of mind were equally exhibited on both sides, and the contest was obstinate: in a more general fray the loss was looked upon as considerable if ten men fell.

The time of feud was also a time of re-union: the object of the individual was spread abroad; discussion was created, sympathy was awakened; the relative merits of the contending parties became the theme of conversation, and the Skalds were stimulated to the composition of new specimens of their inspiring art. On particular occasions they improvised. Hate as well as love formed the theme of these effusions, and the same means were employed to give a graceful form to satire, in which style of composition these ancient poets were remarkably successful: in fact, so cutting were these sallies, and of so much weight among a people peculiarly under the influence of public opinion, that they often became the causes of bloodshed, and were looked upon as a ground of complaint before the Courts (79). For the most part, however, the songs were of an historical character; sometimes the Skald sang of his own exploits, sometimes of those of his friends, who upon such occasions were accustomed to present him with costly gifts: After the Norwegian Skald, Eyvind Skialdespilder, had sung a Drapa or ode in praise of the Icelanders, every peasant in the island contributed three pieces of silver, which were applied to the purchase of a clasp or ornament for a mantel [164] that weighed 50 marks and this they sent to the bard, as an acknowledgment of his poetic powers.

The climate and mode of living contributed to keep alive this taste for poetry, which the Icelanders had inherited from their Norwegian ancestors. Agriculture was almost entirely confined to the care of pasture and meadow land; fishing could only be carried on at certain seasons, and the feeding of cattle required little attention. Their hostile proceedings were also soon concluded; but was a reprisal apprehended, it became necessary for the chief to retain his followers at the farm until a reconciliation was brought about, and these assemblages in the common room, during the long winter

evenings, contributed to increase the social union and reciprocal communication of past events. Public amusements also brought the people frequently together: besides the great feasts, which lasted from eight to fourteen days, sports and games, such as bowls or wrestling, were carried on in the several districts for many weeks in succession; and still more attractive was the Heste-thing, where stallions were made to fight against each other, to the great amusement of both old and young. To these reunions must be added those caused by attendance at the different courts, and particularly at the Althing (80) or general Assizes, where all the first men of the island met annually, with great pomp and parade. It was looked upon as a disgrace to be absent from this meeting, which was held in the open air on the banks of the Thingvalla Vatn, the largest lake in Iceland, a natural hill or mount forming the court.

To figure here with a display and retinue that drew upon him the eyes of all beholders, was the great ambition of the [165] Chief, whose power and influence depended much upon the number of friends and followers he could produce on such occasions. These were again determined by the degree of support and assistance which they could calculate on obtaining from him in the hour of need; and hence the anxiety on the part of the Icelandic yeoman to be fully acquainted with the character and circumstances of his chief, to which cause may be more immediately attributed the interest which he took in all new Sagas or narratives of remarkable individuals.

In the Laxdæla Saga (81) it is related that, after a brave Iclander, named Bolle Bolleson, had gallantly defeated an assailant, by whom he had been attacked in the course of a journey through the island, his exploit became the subject of a new Saga, which quickly spread over the district and added considerably to his reputation. In Gisle Sursens Saga, a stranger is introduced, saying to his neighbours at the court--"Shew me the men of great deeds, those from whom the Sagas proceed."

The greater number of the remaining Sagas bear what may be called a political stamp; they contain a detail of the most important disputes between individual families, or districts, painted in the most minute manner, and followed by a general description of the most important personages in the narrative. How much weight was attached to these personal descriptions is shewn by the nature of the Icelandic language, which is richer than any other European tongue in words that express those various qualities and shades of character which are of the most importance in society. The exterior of the chief person in the Saga is [166] also painted with equal accuracy, especially his features, in which the richness of the language is also observable; and even the particulars of the dress are not omitted. This was of importance in a country where it was not always easy to determine whether the stranger who made his appearance was friend or foe, and a remarkable instance is mentioned in the Laxdæla Saga of a chief named Helge Hardbeinsen identifying some stranger knights, whom he had never seen, solely from the accurate description of their personal appearance, which was brought to him by the messenger who communicated the intelligence of their approach.

The same characteristics are imprinted on the Sagas. The peculiarities of the narrator never appear; it is as if one only heard the simple echo of an old tradition; no introductory

remarks are made, but the history begins at once abruptly with:--"There was a man called so and so, son of so and so," etc.: no judgment is pronounced upon the transaction, but it is merely added that this deed increased the hero's reputation, or that was considered bad. In most Sagas the dialogistic form prevails, particularly in those of more ancient date, for this form was natural to the people, who insensibly threw their narratives into dialogue, and thus they acquired a more poetical colouring; for not only were the conversations related which had actually taken place, but also those which from the nature of the subject it might have been concluded had been held; and the general mode of expression being simple and nearly uniform, and the character being best developed in this definite form, those imaginary conversations were, for the most part, not inconsistent with truth.

The talent for narrating was naturally generated by the desire of hearing these narratives. Those Skalds who remembered [167] the old Sagas, and whose imagination was lively, were best enabled to adopt the dramatic form, and now, independent of their local or political interest, the narratives became interesting on their own account. Scarce a century after the colonization of the country we find that the people took great pleasure in this amusement. "Is no one come," asks Thorvard, at a meeting of the people mentioned in Viga Glums Saga, "who can amuse us with a new story?" They answered him: "There is always sport and amusement when thou are present." He replied: "I can think of nothing better than Glum's songs," upon which he sang one of those which he had learned. In the Sturlunga Saga a certain priest, named Ingemund, is mentioned as a man rich in knowledge, who told good stories, afforded much amusement, and indited good songs for which he obtained payment abroad. Such a narrator was called a Sagaman.

Thus did oral tradition, beginning with the mythic, proceed thence to the historical and end with the fabulous. We have now come to the period when books were written and collected in the island; but in order to trace the cause of that peculiar fondness for their own history, which led the Icelanders not only to become the historians of Iceland but of the whole North, it is necessary to go back to the earlier condition of the country and the people.

It may at first sight appear that the local position of this remote island would be alone sufficient to prevent the inhabitants from taking any interest in the affairs of other countries; but the communication with Norway continued; the migration from thence lasted for many generations, even after the island was colonized, and many merchant ships passed annually between Iceland and the parent state. They brought with them meal, building-timber, leather, fine [168] cloth and tapestry, taking in exchange silver, skins, coarse cloth (Wadmel), and other kinds of wollens, as well as dried fish.

As soon as it was known that a merchant had brought a cargo to the Icelandic coast the chief of the temple, and in later times the governor of the province, rode down immediately to the ship and asked for news; he then fixed the price at which the various goods were to be sold to the people of the district, chose what he wanted for himself, and invited the captain of the vessel to stop at his house for the winter. The visitor was now looked upon as one of the family, he entered into their amusements, and disputes, entertained them at Yule with his stories, and presented his host at parting with a piece of

English tapestry, or some other costly gift, in return for the hospitality which he had received. Piratical expeditions had at this time given place to trading voyages, and the merchant or ship's captain was often a person of good family sometimes attached to the Norwegian Court, and hence well acquainted with ail that was passing there. How much this intercourse tended to the increase of historical material is shown by an old MS. of St. Olafs Saga, wherein is stated that:--"In the time of Harald Haarfager there was much sailing from Norway to Iceland; every summer was news communicated between the two countries, and this was afterwards remembered, and became the subject of narratives."

The Icelanders not only received intelligence from Norway, but brought it away themselves. They were led to undertake these voyages as well from the desire to see their relations, and claim inheritances, as for the purpose of procuring more valuable building-timber than the merchant could bring them. The chief considered that his reputation [169]

depended much upon the number of persons he could entertain, and for this purpose a spacious hall was required. This formed a separate building, in the midst of which the cheerful wood fire blazed upwards to an aperture in the roof, unchecked by ceilings or partition walls:--

*The drinking hall, a separate house, was built  
Of heart of fir; not twice three hundred men  
Could fill that hall, when gather'd there at Yule.  
\* \* \* \* \**

*The cheerful faggot on the straw-strewn floor  
Unceasing blazed, gladdening its stony hearth,  
While downwards through the dense smoke shot the stars,  
Those heavenly friends, upon the guests below. (82)*

The adventurous stripling, on the other hand, sailed to Norway for the purpose of there engaging in a sea-roving expedition, or seeking advancement amongst his influential kinsmen; and thus many earned renown at the courts of the Norwegian kings, or entered into mercantile pursuits in order to obtain wealth, or experience and consideration. For the old Northern maxim of "a fool is the home-bred child," also held good in Iceland, and therefore do we find Bolle Bollesen saying to his father-in-law Snorre Gode, who wished to dissuade him from going abroad: "Little do I think he knows who knows no more than Iceland." Trading was often undertaken by young men solely as the means of acquiring knowledge, which being accomplished, the pursuit was given up.

After the lapse of a few centuries this passion for travelling was increased by a new cause which had more immediate influence upon the collection of historical materials. [170] The Skalds passed over to England, the Orkneys, and the Norwegian courts, seeking rewards and reputation. They neither required the aid of friends nor money for such expeditions, but boldly entering the drinking hall of the kings craved permission to sing a drapa in praise of the monarch, which was always granted, and the bard received handsome presents, such as weapons, clothes, gold rings, together with an honourable reception at the court, in return for his exertions.

The Icelandic Skalds, favoured by the independent position of their country, and a

superior knowledge of the Scandinavian mythology, acquired a marked pre-eminence over their competitors in other parts of the North. The praises of a stranger bard, from a free country, were more flattering to a king or chieftain than the more servile adulation of his own laureate; and it was but reasonable, as well as politic, to reward him well who had come from so great a distance, and who, travelling from land to land, could sound the king's praise and tell of the royal bounty. The odes thus sung were all of an historical character; and it was therefore necessary for the Skald to be well acquainted with the deeds of the monarch and his ancestors. It was also required of him that he should be able to repeat the national ballads; and the extraordinary power of the Skalds in this particular is shown in the saga of the blind Skald Stuf, who one evening sang sixty songs before Harald Haardraade, and could repeat four times as many longer poems!

But if a knowledge of history was of importance to the Skald, it was absolutely indispensable to the Sagaman. A remarkable anecdote of one of these narrators is contained in the Saga of Thorstein Frode, preserved in the Arne-Magnæan[171] collection of Icelandic MSS.; (83) a certain Sagaman, called Thorstein, repaired to King Harald of Norway. The King asked him "whether he knew anything that would amuse." He replied that he knew a few sagas. "I will receive thee," said the king, "and thou shalt entertain whoever requires it of thee." Thorstein became favoured by the courtiers, and obtained clothes from them; the king also gave him a good sword.

Towards Yule (84) he became sorrowful; the king guessed the cause, namely, that his Sagas were at an end, and that he had nothing for Yule. He answered that so it was; he had one remaining, and that he durst not tell, for it was about the king's journeys. The king said that he should begin with that the first day of Yule, and he (the king) would take care [172] that it should last to the end of the festival. The thirteenth day Thorstein's Saga came to an end, and now he looked anxiously for the judgment of the king who said smiling: "It is not the worse told because thou hast a talent therefor, but where didst thou get it?" Thorstein answered: "It is my custom to repair every summer to the Althing in our land, and there I learn the sagas which Haldor Snorreson relates." The king said: "Then it is no wonder thou knowest them so well," and upon this, gave him a good ship load; and now Thorstein passed often between Norway and Iceland.

To comprehend how such a narrative could have lasted thirteen days, we must presume that the dialogistic form was freely used, and that the story was interrupted and decorated with verses and poetical allusions to a considerable extent. The anecdote also shows that while Sagamen were of later origin than Skalds, they also stood in lower estimation; the Skald was enrolled amongst the courtiers; the Sagaman was only looked upon as an amusing visitor.

In the 11th century, the Icelanders ceased to engage in piratical expeditions; the chiefs, whose power and riches had increased, looked with contempt on trading voyages; but on the other hand it was often a result of their feuds, that one of the parties was obliged to leave the country for a few years. Sometimes also they engaged in a voluntary pilgrimage

to Rome. Such an expedition went first to Denmark, where it was always well received by the Danish kings, and more particularly in the 13th century we find the Icelandic chiefs drawing forth expressions of respect and esteem at the court of Valdemar II.

All these travellers were sure to return home after a few years and establish themselves in Iceland, nor could the [173] most flattering reception at foreign courts abate their inherent love of country. Thus King Harald Gormson could not prevail upon Gunnar of Hlidarende to remain at his court, although he held out the temptations of a wife and fortune; and hence says Hakon to Finboge Ramme, "That is just the way with you Icelanders! the moment you are valued and favoured by princes, you want to get away." When the travelled man came home he was received with the greatest attention; he was instantly sought out at the Althing, and now he must make a public statement of his travels and adventures. The curiosity of Icelanders is proverbial, and seems to be in proportion to their distance from the continent. If a ship arrived, the people instantly ran down to the shore to ask for news, unless the chief of the district (Herredsforstanderen) had ruled that he should be the first. Thorstein Ingemundson, a hospitable man, who lived in the 10th century, looked upon it as the duty of every stranger to visit him first; and he was once highly exasperated with some strangers who neglected this courtesy. When Kiartan, mentioned in the history of Olaf Tryggveson, had returned from Norway, and was grieving over the infidelity of his betrothed, his father was most distressed at the people thus losing the benefit of his stories; and when he was afterwards married, and a splendid wedding took place on the island, nothing amused the guests more than the bridegroom's narratives of his services under the great King Olaf Tryggveson. However desirous the new comer might be to learn what had happened during his absence from home, he was always first obliged to tell his countrymen the news from abroad. A remarkable illustration of this is given in the life of Bishop Magnus, who returned from Saxony by Norway (A. D. 1135), just as the [174] people were assembled at the Althing, and were loudly contending upon a matter respecting which no unanimity could be obtained. A messenger suddenly appears among the crowd, and states that the Bishop is riding up. Upon this they all become so pleased that they instantly leave the court, and the Bishop is obliged to parade on a height near the church, and tell all the people what had happened in Norway whilst he was abroad!

### **THIRD PERIOD**

It has thus been shewn how the materials for history had been collected in Iceland, and how these materials were moulded into the form of narrative by oral tradition; it now remains to be seen how the traditions became the subjects of written documents, and historical literature assumed a definite and permanent form.

Snorre Sturleson says in the preface to the Heimskringla that Are Frode (b. 1067, d. 1148) was the first who committed to writing, in the northern tongue, historical narrations both of the present and past. Soon afterwards Sæmund Frode wrote of the Norwegian kings. Both these authors finished their works at a late period of life, and after the year

1120; hence it has been inferred that no history was written in Iceland before the time of Are Frode, and consequently that such historical writing was the fruit [175] of a taste for literature generated by the introduction of Christianity.

This important event occurred in the year 1000. New ideas and new writings were now, doubtless, introduced, but a considerable time must have elapsed before these civilizing effects became general. Christianity was not propagated in Iceland by force, but was the result of the example of the mother country, the adhesion of individual chiefs to the new religion, and the indifference of many to the old. No violent persecution was awakened against the followers of the old idolatry, nor was the influence of the new religion upon morals and customs very visible at first. Sixteen years had elapsed from the introduction of Christianity, before an injunction from Olaf the Saint forbade the Icelanders to expose their children and eat horse-flesh. The first bishop (Isleif) was consecrated in 1056, but the influence of the priestly character depended, like that of the Hofgode in former times, on his personal qualities, and the power of his kinsmen. The oligarchy checked the growth and influence of the hierarchy. Even in the beginning of the 13th century, interdicts were little attended to, and we find the Archbishop of Thronthjem so late as A. D. 1213, obliged to shew great indulgence to the chiefs, who had cruelly maltreated Bishop Jodmund Aresen. With Christian worship came also frankincense, clerical robes, bells and books. Previous to this, the Icelanders were only acquainted with Runes, Runic stones, and Staves, and such small articles, upon which single words or sentences were inscribed. Individuals may, doubtless, have met with books, upon or near the island, just as Irish books were found there by the first settlers, but so long as Roman letters and the language in which [176] they were written were unknown, such books could only have been looked upon as foreign novelties. Now the priests brought Latin breviaries, and the new alphabet could not be found very difficult after the use of Runes. Fifty years after the introduction of Christianity, Bishop Isleif established the first school, which was soon followed by many others. The previous state of society had awakened a greater taste for reading and knowledge in Iceland, than in the rest of the North, and the tranquil habits of the people being favourable to the cultivation of letters, it was not long before many of them applied themselves ardently to literature. The Kristni Saga relates that towards the end of the 11th century there were many chiefs so learned that they might have been priests, and many were actually appointed to the sacred office. In the beginning of the 12th century, Ovid's *Epistles* and *Amores* were read in the schools, and in the course of the same century we find mention made of many who possessed collections of books.

For some time reading and literature were closely connected with the new religion. A knowledge of Latin letters was acquired in order to sing the Psalter, to which, without well understanding it, some magical influence was ascribed, and the young priest applied himself to Latin, in order that he might becomingly celebrate the Mass. For records of daily life, the Icelander needed not the foreign character; his Runes afforded him a readier medium, and their use was continued for a long period. On the other hand an acquaintance with the Latin language became of the greatest importance to his whole being; for thus an inexhaustible source of knowledge had been opened to him, and the travelling Icelander could now, in foreign [177] schools, become endowed with all the learning of the age, and by means of Latin books transfer this learning to his own

country. Of these, the historical were the most congenial to his taste and habits, and the annalistic form was best suited to retain the fruits of his reading; hence came Icelanders to copy and afterwards to compile annals embracing long periods of time, and hence to treat Northern history in the same simple manner.

But peculiar difficulties presented themselves to the correct arrangement of these records. Much as had been related in Iceland of the events of the past, their chronological order was not preserved, and the only guide to this indispensable element of history were the long genealogical details of the individuals whose actions were recorded. To ascribe these different events to particular years, and arrange them in chronological order, required much time, trouble and investigation, yet under all these difficulties a book was completed which must excite the surprise and admiration of all the modern literati.

This book was written by Are Frode, under the title of Book of the Icelanders (*Islendingabok*) and contained a dry and condensed, but at the same time well arranged and comprehensive, view of the most important events in the history of the country. It has often been regretted, that a larger work by the same author has been lost. The former, with good reason, was highly prized, for it laid the foundation of all northern history, determining many important epochs, and shewing their connexion and succession with minor events. But Snorre's expression about Are Frode has been misunderstood, when he is made to say that Are was the first Icelanders who wrote anything historical. Snorre says that Are was the first Icelanders who was *a historian*, [178] but by this he could not mean to say that no one had ever put a Saga upon paper before Are Frode; for this, after Icelanders had been educated in schools, could not be well maintained.

The preceding shows that a number of narratives, thrown into an agreeable form, were current throughout Iceland, and that these, favoured by a free constitution, were increased by all the remarkable events that took place either in the island or the neighbouring kingdoms. The transition to written documents was now easy and natural: he who was accustomed to read and write, and who perhaps relied less upon his memory than others, was readily led to take down in writing that which he was desirous to retain, and thus he constructed a Saga. But the writer of such a Saga would never think of appending his name to it, and thereby seeking the honours of authorship, for he merely wrote down what he had heard others say, and exactly as he had heard it. Hence are the greater number of Icelandic Sagas anonymous; the date must be determined by the contents, and it is very possible that many of these narratives, such as *Vigastrys* and *Heidarviga Saga* were written earlier than the *Schedæ* of Are Frode. The other principal Icelandic historian was Are's friend, Sæmund, also surnamed Frode, or the learned, whose work on the Norwegian kings, from Harald Haarfager to Magnus the Good, is now lost: it is quoted less frequently than that of Are, the most important events having probably been already determined by him.

The peculiar nature of the settlement, and the circumstances under which it had been formed, directed the attention of the Icelandic historians of the 12th century more particularly to details connected with the colonization of the island: the order in which families had become established, [179] their genealogy, territory, how they were allied



etc.; and the fruit of these enquiries was the celebrated Landnamabok. Next to these local matters came the reigns of the two Olafs, of whose achievements many narratives were in circulation and whose zeal in the propagation of Christianity caused them to be surrounded with a sacred halo. The life of Olaf Tryggveson was written in Latin by two monks, named Gunlaug and Odd, who gave as authorities the oral relations of men from the middle of the same century, at the end of which they wrote; their labour consisted in little more than translating into Latin, and accompanying with a few remarks that which had been communicated to them by others, for both these notices of Olaf's life shew that neither of the authors related anything on his own personal knowledge. About the same period a diffuse compilation was made, recording the achievements of St. Olaf during his life, and his miracles after his death; this was afterwards employed by Snorre, and his contemporary Styrmer, but the nature of both these works renders it probable that many parts had been already written in detached narratives before the whole was collected.

These lives of the Olafs are, in all probability, the earliest regularly arranged written record of a narrative which had been orally related, and they form a connecting link between historical writing and tradition. The achievements of Harald Haarfager, also, which are mentioned in so many narratives of the Icelandic colonists, as having been sung by so many Skalds, whose songs were remembered, and which besides contained events of such great general importance to the Icelanders, were no doubt committed to writing in the course of the 12th century. From such lives of individual kings, the Sagas of the [180] Kings of Norway could easily be compiled, for just as the isolated deeds of an Icelander were put together to form the history of his life, and thereto were added the achievements of his forefathers and children, so by uniting the lives of Harald Haarfager and the two Olafs, a Saga of Norwegian Kings was already formed. But he who collected or transcribed such a history in the 12th century never thought of writing a book, still less of being looked upon as an author; he wrote either because he wished to note down certain events for his own satisfaction, or in order to have a good collection of entertaining narratives to relate to his friends. The first attempts were naturally imperfect and unequal, for the materials were casually collected, and the most disproportionate brevity and prolixity is to be observed amongst them; but these became better after a time, and only the most deserving were eventually transcribed.

Next to the Olafs, Harald Haardraade was the Norwegian King who furnished the richest materials to the historian, and already during his life time, and with his cognizance, a romantic complimentary Saga, of his residence at Constantinople, founded upon Haldor Snorreson's prolix narrative, was in circulation. There was another class of Saga which must have led the admirers of the bardic art to collect them into a united form, namely, the celebrated mythic Sagas of the Volsunger and Ginkunger, whose deeds formed the theme of the oldest songs of the Skalds, and from whence so many poetical images are taken. No Icelander who either ventured to indite a strophe himself, or made any pretensions to poetic taste, could be ignorant of these. The Volsunga Saga is supposed to have been written either at the end of the 12th or beginning of the 13th century. [181] That the Icelanders who thus, in the 12th century, committed to paper for their own information the achievements of foreign kings, were not unmindful of the transactions of their own island, may be easily believed; nor did they fail to note down carefully the concerns of their own families and the valorous deeds of their kinsmen and forefathers.

But of these narratives, there was scarcely one that could be properly called a book, that is to say, a work published for the information of others; they could only be looked upon as records for personal use, or echoes of the living narrative and assistants to its propagation.

The first real writers of history that Iceland produced--those, namely, who collected historical materials, which they individually worked out with the view of communicating the knowledge of remarkable events to their fellow men,--were those who wrote the history of their own times. The first of these was Erik Oddson, who, according to Snorre, wrote from the testimony of eye-witnesses, and from what he himself had learned from Harald Gille and his sons in the middle of the 12th century. This book is used by Snorre, and still more literally by the author of the MS. *Morkinskinna*. Next to him comes Carl Jonson, who was Abbot of Thingore Monastery in 1169, and wrote the first part of the history of King Sverre, under the personal inspection of the monarch himself: the succeeding part was finished by Styrmer, in the first half of the 10th century. These authors followed exactly the historical style which had been formed by oral relation. The circumstance of King Sverre, who carefully employed every means of leading public opinion in his favour, having sought to influence the Abbot while writing his history, proves that already at that time a feeling for literature had been awakened. [182] Thus in the 12th century, when the night of ignorance and barbarism still hung over the rest of Europe, narratives which had previously been transmitted by oral tradition were taken down with the pen, and the writing of books was commenced in Iceland. The following century was the golden age of Icelandic historical literature, for in that age lived Snorre Sturleson (85). His mode of writing history was to collect the Sagas that had been written before his time, to strike out whatever displeased him, make abstracts of what he considered too diffuse, and enliven the recital by the introduction of a few strophes from the old Skalds. He states nothing for which he has not good authority; he rejects whatever was too trifling to be consistent with the dignity of history, as well as the greater part of those legends which several of the copyists have inserted in his work: but, on the other hand, he does not pass by a single illustrative feature, and has faithfully preserved the lively character of the ancient Saga.

Between 1264 and 1271, being some years after Sverres Saga had been completed, Sturle Thordson wrote the history of Hakon Hakonson, at the instigation of Magnus Lagebæter, and according to the materials which he had collected at the Norwegian court. His work is therefore to be looked upon as an independent performance, and both [183] as regards its comprehensiveness and historical arrangement, must be classed amongst the best of the Icelandic historical works.

The Sagas which embrace that period of time, extending from the death of Sverre to the birth of Hakon Hakonson, are probably written later than Hakon Hakonson's Saga, for as they just fill up the space between these two great historical works, the want of this link would not clearly appear until the latter had been completed. The fragment which remains of Magnus Lagebæter's Saga, shews that it was intended to continue the series of Royal Narratives, but these could scarcely have been of much interest, as no MSS. are extant.

A Jarls Saga was also compiled in the 13th century, being a collection of ancient Narratives relating to the Jarls of the Orkneys, which were united and continued under the name of the Orkneyinga Saga. The civil disturbances in Iceland at this period were described by Sturle Thordson, and besides this many were employed in writing Annals.

In the 16th century, although the decline of learning had commenced much literary activity was still visible in Iceland; but the independent compilation or composition of history had ceased, and only a few Bishop Sagas were still written. On the other hand copying was carried on with great industry, older Sagas were transcribed, the Landnamabok completed, and the Kristnisaga, or description of the introduction of Christianity into the country, was extracted from the older writings: the copious MSS. called Flatobogen, [\(86\)](#) still shews with what industry individual ecclesiastics[184] collected and transcribed the older historical Sagas towards the end of this century.

## LAST PERIOD

We have now seen how Icelandic historical literature, after having blossomed and borne good fruit, began at last to wither and decay; and the cause of its origin and bloom leads us also to the cause of its decline and extinction. The old state of society had called forth individual action and heroic deeds, and awakened a feeling for their representation; but now the power of the petty chief over his Thingmen had become diminished, and the equilibrium had been removed from amongst the chieftains themselves. Already in the beginning of the 11th century had Gudmund the Powerful one hundred servants at his farm, and he was accustomed to travel through his district like a petty king, with a retinue of thirty men, to judge the disputes of his Thingmen. He did not, however, venture to combat the general dissatisfaction caused by the increased expense to the individuals where he lodged, which this practice occasioned, and eventually contented himself with six attendants. As long as public opinion had so much weight, the voice of the Saga was

also influential, but when powerful families intermarried, their influence invariably increased as well as the number of their followers and constituents. In the beginning of the 12th century Haflide Marson had a dispute with Thorgill Oddeson, and rode to the Thing with 1200 men, while 700 accompanied his antagonist. No individual yeoman could oppose such an armament, either with [185] his own force or that of his kinsmen, and the field of domestic narrative was therefore reduced from the multiplicity of characters and events which the time of the colonists brought forth, to the more serious feuds of a few powerful chiefs.

From the middle of the 12th century all power and influence was divided between the three warlike sons of Sturle--the historian--Snorre, Thord, and Sigvat. Avarice, ambition, and revenge generated implacable hatred between these, and brought on the destruction of their race; and the history of the independent age of Iceland may be said to end with the feuds of this family, which lasted one hundred years, and gave to that period the name of "the time of the Sturlungers" (Sturlungatiden). Although the history of this period has been written in a good style, with the greatest accuracy, and rare impartiality by an eye-witness and participator in the events--Sturle Thordson; notwithstanding the much more important occurrences which are here narrated, as compared with the former periods, and which, it might therefore be supposed, would awaken greater interest,--the Sturlunga Saga does not present that attraction to the reader which is afforded by the narratives of less important periods.

Mere numerical force, and not the personal strength or ability of the individual now determined the result. The question was no longer about defending a cause at the Court, but assembling an army; the old thirst for revenge had not vanished, but honourable feeling had given place to treachery, and the power of numbers. No distinguished individual appeared whose deeds could awaken sympathy. Snorre Sturleson was talented and eloquent, but at the same time ambitious, avaricious, and not very celebrated for his [186] personal prowess; his nephew, Sturle Sigvatson, was full of energy, but imperious, violent, and faithless; Kolbein the younger, and Gissur, authors of Snorre's murder, were only clever partisans; Thord Kakal, who revenged the fall of the Sturlungers, awakened more sympathy, but he did not possess energy enough either to overcome his enemies or sincerity enough to be reconciled to them, and hastened the submission of the island to Norway.

The submission of the Icelanders to the sway of the Norwegian Kings was a natural consequence of these domestic dissensions; there was no end to the wars of the chiefs; not a single house, as formerly, was burned down, but whole provinces were laid waste. The chiefs themselves also looked to Norway for assistance as well as to their bishops, who were dependant on the see of Thronthjem; Hakon Hakonson well knew how to avail himself of this internal weakness, and hastening on a crisis, which was the necessary consequence of the natural course of events, secured the allegiance of the island in 1261. Thus did all the noble sentiments generated by equal laws, an independent position, high descent and intellectual endowment, sink beneath the angry and narrow-minded conflicts of private interest and personal animosity. Party feeling,--that curse of a nation,--fell upon the land; the Norwegian monarch, availing himself of the weakness which ever

accompanies disunion, accomplished the subjection of the island, and as in a more southern and greener isle, the intestine dissensions of his own excited sons affixed the badge of vassalage upon Iceland!

What theme could now animate the lyric muse, or give interest and distinction to the annals of the historian? The flame of discord lighted by the chiefs, and fanned into destructive [187] extension by the Norwegian King, had carried with it the last spark of freedom from the exhausted land, and with freedom fled the spirit which had breathed life into the songs of the Skalds and given force and character to the records of the Saga!

After a short time the Sagas ceased to be produced, for nothing occurred that was worthy of being committed to writing; the dry annalist alone could fill his note book with the successions of Lagmen or chief magistrates, the weddings of the chiefs, law suits, and solitary deeds of violence, or more destructive still, with details of the ravages of the pestilential diseases which now spread death and desolation throughout the land.

But even more injurious to the historical literature of Iceland than these depopulating effects was the taste for romance which arose about this period, and weakened the feeling for pure history. We have already seen that in the 12th century, fabulous or poetical ornament was given to historical narrative, in order to increase the gratification of the hearer; and by such embellished adventures Sturle Thordson obtained so much favour with Magnus Lagebæter; but so long as real acts of heroism were performed, and recorded, and the Sagas were connected with the songs of the Skalds and the genealogy of families, such narratives justly attained the preference; it was otherwise, however, when the public interest in domestic events had subsided, or rather when the altered condition of society produced nothing to call it forth, and the romances of chivalry were opened like a new world before the admiring eyes of the Icelanders. This was particularly apparent in the reign of Hakon Hakonson, by whose orders several of the most popular foreign romances were translated into Icelandic. [188] To these may be added the copious Vilkina Saga, a romance of Didrik of Bern and his champions, which was probably written by Icelanders in Bergen in the 14th century from the narratives of Hanseatic merchants.

The passion for hearing and reading foreign romances injured historical literature in two ways; first, by corrupting the pure taste for true history; and secondly, by leading many to exaggerate, and deck out facts with imaginative features borrowed from these fables. Public interest in the history of the neighbouring countries also ceased to be longer entertained; some considerable properties fell to the Norwegian crown; the riches of the chiefs passed away, and the island sank fast into an abject and unimportant condition. Journeys to foreign courts, and consequently the knowledge of foreign events became more rare; the complimentary verses of the subject poet to his monarch were naturally less valued than those sung by the travelling bard in honour of a stranger king; they were no longer liberally rewarded, and soon both Skald and Sagaman; ceased to sing and to narrate. With good reason therefore does Torfæus observe that Hakon Hakonson, by subjecting Iceland, left a larger kingdom to his successors, but at the same time diminished their glory by depriving them of the men who could have immortalized their

name.

In the 14th and 15th centuries the voyages of the Icelanders altogether ceased. The stranger who landed on their coast, unlike the old skipper of wide experience and goodly lineage and connexion, was now the paltry trader or ordinary seaman from whom little could be learned; and if an Icelander went abroad, he found himself a stranger in Scandinavia. In the course of the 13th century, the old language, by mixture with the German, and a careless [189] manner of speaking, had become quite altered in Denmark, and the same change appeared in the following century in Norway, these two languages becoming nearly similar; so that the old *Danske Tunge*, together with the Saga, was no longer heard in Scandinavia, while in remote Iceland the ancient songs of the Skalds, and stories of the Sagamen, secured its preservation there.

Thus separated from the rest of the world, as well by language as locality, the Icelanders could only gratify their taste for reading in the books of their own country. The value of oral tradition, and therewith its power had gradually diminished and died away as books and reading became more general; but the old supply of true and poetical narratives became corrupted by legends of foreign and native saints, adventures with ghosts and spirits, and traditions from foreign romances, which were written in the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries. Meantime the feeling for the old Saga was still kept alive by historical songs (Rimar) and the labours of the genealogist; the latter has been a favourite pursuit with Icelanders in all ages, and by these means have the principal families been enabled to trace their descent, from the 10th and 11th centuries, with far greater accuracy than the most ancient nobility of the rest of Europe. The Rimar had much resemblance to the Champion songs (Kæmpe viser), traces of which are to be found in the Sturlunga Saga, and which were composed in great numbers in the following century. Of the seventy-eight Icelandic poets that are enumerated by Einarm, as having flourished from the Reformation to the end of the 18th century, the greater number have composed such rhymes, and in many of these the old traditions are included. [190] In the 16th century still fewer Sagas were written than in the 15th, not so much because people began to get acquainted with printed works, which took place slowly, but because the Reformation at first operated against the reading of Sagas: they were said to contain Popery.

It was, therefore, fortunate for history that from the 17th century the attention of the literati, both in Sweden and Denmark, was turned to the importance of Icelandic manuscripts. Arngrim Johnson, author of *Crymogæa*, assisted by King Christian IV. of Denmark (1643), collected several of them, and Bishop Brynjulf Svendsen sent some of the most important Icelandic codices to Frederic III. (1670), who was a zealous promoter of all intellectual advancement. The Icelander Rugman who, taken prisoner in the wars of Charles X. of Sweden, had awakened the attention of the Swedish literati to the literary treasures of his own country, was sent to the island in 1661 to purchase manuscripts for the Antiquarian Museum of Stockholm, and many were afterwards sent thither on the same errand; but Christian V. of Denmark, whose dominion, including Norway, extended to Iceland, issued a prohibition in 1685 against any manuscripts being disposed of to strangers, nor was it until the eminent antiquary Professor Arnas Magnussen was placed at the head of a royal commission in Iceland, which carried on its labours with unwearied

assiduity from 1702 to 1712, that the remaining manuscripts were collected and lodged in the libraries of Copenhagen.

## **SAGA OF ERIK THE RED**

DISCOVERY AND COLONIZATION OF GREENLAND - A. D. 985

*In presenting the historical evidences, and results that attended the independent investigations of Professors Reeves, Rafn and Beamish, there is necessarily much repetition, but it is nevertheless essential, because not only are the translations, in many instances, different, but the interpretations of text, and the conclusions reached therefrom are at times widely dissimilar. The importance of bringing the relations, arguments, and proofs of these distinguished authorities into apposition will, therefore, readily appear. The value of the submitted record from so many sources will be appreciated by those who have a sincere desire to know all the grounds upon which are based the claim that Norsemen discovered and made a settlement upon what are now America's shores as early as about the year 1000-3.*

The first important document that appears in Professor Rafn's collection, is the Saga or narrative of Erik the Red, the first settler in Greenland. This manuscript forms part of the celebrated Flatobogen, or Codex Flateyensis, and the language, construction and style of

the narrative, together with other unerring indications, prove it to have been written in the 12th century.

Although the main object of the writer of this narrative appears to have been to enumerate the deeds and adventures of Erik and his sons, short accounts are also given of the discoveries of succeeding voyagers, the most distinguished of whom was Thorfinn Karlsefne; but as a more detailed narrative of the discoveries of this remarkable personage is contained in the manuscript entitled the Saga of Thorfinn Karlsefne, which is also translated, the [192] following selections are principally confined to the voyages of Erik and his immediate followers.

Thorvald hight (name) a man, a son of Osvald, a son of Ulf-Oxne-Thorersson. Thorvald and his son Erik the Red removed from Jæder (87) to Iceland, in consequence of murder. At that time was Iceland colonized wide around (88). They lived at Drange on Hornstand; there died Thorvald. Erik then married Thorhild, the daughter of Jærunda and Thorbjorg Knarrarbringa, who afterwards married Thorbjorn of Haukadal.

Then went Erik northwards and lived at Erikstad near Vatshorn. The son of Erik and Thorhild hight Leif. But after Eyulf Soers and Rafn the duellists' murder, was Erik banished from Haukadal, and he removed westwards to Breidafjord, and lived at Oexney at Erikstad. He lent Thorgest his seat-posts, and could not get them back again; he then demanded them; upon this arose disputes and frays between him and Thorgest, as is told in Erik's saga. Styr Thorgrimson, Eyulf of Svinoe, and the sons of Brand of Alptafjord, and Thorbjorn Vifilson assisted Erik in this matter, but the sons of Thorgeller and Thorgeir of Hitardal stood by the Thorgestlingers. Erik was declared outlawed by the Thornesthing, and he then made ready his ship in Erik's creek, and when he was ready, Styr and the others followed him out past the islands. [193] Erik told them that he intended to go in search of the land, which Ulf Krages son Gunnbjorn saw, when he was driven out to the westward in the sea, the time when he found the rocks of Gunnbjorn (89). He said he would come back to his friends if he found the land. Erik sailed out from Snæfellsjokul; he found land, and came in from the sea to the place which he called Midjokul; it is now hight Blaserkr. He then went southwards to see whether it was there habitable land. The first winter he was at Eriksey, nearly in the middle of the eastern settlement; the spring after repaired he to Eriksfjord, and took up there his abode. He removed in summer to the western settlement, and gave to many places names. He was the second winter at Holm in Hrafnsgnipa, but the third summer went he to Iceland, and came with his ship into Breidafjord. He called the land which he had found Greenland, because, quoth he, "people will be attracted thither, if the land has a good name." Erik was in Iceland for the winter, but the summer after, went he to colonize the land; he dwelt at Brattahlid in Eriksfjord. Informed people say that the same summer Erik the Red went to colonize Greenland, thirty-five ships sailed from Breidafjord and Borgafjord, but only fourteen arrived; some were driven back, and others were lost. This was fifteen winters before Christianity was established by law in Iceland. The following men who went out with Erik took land in Greenland: Herjulf took Herjulfssfjord (he lived at Herjulfssness), Ketil Ketilssfjord, Rafn Rafnssfjord, [194] Sælvæ Sælvædal, Helge Thorbrandsson Alptefjord, Thorbjornglora Siglefjord, Einar Einarsfjord, Hafgrim Hafgrimsfjord and



Vatnahverf, Arnlaug Arnlaugsfjord, but some went to the western settlement.

## **BJARNE SEEKS OUT GREENLAND - A. D. 986.**

Herjulf was the son of Bard Herjulfson; he was kinsman to the colonist Ingolf. To Herjulf gave Ingolf land between Vog and Reykjaness. Herjulf lived first at Drepstock; Thorgerd his wife, and Bjarne was their son, a very hopeful man. He conceived, when yet young, a desire to travel abroad, and soon earned for himself both riches and respect, and he was every second winter abroad, every other at home with his father. Soon possessed Bjarne his own ship, and the last winter he was in Norway, Herjulf prepared for a voyage to Greenland with Erik. In the ship with Herjulf was a Christian from the Hebrides, who made a hymn respecting the whirlpool, in which was the following verse:

O thou who triest holy men!  
Now guide me on my way,  
Lord of the earth's wide vault, extend  
Thy gracious hand to me!

Herjulf lived at Herjulfssness; he was a very respectable man. Erik the Red lived at Brattahlid; he was the most looked up to, and every one regulated themselves by him. These were Erik's children: Leif, Thorvald and Thorstein, but Freydis his daughter; she was married [195] to a man who Thorvard his wife; they lived in Garde, where is now the Bishop's seat; she was very haughty, but Thorvard was narrow-minded; she was married to him chiefly on account of his money. Heathen were the people in Greenland at this time. Bjarne came to Eyrar with his ship the summer of the same year in which his father had sailed away in spring. These tidings appeared serious to Bjarne, and he was unwilling to unload his ship. Then his seamen asked him what he would do; he answered that he intended to continue his custom, and pass the winter with his father; "and I will," said he, "bear for Greenland if ye will give me your company." All said that they would follow his counsel. Then said Bjarne: "Imprudent will appear our voyage since none of us has been in the Greenland ocean." However, they put to sea so soon as they were ready and sailed for three days, until the land was out of sight under the water; but then the fair wind fell, and there arose north winds and fogs, and they knew not where they were, and thus it continued for many days. After that saw they the sun again, and could discover the sky; they now made sail, and sailed for that day, before they saw land, and counselled with each other about what land that could be, and Bjarne said that he thought it could not be Greenland. They asked whether he wished to sail to this land or not. "My advice is," said he, "to sail close to the land;" and so they did, and soon saw that the land was without mountains, and covered with wood, and had small heights. Then left they the land on their larboard side, and let the stern turn from the land. Afterwards they [196] sailed two days before they saw another land. They asked if Bjarne thought that this was Greenland, but he said that he as little believed this to be Greenland as the other; "because in Greenland are said to be very high ice hills." They soon approached the land, and saw that it was a flat land covered with wood. Then the fair wind fell, and the sailors said that it seemed to them most advisable to land there; but Bjarne was unwilling to do so. They pretended that they were in want of both wood and water. "Ye have no want of either of the two," said Bjarne; for this, however, he met with some reproaches from the

sailors. He bade them make sail, and so was done; they turned the prow from the land, and, sailing out into the open sea for three days, with a southwest wind, saw then the third land; and this land was high, and covered with mountains and ice-hills. Then asked they whether Bjarne would land there, but he said that he would not: "for to me this land appears little inviting." Therefore did they not lower the sails, but held on along this land, and saw that it was an island; again turned they the stern from the land, and sailed out into the sea with the same fair wind; but the breeze freshened, and Bjarne then told them to shorten sail, and not sail faster than their ship and ship's gear could hold out. They sailed now four days, when they saw the fourth land. Then asked they Bjarne whether he thought that this was Greenland or not. Bjarne answered: "This is the most like Greenland, according to what I have been told about it, and here will we steer for land." So did they, and landed in the evening under a ness; and there was a boat by the [197] ness, and just here lived Bjarne's father, and from him has the ness taken its name, and is since called Herjulfssness. Bjarne now repaired to his father's, and gave up seafaring, and was with his father so long as Herjulf lived, and afterwards he dwelt there after his father.

Such is the simple detail of the first voyage of the Northmen to the western hemisphere, and Professor Rafn shews that there are sufficient data in the ancient Icelandic geographical works to determine the position of the various coasts and headlands thus discovered by Bjarne Herjulfson. A day's sail was estimated by the Northmen at from twenty-seven to thirty geographical miles, and the knowledge of this fact, together with that of the direction of the wind, the course steered, the appearance of the shores, and other details contained in the narrative itself, together with the more minute description of the same lands given by succeeding voyagers,--leave no doubt that the countries thus discovered by Bjarne Herjulfson, were Connecticut, Long Island, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland, and the date of the expedition is determined by the passage in the preliminary narrative which fixes the period of Herjulf's settlement at Herjulfssness in Iceland.

It may, perhaps, be urged in disparagement of these discoveries that they were *accidental*,--that Bjarne Herjulfson set out in search of Greenland, and fell in with the eastern coast of North America; but so it was, also, with Columbus.--The sanguine and skilful Genoese navigator set sail in quest of Asia, and discovered the West Indies; even when in his last voyage, he did reach the eastern shore of Central America, he still believed it to be Asia, and continued under that impression to the day of his [198] death [\(90\)](#). Besides, how different were the circumstances under which the two voyages were made? The Northmen, without compass or quadrant, without any of the advantages of science, geographical knowledge, personal experience, or previous discoveries,--without the support of either kings or governments,--which Columbus, however discouraged at the outset, eventually obtained,--but guided by the stars, and upheld by their own private resources, and a spirit of adventure which no dangers could deter--cross the broad northern ocean, and explore these distant lands! Columbus, on the other hand, went forth with all the advantages of that grand career of modern discovery which had been commenced in the preceding century, and which, under Prince Henry of Portugal, had been pushed forward to an eminent position in the period immediately preceding his first voyage.

The compass had been discovered and brought into general use; maps and charts had been constructed; astronomical and geographical science had become more diffused, and the discoveries of the African coast from Cape Blanco to Cape de Verde, together with the Cape de Verde and Azore Islands, had produced a general excitement amongst all who were in any way connected with a maritime life, and filled their minds with brilliant images of fairer islands and more wealthy shores amidst the boundless waters of [199] the Atlantic. It should also be recollected that Columbus ever ready to gather information from veteran mariners, had heard of land seen far to the west of Ireland and of the island of Madeira; had been assured that, four hundred and fifty leagues east of Cape St. Vincent, carved wood, not cut with iron instruments, had been found in the sea, and that a similar fragment, together with reeds of an immense size, had drifted to Porto Santo from the west: added to this, was the fact of huge pine trees, of unknown species, having been wafted by westerly winds to the Azores, and human bodies of wondrous form and feature cast upon the island of Flores. Nor should it be forgotten that Columbus visited Iceland in 1477, (91) when, having had access to the archives of the island, and ample opportunity of conversing with the learned there, through the medium of the Latin language, he might easily have obtained a complete knowledge of the discoveries of the Northmen, sufficient at least to confirm his belief in the existence of a western continent. How much the discoveries of the distinguished Genoese navigator were exceeded by those of the Northmen, will appear from the following narratives.

## **VOYAGE OF LEIF ERIKSON - A. D. 1008**

THE next thing now to be related is that Bjarne Herjulfson went out from Greenland and visited Erik Jarl, and the Jarl received him well. Bjarne told about his voyages, that he had seen unknown lands, and people thought he had shown no curiosity, when he had nothing to relate about these countries, and this became somewhat a matter of reproach to him. Bjarne became one of the Jarl's courtiers, and came back to Greenland the summer after. There was now much talk about voyages of discovery. Leif, the son of Erik the Red, of Brattahlid, went to Bjarne Herjulfson, and bought the ship of him, and engaged men for it, so that there were thirty-five men in all. Leif asked his father Erik to be the leader on the voyage, but Erik excused himself, saying that he was now pretty well stricken in years, and could not now, as formerly, hold out all the hardships of the sea. Leif said that still he was the one of the family whom good fortune would soonest attend; and Erik gave in to Leif's request, and rode from home so soon as they were ready; and it was but a short way to the ship. The horse stumbled that Erik rode, and he fell off, and bruised his foot. Then said Erik, "It is not ordained that I should discover more countries than that which we now inhabit, and we should make no further attempt in company." Erik went home to Brattahlid, but Leif repaired to the ship, and his comrades [201] with him, thirty-five men. There was a southern (92) on the voyage, who Tyrker hight (named). *Now prepared they their ship, and sailed out into the sea when they were ready, and then found that land first which Bjarne had found last.* There sailed they to the land,

and cast anchor, and put off boats, and went ashore, and saw there no grass. Great icebergs were over all up the country, but like a plain of flat stones was all from the sea to the mountains, and it appeared to them that this land had no good qualities. Then said Leif, "We have not done like Bjarne about this land, that we have not been upon it; now will I give the land a name, and call it Helluland." Then went they on board, and after that sailed out to sea, and found another land; they sailed again to the land, and cast anchor, then put off boats and went on shore. This land was flat, and covered with wood, and white sands were far around where they went, and the shore was low. Then said Leif, "This land shall be named after its qualities, and called Markland (93) (woodland.)" They then immediately returned to the ship. Now sailed they thence into the open sea, with a northeast wind, and were two days at sea before they saw land, and they sailed [202] thither and came to an island (Nantucket?) which lay to the eastward of the land, (94) and went up there, and looked round them in good weather, and observed that there was dew upon the grass; and it so happened that they touched the dew with their hands, and raised the fingers to the mouth, and they thought that they had never before tasted anything so sweet.

After that they went to the ship, and sailed into a sound, which lay between the island and a ness (promontory), which ran out to the eastward of the land; and then steered westwards past the ness. It was very shallow at ebb tide, and their ship stood up, so that it was far to see from the ship to the water.

But so much did they desire to land, that they did not give themselves time to wait until the water again rose under their ship, but ran at once on shore, at a place where a river flows out of a lake; but so, soon as the waters rose up under the ship, then took they boats, and rowed to the ship, and floated it up to the river, and thence into the lake, and there cast anchor, and brought up from the ship their skin cots, (95) and made their booths.

After this took they counsel, and formed the resolution of remaining there for the winter, and built there large houses. There was no want of salmon either in the river or in the lake, and larger salmon than they had[203]before seen. The nature of the country was, as they thought, so good that cattle would not require house feeding in winter, for there came no frost in winter, and little did the grass wither there. Day and night were more equal than in Greenland or Iceland, for on the shortest day was the sun above the horizon from half-past seven in the forenoon till half-past four in the afternoon, hence Prof. Rafn makes the latitude 41°, 24', 10".

This would give very nearly the latitude of Mount Hope Bay, which locality is previously pointed out by the details relating to the soil and climate, and fully corresponds with the descriptions of modern travellers.

But when they had done with the house building, Leif said to his comrades:--"Now will I divide our men into two parts, and have the land explored, and the half of the men shall remain at home at the house, while the other half explore the land; but however, not go further than that they can come home in the evening, and they should not separate." Now

they did so for a time, and Leif changed about, so that the one day he went with them, and the other remained at home in the house. Leif was a great and strong man, grave and well favoured, therewith sensible and moderate in all things.

It happened one evening that a man of the party was missing, and this was Tyrker the German. This took Leif much to heart, for Tyrker had been long with his father and him, and loved Leif much in his childhood. Leif now took his people severely to task, and prepared to seek for Tyrker, and took twelve men with him. But when they had gotten a short way from the house, then [204] came Tyrker towards them, and was joyfully received. Leif soon saw that his foster-father was not in his right senses. Tyrker had a high forehead, and unsteady eyes, was freckled in the face, small and mean in stature, but excellent in all kinds of artifice. Then said Leif to him: "Why wert thou so late my fosterer, and separated from the party?" He now spoke first, for a long time, in German, and rolled his eyes about to different sides, and twisted his mouth, but they did not understand what he said. After a time he spoke Norse. "I have not been much further off, but still have I something new to tell of; I found vines and grapes." "But is that true, my fosterer?" quoth Leif. "Surely is it true," replied he, "for I was bred up in a land where there is no want of either vines or grapes." They slept now for the night, but in the morning, Leif said to his sailors: "We will now set about two things, in that the one day we gather grapes, and the other day cut vines and fell trees, so from thence will be a loading for my ship," and that was the counsel taken, and it is said their long boat was filled with grapes. Now was a cargo cut down for the ship, and when the spring came they got ready and sailed away, and Leif gave the land a name after its qualities, and called it Vinland, or Wineland.

They sailed now into the open sea, and had a fair wind until they saw Greenland, and the mountains below the joklers. Then a man put in his word and said to Leif: "Why do you steer so close to the wind?" Leif answered: "I attend to my steering, and something more, and can ye not see anything?" They answered that they [205] could not observe anything extraordinary. "I know not," said Leif, "whether I see a ship or a rock." Now looked they, and said it was a rock. But he saw so much sharper than they that he perceived there were men upon the rock. "Now let us," said Leif, "hold our wind so that we come up to them, if they should want our assistance, and the necessity demands that we should help them; and if they should not be kindly disposed, the power is in our hands, and not in theirs." Now sailed they under the rock, and lowered their sails, and cast anchor, and put out another little boat, which they had with them. Then asked Tyrker who their leader was? He called himself Thorer, and said he was a Northman; "but what is *thy* name?" said he. Leif told his name. "Art thou a son of Erik the Red, of Brattahlid?" quoth he. Leif answered that so it was. "Now will I," said Leif, "take ye all on board my ship, and as much of the goods as the ship can hold." They accepted this offer, and sailed thereupon to Eriksfjord with the cargo, and thence to Brattahlid, where they unloaded the ship. After that, Leif invited Thorer and his wife Gudrid, and three other men to stop with him, and got berths for the other seamen, as well Thorer's as his own, elsewhere. Leif took fifteen men from the rock; he was, after that, called Leif the Lucky. Leif had now earned both riches and respect. The same winter came a heavy sickness among Thorer's people, and carried off as well Thorer himself as many of his men. This winter died also Erik the Red. Now was there much talk about Leif's voyage to Vinland, and Thorvald, his brother,

thought that the land [206] had been much too little explored. Then said Leif to Thorvald: "Thou can'st go with my ship, brother! if thou wilt, to Vinland, but I wish first that the ship should go and fetch the timber, which Thorer had upon the rock;" and so was done.

Lief Erickson, with his companions, found the country about Vinland so fertile and attractive that sailing up the River St. Charles a short distance they landed at a site suitable for a settlement and there erected booths. These booths were built after the primitive fashion, by driving sharpened posts into the ground, which with forked tops supported cross pieces on which were then laid boughs and a covering of grass and earth. These temporary structures answered very well for shelter during the summer, and until more substantial buildings could be erected, which was done the following spring.

## **THORVALD REPAIRS TO VINLAND - A. D. 1002**

Now Thorvald made ready for this voyage with 30 men, and took counsel thereon with Leif his brother. Then made the their ship ready, and put to sea, and nothing is told of their voyage until they came to Leif's booths in Vinland. There they laid up their ship, and spent a pleasant winter, and caught fish for their support. But in the spring, said Thorvald, that they should make ready the ship, and that some of the men should take the ship's long boat round the western part of the land, and explore there during the summer. To them appeared the land fair and woody, and but a short distance between the wood and the sea, and white sands; there were many islands, and much shallow water. They found neither dwellings of men nor beasts, except upon an island, to the westward, where they found a corn-shed of wood, but many works of men they found not; and they then went back and came to Leif's booths in the autumn. But the next summer, went Thorvald eastward with the ship, and round the land to the northward. Here came a heavy storm upon them when off a ness, so that they were driven on shore, and the keel broke off from the ship, and they remained here a long time, and [207] repaired their ship. Then said Thorvald to his companions: "Now will I that we fix up the keel here upon the ness, and call it Keelness (Kjalarness), and so did they. After that they sailed away round the eastern shores of the land, and into the mouths of the firths, which lay nearest thereto, and to a point of land which stretched out, and was covered all over with wood. There they came to, with the ship, and shoved out a plank to the land, and Thorvald went up the country with all his companions. He then said: "Here it is beautiful, and here would I like to raise my dwelling." Then went they to the ship, and saw upon the sands within the promontory three elevations, and went thither, and saw there three skin boats (canoes), and three men under each. Then divided they their people, and caught them all, except one, who got away with his boat. They killed the other eight, and then went back to the cape, and looked round them, and saw some heights inside of the frith, and supposed that these were dwellings. After that, so great a drowsiness came upon them that they could not keep awake, and they all fell asleep. Then came a shout over them, so that they all awoke. Thus said the shout: "Wake thou! Thorvald! and all thy companions, if thou wilt preserve life, and return thou to thy ship, with all thy men, and leave the land without delay." Then rushed out from the interior of the frith an innumerable crowd of skin boats, and made towards them. Thorvald said then: "We will put out the battle-skreen, and defend ourselves as well as we can, but fight little against them." So did they, and the

Skrælings shot at [208] them for a time, but afterwards ran away, each as fast as he could. Then asked Thorvald his men if they had gotten any wounds; they answered that no one was wounded. "I have gotten a wound under the arm," said he, "for an arrow fled between the edge of the ship and the shield, in under my arm, and here is the arrow, and it will prove a mortal wound to me. Now counsel I ye, that ye get ready instantly to depart, but ye shall bear me to that cape, where I thought it best to dwell; it may be that a true word fell from my mouth, that I should dwell there for a time; there shall ye bury me, and set up crosses at my head and feet, and call the place Krossaness for ever in all time to come." Greenland was then Christianized, but Erik the Red died before Christianity was introduced. Now Thorvald died, but they did all things according to his directions, and then went away, and returned to their companions, and told to each other the tidings which they knew, and dwelt there for the winter, and gathered grapes and vines to load the ship. But in the spring they made ready to sail to Greenland, and came with their ship in Eriksfjord, and could now tell great tidings to Leif. [209]

## **UNSUCCESSFUL VOYAGE OF THORSTEIN ERIKSON**

THORSTEIN ERIKSON DIES IN THE WESTERN SETTLEMENT - A. D. 1005

MEANTIME it had happened in Greenland that Thorstein in Eriksfjord married Gudrid, Thorbjorn's daughter, who had been formerly married to Thorer the Eastman, as is before related. Now Thorstein Erikson conceived a desire to go to Vinland after the body of Thorvald his brother, and he made ready the same ship, and chose great and strong men for the crew, and had with him 25 men, and Gudrid his wife. They sailed away so soon as they were ready, and came out of sight of the land. They drove about in the sea the whole summer, and knew not where they were; and when the first week of winter was past, then landed they in Lysefjord in Greenland, in the western settlement. Thorstein sought shelter for them and procured lodging for all his crew; but he himself and his wife were without lodging, and they, therefore, remained some two nights in the ship. Then was Christianity yet new in Greenland. Now it came to pass one day that some people repaired, early in the morning, to their tent, and the leader of the party asked who was in the tent. Thorstein answered: "Here are two persons, but who asks the question?" "Thorstein is my name," said the other, "and I am called Thorstein the Black, but my business here is to bid ye both, [210] thou and thy wife, to come and stop at my house." Thorstein said that he would talk the matter over with his wife, but she told him to decide, and he accepted the bidding. "Then will I come after ye in the morning with horses, for I want nothing to entertain ye both; but it is very wearisome at my house, for we are there but two, I and my wife, and I am very morose; I have also a different religion from yours, and yet hold I that for the better which ye have." Now came he after them in the morning with horses, and they went to lodge with Thorstein the Black, who shewed them every hospitality.

Gudrid was a grave and dignified woman, and therewith sensible, and knew well how to carry herself among strangers. Early that winter came sickness amongst Thorstein Erikson's men, and there died many of his people. Thorstein had coffins made for the bodies of those who died, and caused them to be taken out to the ship, and there laid; "for I will," said he, "have all the bodies taken to Eriksfjord in the summer." Now it was not long before the sickness came also into Thorstein's house, and his wife, who hight Grimhild took the sickness first; she was very large, and strong as a man, but still did the sickness master her. And soon after that, the disease attacked Thorstein Erikson, and they both lay ill at the same time, and Grimhild, the wife of Thorstein the Black, died. But when she was dead, then went Thorstein out of the room, after a plank to lay the body upon. Then said Gudrid: "Stay not long away, my Thorstein!" he answered that so it should be. Then said Thorstein Erikson: "Strangely now is our house-mother [\(96\)](#) going on, [211] for she pushes herself up on her elbows, and stretches her feet out of bed, and feels for her shoes." At that moment came in the husband Thorstein, and Grimhild then lay down, and every beam in the room creaked. Now Thorstein made a coffin for Grimhild's body, and took it out, and buried it; but although he was a large and powerful man, it took all his strength to bring it out of the place. Now the sickness attacked Thorstein Erikson and he died, which his wife Gudrid took much to heart. They were then all in the room; Gudrid had taken her seat upon a chair beyond the bench upon which Thorstein her husband, had lain; then Thorstein the host took Gudrid from the chair upon his knees, and sat down with her upon another bench, just opposite Thorstein's body. He comforted her in many ways, and cheered her up, and promised to go with her to Eriksfjord, with her husband's body, and those of his companions; "and I will also," added he, "bring many servants to comfort and amuse thee." She thanked him. Then Thorstein Erikson sat himself up on the bench, and said: "Where is Gudrid?" Three times said he that, but she answered not. Then said she to Thorstein the host: "Shall I answer his questions or not?" He counselled her not to answer. After this, went Thorstein the host across the floor, and sat himself on a chair, but Gudrid sat upon his knees, and he said: "What wilt thou, Namesake?" After a little he answered: "I wish much to tell Gudrid her fortune, in order that she may be the better reconciled to my death, for I have now come to a good resting place; but this can I tell thee, Gudrid! that thou wilt [212] be married to an Icelander, and ye shall live long together, and have a numerous posterity, powerful, distinguished, and excellent, sweet and well favoured; ye shall remove from Greenland to Norway, and from thence to Iceland; there shall ye live long, and thou shalt outlive him. Then wilt thou go abroad, and travel to Rome, and come back again to Iceland, to thy house; and then will a church be built, and thou wilt reside there, and become a nun, and there wilt thou die." And when he had said these words, Thorstein fell back, and his corpse was set in order, and taken to the ship. Now Thorstein the host kept well all the promises which he had made to Gudrid; in the spring (1006) he sold his farm, and his cattle, and betook himself to the ship, with Gudrid, and all that he possessed; he made ready the ship, and procured men therefor, and then sailed to Eriksfjord. The bodies were now buried by the Church. Gudrid repaired to Leif in Brattahlid, but Thorstein the Black made himself a dwelling at Eriksfjord, and dwelt there so long as he lived, and was looked upon as a very able man.

This prophetic announcement of Thorstein Erikson is highly characteristic of the



superstition of the times, and although pertaining to the marvellous, is not the less corroborative of the authenticity of the narrative. "Such incidents," says Sir Walter Scott, "make an invariable part of the history of a rude age, and the chronicles which do not afford these marks of human credulity, may be grievously suspected as being deficient in authenticity." [213]

*FROM THE HEIMSKRINGLA, OR HISTORY OF THE: NORWEGIAN KINGS, ACCORDING TO THE 2nd VELLUM CODEX OF THE ARNAE-MAGNAEAN COLLECTION, No. 45 Folio.*

## **VINLAND THE GOOD IS DISCOVERED**

The same winter was Leif, the son of Erik the Red, with King Olaf, in good repute, and embraced Christianity. But the summer that Gissur went to Iceland, King Olaf sent Leif to Greenland, in order to make known Christianity there; he sailed the same summer to Greenland. He found, in the sea, some people on a wreck, and helped them; the same time discovered he Vinland the Good; and came in harvest to Greenland. He had with him a priest, and other clerks, and went to dwell at Brattahlid with Erik, his father. Men called him afterwards Leif the Lucky; but Erik his father said that these two things went one against the other, inasmuch as Leif had saved the crew of the ship, but brought evil men to Greenland, namely the priests. [214]

## **SAGA OF THORFINN KARLSEFNE**

NEXT in importance and interest to the Saga of Erik the Red, is that of Thorfinn, with the significant surname of Karlsefne, *i. e.*, destined to become a great man. This distinguished individual was a wealthy and powerful Icelandic merchant, descended from an illustrious line of Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Irish, and Scottish ancestors, some of whom were kings, or of royal blood. The narrative of his exploits is taken from two ancient Icelandic MSS. not previously known to the literati, and one of which, there is every reason to believe, is a genuine autograph of the celebrated Hank Erlendson, who was Lagman or Chief Governor of Iceland in 1295, and one of the compilers of the Landnamabok; he was also a descendant of Karlsefne in the ninth generation. This very remarkable Saga forms part of the Arnæ-Magæan collection, and besides short notices of the discoveries of the earlier voyagers, which are more fully described in the Saga of Erik the Red, gives detailed accounts of voyages to and discoveries in America, carried on by Karlsefne and his companions for a period of three years, commencing in 1007. Some discrepancies and misnomers appear in those parts of the narrative, which treat of the personages and events recorded in the preceding Saga, but they are only such as to preclude all suspicion of confederacy or fraud on the part of the writers, as all the *main facts* are substantially the same in both; and the circumstance [215] of the Saga of Erik having been written in Greenland, while that of Karlsefne was written in Iceland, is sufficient to account for these variations. The same circumstance, also, renders the former the best authority in all matters of detail connected with Greenland, while the other must be considered more correct respecting occurrences relating to Iceland. These differences are pointed out in the notes, and where any minor points of interesting detail connected with the voyage of Karlsefne appear in the Saga of Erik the Red, while they are absent in

Karlsefne's saga, they have been supplied from that of Erik, the interpolation being pointed out.

Torfæus imagined that the Saga of Thorfinn Karlsefne was lost, and the only knowledge he had of its contents was derived from some corrupt extracts contained in the collection of materials for the history of ancient Greenland, left by the Icelandic yeoman Bjorn Jonson, of Skardso.[216]

## **SAGA OF THORFINN KARLSEFNI**

*GENEALOGY OF THORFINN KARLSEFNI, HIS VOYAGE TO GREENLAND, AND MARRIAGE WITH GUDRID, THE WIDOW OF THORSTEIN ERIKSON. (Translation from the Manuscript.)*

THORD hight (97) a man who lived at Hofda in Hofda strand; he married Fridgerda, daughter of Thorer Hyma and Fridgerda daughter of Kjarval, king of the Irish. Thord was the son of Bjarni Byrdusmjor, son of Thorvald Ryg, son of Asleik, son of Bjarni Jarnsid, son of Ragnar Lodbrok. They had a son called Snorri; he married Thorhild Rjupa, daughter of Thord Gellar; their son was Thord Hesthofdi. Thorfinn Karlsefni hight Thord's son; Thorfinn's mother hight Thorum. Thorfirm took to trading voyages, and was thought an able seaman and merchant. One summer Karlsefni fitted out his ship, and purposed a voyage to Greenland. Snorri Thorbrandson, of Alptefjord, went with him, and there were forty men in the ship. There was a man hight Bjarne Grimolfson, of Breidafjord; another hight Thorhall Gamalason, an Eastfjordish man; they fitted out their ship the same summer for Greenland; there were also forty men in the ship. Karlsefni and the others put to sea with these two ships, so soon as they were ready. Nothing is told about how long they were at sea, but it is to be related that both these ships came to Eriksfjord in the autumn. Erik rode to the ship together with several of [217] the inhabitants, and they began to deal in a friendly manner. Both the ship's captains begged Erik (Leif) to take as much of the goods as he wished; but Erik (Leif) on his side, showed them hospitality, and bade the crews of these two ships home, for the winter, to his own house at Brattahlid. This the merchants accepted, and thanked him. Then were their goods removed to Brattahlid; there was no want of large out-houses to keep the goods in, neither plenty of every thing that was required, wherefore they were well satisfied in the winter. But towards Yule Erik (Leif) began to be silent, and was less cheerful than he used to be. One time turned Karlsefni towards Erik (Leif) and said: "Hast thou any sorrow, Erik, my friend? people think to see that thou art less cheerful than thou wert wont to be; thou hast entertained us with the greatest splendour, and we are bound to return it to thee with such services as we can command; say now, what troubles thee?" Erik (Leif) answered: "Ye are friendly and thankful, and I have no fear as concerns out intercourse, that ye will feel the want of attention; but, on the other hand, I fear that when ye come elsewhere it will be said that ye have never passed a worse Yule than that which now approaches, when Erik the Red entertained ye at Brattahlid, in Greenland." "It shall not be so, Yeoman!" (98) said Karlsefne; "we have in our ship, both malt and corn; take as much as thou desirest thereof, and make ready a feast as grand as thou wilt!" This Erik (Leif) accepted, and now preparation was made for the feast of Yule, and this' [218] feast was so grand that people thought they had hardly ever seen the like pomp in a poor land. And after Yule Karlsefni disclosed to Erik (Leif) that he wished to marry Gudrid, for it

seemed to him, as if he must have the power in this matter. Erik answered favourably, and said that she must follow her fate, and that he had heard nothing but good of him; and it ended so that Thorfinn married Thurid (99) (Gudrid), and then was the feast extended; and their marriage was celebrated; and this happened at Brattahlid, in the winter.

## **EXPEDITION TO AND SETTLEMENT IN VINLAND BY THORFINN KARLSEFNI**

BEGINNING OF THE VINLAND VOYAGE - A. D. 1007

IN Brattahlid began people to talk much about that Vinland the Good should be explored, and it was said that a voyage thither would be particularly profitable by reason of the fertility of the land; and it went so far that Karlsefni and Snorri made ready their ship to explore the land in the spring. With them went also the before-named men hight Bjarni and Thorhall, with their ship. There was a man hight Thorvard; he married Freydis, a natural daughter of Erik the Red; he went [219] also with them, and Thorvald the son of Erik (100), and Thorhall who was called the hunter; he had long been with Erik, and served him as huntsman in summer and steward in winter; he was a large man, and strong, black and like a giant, silent and foul-mouthed in his speech, and always egged on Erik to the worst; he was a bad Christian; he was well acquainted with uninhabited parts, he was in the ship with Thorvard and Thorvald. They had the ship which Thorbjorn had brought out [from Iceland]. They had in all 160 men (101), when they sailed to the western settlement, and from thence to Bjanney. Then sailed they two days to the south; then saw they land, and put off boats, and explored the land, and found there great flat stones, many of which were 12 ells broad; foxes were there. They gave the land a name, and called it Helluland (102). Then sailed they two days, and turned from the south to the southeast, and found a land covered with wood, and many wild beasts upon it; an island lay there out from the land to the south-east; there killed they a bear, and called the place afterwards Bear Island, but the land Markland. Thence sailed they far to the southward along the land, and came to a ness; the land lay upon the right; there [220] were long and sandy strands. They rowed to land, and found there upon the ness the keel of a ship, and called the place Kjalarness, and the strands they called Furdustrands for it was long to sail by them. Then became the land indented with coves; they ran the ship into a cove. King Olaf Tryggvason had given Leif two Scotch people, a man hight Haki, and a woman hight Hekja; they were swifter than beasts. These people were in the ship with Karlsefni; but when they had sailed past Furdustrands, then set they the Scots on shore, and bade them run to the southward of the land, and explore its qualities, and come back again within three days. They had a sort of clothing which they called kjafal, which was so made that a hat was on the top, and it was open at the sides, and no arms to it; fastened together between the legs, with buttons and clasps, but in other places it was open. They staid away the appointed time, but when they came back, the one had in the hand a bunch of grapes, and the other a new sown ear of wheat; (103) these went on board the ship, and after that sailed they farther. They sailed into a frith; there lay an island before it, round which there were strong currents, therefore called they it Stream island. There were so many eider ducks on the island that one could scarcely walk in consequence of the eggs. They called the place Stream-frith. They took their cargo from the ship, and prepared to remain there. They had with them all sorts of cattle. The country there was very beautiful.

They [221] undertook nothing but to explore the land. They were there for the winter without having provided food beforehand. In the summer the fishing declined, and they were badly off for provisions; then disappeared Thorhall the huntsman. They had previously made prayers to God for food, but it did not come so quick as they thought their necessities required. They searched after Thorhall for three days, and found him on the top of a rock; there he lay, and looked up in the sky, and gaped both with nose and mouth, and murmured something; they asked him why he had gone there; he said it was no business of theirs; they bade him come home with them, and he did so. Soon after, came there a whale, and they went thither, and cut it up, and no one knew, what sort of whale it was; and when the cooked dressed it then ate they, and all became ill in consequence. Then said Thorhall: "The red bearded was more helpful than your Christ; this have I got now for my verses that I sung of Thor, my protector; seldom has he deserted me." But when they came to know this, they cast the whole whale into the sea, and resigned their case to God. Then the weather improved, and it was possible to row out fishing, and they were not then in want of provisions, for wild beasts were caught on the land, and fish in the sea, and eggs collected on the island.

*In the account of these transactions, given in the Saga of Erik the Red, it is stated that a son was born to Gudrid during this autumn (1007); which statement is corroborated in a subsequent part of the present narrative The child was called Snorre, and from this first of European [222] blood born in America, the celebrated sculptor Thorvaldson, as well as many other eminent Scandinavians, is lineally descended.*

## OF KARLSEFNI AND THORHALL

So is said, that Thorhall would go to the northward along Furdustrands, to explore Vinland, but Karlsefni would go southwards along the coast. Thorhall got ready, out under the island, and there were no more together than nine men; but all the others went with Karlsefni. Now when Thorhall bore water to his ship, and drank, then sung he this song:

People told me when I came  
Hither, all would be so fine;  
The good Vinland, known to fame,  
Rich in fruits, and choicest wine;  
Now the water pail they send;  
To the fountain I must bend,  
Nor from out this land divine  
Have I quaffed one drop of wine.

And when they were ready, and hoisted sail, then chaunted Thorhall:

Let our trusty band  
Haste to Fatherland;  
Let our vessel brave,  
Plough the angry wave,  
While those few who love  
Vinland, here may rove,  
Or, with idle toil,  
Feted whales may boil,

Here on Furdustrans  
Far from fatherland.

[223]After that sailed they northwards past Furdustrands, and Kjalarness, and would cruise to the westward; then came against them a strong west wind, and they were driven away to Ireland, and were there beaten, and made slaves, according to what the merchants have said.

Now is to be told about Karlsefni, that he went to the southward along the coast, and Snorri and Bjarne, with their people. They sailed a long time, and until they came to a river which ran out from the land and through a lake, out into the sea. It was very shallow, and one could not enter the river without high water. Karlsefni sailed, with his people, into the mouth, and they called the place Hop. They found there upon the land self-sown fields of wheat, there where the ground was low, but vines there where it rose somewhat. Every stream there was full of fish. They made holes there where the land commenced, and the waters rose highest; and when the tide fell there were secured fish in the holes. There were a great number of all kinds of wild beasts in the woods. They remained there a half month, and amused themselves, and did not perceive anything [new]; they had their cattle with them. And one morning early, when they looked around, saw they a great many canoes, and poles were swung upon them, and it sounded like the wind in a straw stack, and the swinging was with the sun. Then said Karlsefni: "What may this denote?" Snorri Thorbrandson answered him: "It may be that this is a sign of peace, so let us take a white shield and hold it towards them;" and so they did. Upon this the others rowed towards them, and looked with [224] wonder upon those that they met, and went up upon the land. These people were black, and ill favoured, and had coarse hair on the head; they had large eyes and broad cheeks. They remained there for a time, and gazed upon those that they met, and rowed, afterwards, away to the southward, round the ness.

Karlsefni and his people had made their dwellings above the lake, and some of the houses were near the water, others more distant. Now were they there for the winter; there came no snow, and all their cattle fed themselves on the grass. But when spring approached, saw they one morning early that a number of canoes rowed from the south round the ness; so many, as if the sea was sown with coal; poles were also swung on each boat. Karlsefni and his people then raised up the shield, and when they came together, they began to barter; and these people would rather have red cloth [than anything else]; for this they had to offer skins and real furs. They would also purchase swords and spears, but this Karlsefni and Snorri forbade. For an entire fur skin the Skrellings took a piece of red cloth, a span long, and bound it round their heads. Thus went on their traffic for a time; then the cloth began to fall short among Karlsefni and his people, and they cut it asunder into small pieces, which were not wider than the breadth of a finger, and still the Skrellings gave just as much for that as before, and more.

The Saga of Erik the Red, in giving an account of this transaction, adds that Karlsefni, on the cloth being expended, hit upon the expedient of making the women take [225] but milk porridge to the Skrellings, who, as soon as they saw this new article of commerce would buy the porridge and nothing else. "Thus," says the Saga, "the traffic of the

Skrellings was wound up by their bearing away their purchases in their stomachs, but Karlsefni and his companions retained their goods and skins."

It happened that a bull, which Karlsefni had, ran out from the wood and roared aloud; this frightened the Skrellings, and they rushed to their canoes, and rowed away to the southward, round the coast; after that they were not seen for three entire weeks. But at the end of that time a great number of Skrellings boats' were seen coming from the south like a rushing torrent; all the poles were turned from the sun, and they all howled very loud. Then took Karlsefni's people a red shield, and held it towards them. The Skrellings jumped out of their ships, and after this went they against each other and fought. There was a sharp shower of weapons, for the Skrellings had slings. Karlsefni's people saw that they raised up on a pole an enormous large ball, something like a sheep's paunch, and of a blue colour; this swung they from the pole over Karlsefni's men, upon the ground, and it made a frightful crash as it fell down. This caused great alarm to Karlsefni and all his people, so that they thought of nothing but running away, and they fell back along the river, for it appeared to them that the Skrellings pressed upon them from all sides; and they did not stop until they came to some rocks, where they made a stout resistance. Freydis came out and saw that Karlsefni's people fell back, and she cried [224] out: "Why do ye run, stout men as ye are, before these miserable wretches, whom I thought ye would knock down like cattle? and if I had weapons, methinks I could fight better than any of ye." They gave no heed to her words. Freydis would go with them, but she was slower, because she was pregnant; however she followed after them into the wood. The Skrellings pursued her; she found a dead man before her; it was Thorbrand Snorrason, and there stood a flat stone stuck in his head; the sword lay naked by his side; this took she up, and prepared to defend herself. Then came the Skrellings towards her; she drew out her breasts from under her clothes, and dashed them against the naked sword; by this the Skrellings became frightened, and ran off to their ships, and rowed away. Karlsefni and his people then came up, and praised her courage. Two men fell on Karlsefni's side, but a number of the Skrellings. Karlsefni's band was overmatched, and they now drew home to their dwellings, and bound their wounds; and they thought over what crowd that could have been, which had pressed upon them from the land side, and it now appeared to them that it could scarcely have been real people from the ships, but that these must have been optical illusions. The Skrellings found also a dead man, and an axe lay by him; one of them took up the axe, and cut wood with it, and now one after another did the same, and thought it was an excellent thing, and bit well; after that one took it, and cut at a stone, so that the axe broke, and then thought they it was of no use, because it would not cut stone, and they threw it away. [227]

Karlsefni and his people now thought they saw that although the land had many good qualities, still would they be always exposed there to the fear of hostilities from the earlier inhabitants. They proposed, therefore, to depart, and return to their own country. They sailed northwards along the coast, and found five Skrellings clothed in skins, sleeping near the sea. They had with them vessels containing animal marrow mixed with blood. Karlsefni's people thought they understood that these men had been banished from the land; they killed them. After that came they to a ness, and many wild beasts were there, and the ness was covered all over with dung, from the beasts which had lain there

during the night. Now came they back to Straumfjord, and there was abundance of everything that they wanted to have. *It is some mens say, that Bjarne and Gudrid remained behind, and 100 men with them, and did not go further; but that Karlsefni and Snorri went southwards, and 40 men with them, and were not longer in Hope than barely two months, and, the same summer, came back.* Karlsefne went then with one ship to seek after Thorhall the hunter, but the rest remained behind, and they sailed northwards past Kjalarness, and thence westwards, and the land was upon their larboard hand; there were wild woods over all, as far as they could see, and scarcely any open places. And when they had long sailed, a river fell out of the land from east to west; they put in to the mouth of the river, and lay by its southern bank.[228]

## DEATH OF THORVALD ERIKSON

It happened one morning that Karlsefni and his people saw, opposite an open place in the wood, a speck which glistened in their sight, and they shouted out towards it, and it was a uniped, which thereupon hurried down to the bank of the river where they lay. Thorvald Erikson stood at the helm, and the uniped shot an arrow into his bowels. Thorvald drew out the arrow, and said: "It has killed me!--to a fruitful land have we come, but hardly shall we enjoy any benefit from it." Thorvald soon after died of this wound. Upon this the uniped ran away to the northward; Karlsefni and his people went after him, and saw him now and then, and the last time they saw him, he ran out into a bay.

They drew off then, and to the northward, and thought they saw the country of the unipeds, they would not expose their people any longer. They looked upon the mountain range that was at Hope; and that which they now found, as all one, and it also appeared to be equal length from Straumfjord to both places. The third winter were they in Straumfjord. They now became much divided by party feeling, and the women were the cause of it, for those who, were unmarried would injure those that were married, and hence arose great disturbance. There was born the first autumn, Snorri, Karlsefni's son, and he was three years old when they went away. When they sailed from Vinland they had a south wind, and came then to Markland, and found there five Skrælings, and one was bearded; two were females, and two [229] boys; they took the boys, but the others escaped, and the Skrellings sank down in the ground. These two boys took they with them; they taught them the language, and they were baptized. They called their mother Vathelldi and their father Uvæge. They said that two kings ruled over the Skrellings, and that one of them was hight Avalldania, but the other Valldidida. They said that no houses were there; people lay in caves or in holes. They said there was a land on the other side, just opposite their country, where people lived who wore white clothes, and carried poles before them, and to these were fastened flags, and they shouted loud; and people think that this was White-man's-Land, or Great Ireland.

Bjarne Grimolfson was driven with his ship into the Irish ocean, and they came into a worm-sea, and straightway began the ship to sink under them. They had a boat which was smeared with seal oil, for the sea-worms do not attack that; they went into the boat, and then saw that it could not hold them all; then said Bjarne: "Since the boat cannot give room to more than the half of our men, it is my counsel that lots should be drawn, for those to go in the boat, for it shall not be according to rank." This thought they all so high-minded an offer that no one would speak against it; they then did so that lots were drawn, and it fell upon Bjarne to go, in the boat, and the half of the men with him, for the boat had not room for more. But when they had gotten into the boat, then said an Icelandic man, who was in the ship, and had come with Bjarne from Iceland: "Dost thou intend, Bjarne, to separate from me here?" Bjarne answered: [230] "So it turns, out." Then said the other: "Very different was thy promise to, my father, when I went with thee from Iceland, than thus to abandon me, for thou said'st that we should both share the same fate." Bjarne replied: "It shall not be thus; go thou down into, the boat, and I will go up into the ship, since I see that thou art so desirous to live." Then went Bjarne up into the ship, but this man down into the boat, and after that continued they their voyage, until they came to Dublin in Ireland, and told there these things; but it is most people's belief that Bjarne and his companions were lost in the worm-sea, for nothing was heard of them since that time.

## **POSTERITY OF KARLSEFNI AND THURID HIS WIFE**

The next summer went Karlsefni to Iceland, and Gudrid with him, and he went home to Reynisness. His mother thought that he had made a bad match, and therefore was Gudrid not at home the first winter. But when she observed that Gudrid was a distinguished woman, went she home, and they agreed very well together. The daughter of Snorri Karlsefnesson was Hallfrid, mother to Bishop Thorlak Runolfson. They had a son who Thorbjorn hight, his daughter hight Thorunn, mother to Bishop Bjorn. Thorgeir hight the son of Snorri Karlsefnesson, father to Yngvild, mother of Bishop Brand the first. A daughter of Snorri Karlsefnesson was also Steinum, who, married Einar, son of Grundarketil, son of Thorvald Krok, the son of Thorer, of Espihol; their son was Thorstein Ranglatr; he was [231] father to Gudrun, who married Jorund of Keldum; their daughter was Halla, mother to Flose, father of Valgerde, mother of Herr Erlend Sterka, father of Herr Hauk the Lagman. Another daughter of Flose was Thordis, mother of Fru Ingigerd the rich; her daughter was Fru Hallbera, Abbess of Stad at Reinisness. Many other great men in Iceland are descended from Karlsefni and Thurid, who are not here mentioned. God be with us! Amen!



## **VOYAGE OF FREYDIS, HELGI AND FINNBOGI**

FREYDIS CAUSES THE BROTHERS TO BE KILLED - A. D. 1011

Now began people again to talk about expeditions to Vinland, for voyages thereto appeared both profitable and honourable. The same summer that Karlsefni came from Vinland, came also a ship from Norway to Greenland; this ship steered two brothers, Helgi and Finnbogi, and they remained for the winter in Greenland. These brothers were Icelanders by descent, and from Austfjord. It is now to be told that Freydis, Erik's daughter, went from her home at Garde to the brothers Helgi and Finnbogi, and bade them that they should sail to Vinland with their vessels, and go halves with her in all the profits which might be there made. To this [232] they agreed. Then went she to Leif her brother, and begged him to give her the houses, which he had caused to be built in Vinland; but he answered the same as before, that he would lend the houses, but not give them. So was it settled between the brothers and Freydis, that each should have thirty fighting men in the ship, besides women. But Freydis broke this agreement, and had five men more, and hid them; so that the brothers knew not of it before they came to Vinland. Now sailed they into the sea, and had before arranged that they should keep together, if it could so be, and there was little difference, but still came the brothers somewhat before, and had taken up their effects to Leif's houses. But when Freydis came to land, then cleared they out their ships, and bore up their goods to the house. Then said Freydis: "Why bring ye in your things here?" "Because we believed," said they, "that the whole agreement should stand good between us." "To me lent Leif the houses," quoth she, "and not to you." Then said Helgi: "In malice are we brothers easily excelled by thee." Now took they out their goods, and made a separate building, and set that building further from the strand, on the edge of a lake, and put all around in good order; but Freydis had trees cut down for her ship's loading. Now began winter, and the brothers proposed to set up sports, and have some amusement. So was done for a time, until evil reports and discord sprung up amongst them, and there was an end of the sports, and nobody came from the one house to the other, and so it went on for a long time during the winter. It happened one morning early that Freydis [233] got up from her bed, and dressed herself, but took no shoes or stockings, and the weather was such that much dew had fallen. She took her

husband's cloak, and put it on, and then went to the brothers' house, and to the door; but a man had gone out a little before, and left the door half open. She opened the door, and stood a little time in the opening, and was silent; but Finnbogi lay inside the house, and was awake, and said: "What wilt thou here, Freydis?" She said: "I wish that thou wouldest get up, and go out with me, for I will speak with thee." He did so; they went to a tree that lay near the dwellings, and sat down there. "How art thou satisfied here?" said she; he answered: "Well think I of the land's fruitfulness, but ill do I think of the discord that has sprung up betwixt us, for it appears to me that no cause has been given." "Thou sayest as it is," said she, "and so think I; but my business here with thee, is that I wish to change ships with thy brother, ye have a larger ship than I, and it is my wish to go from hence." "That must I agree to," said he, "if such is thy wish." Now with that they separated; she went home, and Finnbogi to his bed. She got into the bed with cold feet, and thereby woke Thorvard, and he asked why she was so cold and wet. She answered, with much vehemence: "I was gone," said she, "to the brothers, to make a bargain with them about their ship, for I wished to buy the large ship; but they took it so ill that they beat me, and used me shamefully; but thou! miserable man! wilt surely, neither avenge my disgrace nor thine own, and it is easy to see that I am no longer in Greenland, and [234] I will separate from thee if thou avengest not this." And now could he no longer withstand her reproaches, and bade his men to get up, with all speed, and take their arms; and so did they, and went straightway to the brothers' house, and went in, and fell upon them sleeping, and then took and bound them, and thus led out one after the other; but Freydis had each of them killed as he came out. Now were all the men there killed, and only women remained, and them would no one kill. Then said Freydis: "Give me an axe!" So was done; upon which she killed the five women that were there, and did not stop until they were all dead. Now they went back to their house after this evil work, and Freydis did not appear otherwise than as if she had done well, and spoke thus to her people: "If it be permitted us to come again to Greenland," said she, "I will take the life of that man who tells of this business; now should we say this, that they remained behind when we went away." Now early in the spring made they ready the ship that had belonged to the brothers, and loaded it with all the best things they could get, and the ship could carry. After that they put to sea, and had a quick voyage, and came to Eriksfjord with the ship early in the summer. Now Karlsefni was there, and had his ship quite ready for sea, and waited for a fair wind; and it is generally said, that no richer ship has ever gone from Greenland than that which he steered.[235]

## **OF FREYDIS**

Freydis repaired now to her dwelling, which, in the meantime, had stood uninjured; she gave great gifts to all her companions, that they should conceal her misdeeds and sat down now in her house. All were not, however, so mindful of their promises to conceal their crimes and wickedness but that it came out at last. Now finally it reached the ears of Leif, her brother, and he thought very ill of the business. Then took Leif three men of Freydis's band. and tortured them to confess the whole occurrence, and all their statements agreed. "I like not," said Leif, "to do that to Freydis, my sister, which she has deserved, but this I will predict, that thy posterity will never thrive." Now the consequence was, that no one, from that time thought otherwise than ill of them.

Now must we begin from the time when Karlsefni got ready his ship, and put to sea; he had a prosperous voyage, and came safe and sound to Norway, and remained there for the winter and sold his goods, and both he and his wife were held in great honor by the most respectable men in Norway. But the spring after, fitted he out his ship for Iceland; and when he was all ready, and his ship lay at the bridge waiting for a fair wind, then came there a southern to him, who was from Bremen in Saxony, and wanted to buy from Karlsefni his house broom. "I will not sell it," said he. "I will give thee a half mark gold for it," said the German. Karlsefni thought this was a good offer, and they closed the bargain. The southern went off with the house [236] broom, but Karlsefni knew not what wood it was; but that was mausur, brought from Vinland. Now Karlsefni put to sea, and came with his ship to Skagafjord, on the northern coast, and there was the ship laid up for the winter. But in spring bought he Glaumbæland, and fixed his dwelling there, and lived there, and was a highly respected man, and from him and Gudrid his wife has sprung a numerous and distinguished race. And when Karlsefni was dead, took Gudrid the management of the house with her son Snorri, who was born in Vinland. But when Snorri was married, then went Gudrid abroad, and travelled southwards, and came back again to the house of Snorri her son, and then had he caused a church to be built at Glaumbæ. After this, became Gudrid a nun and recluse, and remained so whilst she lived. Snorri had a son who Thorgeir hight; he was father to Ingveld, mother of Bishop Brand. The daughter of Snorri Karlsefnsson hight Hallfrid; she was mother to Runolf, father to Bishop Thorlak. Bjorn hight a son of Karlsefni and Gudrid; he was father to Thorunn, mother of Bishop Bjarn. A numerous race are descended from Karlsefni, and distinguished men; and Karlsefni has accurately related to all men the occurrences on all these voyages, of which somewhat is now recited here.

## **GEOGRAPHICAL NOTICES IN ANCIENT ICELANDIC MSS.**

### **B. FRAGMENT OF VELLUM CODEX, No. 192.**

Supposed to have been written about the end of the 14th Century.

NEXT to Denmark is the lesser Sweden, then is Oeland, then Gottland, then Helsingeland, then Vermeland, and the two Kvendlands, which lie to the north of Bjarmeland. From Bjarmeland stretches uninhabited land towards the north, until Greenland begins. South of Greenland is Helluland; next lies Markland; thence it is not far to Vinland the Good, which some think goes out from Africa; and if it be so, the sea must run in between Vinland and Markland. It is related that Thorfinn Karlsefni cut wood here to ornament his house, and went afterwards to seek out Vinland the Good, and came there, where they thought the land was, but did not effect the knowledge of it, and gained none of the riches of the land. Leif the Lucky first discovered Vinland, and then he met some merchants in distress, at sea, and by God's mercy saved their lives; and he introduced Christianity into Greenland, and it spread itself there, so that a Bishop's seat was established in the place called Gardar. England and Scotland are an island, and yet each is a kingdom for itself. Ireland is a great island. Iceland is also a great island north of Ireland. These countries are all in that part of the world which is called Europe.[238]

### C. GRIPLA. [\(105\)](#)

Codex No. 115.

Bavaria is bounded by Saxony; Saxony is bounded by Holstein, then comes Denmark; the sea flows through the eastern countries. Sweden lies to the east of Denmark, Norway to the north; Finmark north of Norway; thence stretches the land out to the north-east and east, until you come to Bjarmeland; this land is tributary to Gardarige. From Bjarmeland lie uninhabited places all northward to that land which is called Greenland, [*which, however, the Greenlanders do not confirm, but believe to have observed that it is otherwise, both from drift timber, which it is known is cut down by men, and also from Reindeer, which have marks upon the ears, or bands upon the horns, likewise from sheep, which stray thither, of which there now are remains in Norway, for one head hangs in Thronthjem, another in Bergen, and many more besides are to be found.*] But there are bays, and the land stretches out toward the southwest; there are Jokels and Fjords; there lie islands out before the Jokels; one of the Jokels cannot be explored; to the other is half a month's sail, to the third a week's sail; this is nearest to the settlement hight Hvidserk; thence stretches the land toward the north; but he who wishes not to miss the settlement, steers to the south-west. Gardar hight the Bishop's seat at the bottom of Eriksfjord; there is a [239] church dedicated to the holy Nicholas; XII churches are upon Greenland in the eastern settlement, IIII in the western.

Now is to be told what lies opposite Greenland, out from the bay, which was before named: Furdustrandir hight a land; there are so strong frosts that it is not habitable, so far as one knows; south from thence is Helluland, which is called Skrellingsland; from thence it is not far to Vinland the Good, which some think goes out from Africa; between Vinland and Greenland is Ginnungagap, which flows from the sea called Mare oceanum, and surrounds the whole earth [*Hæc verbotenus Gripla.*]

## MONUMENTS AND INSCRIPTIONS

### THE DIGHTON WRITING ROCK

Some remarkable monuments and inscriptions have been found on the eastern shores of North America, which bear testimony to the voyages and settlements recorded in the preceding narratives, and complete the mass of evidence that has been so ably brought forward by Professor Rafn, upon this interesting subject. The Rhode Island Historical Society have applied themselves to the examination of these remains, with a degree of zeal and ability worthy of the occasion, and details of high interest and value have been made known to the corresponding Danish members, through the medium of the distinguished American secretary, Dr. Webb. From these communications it appears that in the western part [240] of the county of Bristol in the State of Massachusetts may still be seen numerous and extensive mounds, similar to the tumuli that are so often met with in Scandinavia, Tartary, and Russia; "also the remains of fortifications that must have required for their construction a degree of industry, labour, and skill, as well as an advancement in the arts, that never characterized any of the Indian tribes. Various articles of pottery are found in them, with the method of manufacturing which they were entirely unacquainted. But above all, many rocks, inscribed with unknown characters, apparently of very ancient origin, have been discovered scattered through different parts of the country: rocks, the constituent parts of which are such as to render it almost impossible to engrave on them such writings without the aid of iron, or other hard metallic instrument. The Indians were ignorant of the existence of these rocks; and the manner of working with iron they learned from the Europeans, after the settlement of the country by the English."

Of such remains, the most important that has yet been discovered is the Assonet rock, or "Dighton writing rock," which is thus described in the Report of a Committee that was appointed by the Rhode Island Historical Society, to examine and report upon this remarkable stone, and who visited it in the month of February, 1830--

"It is situated six and a half miles south of Taunton, on the east side of Taunton

river, a few feet from the shore, and on the west side of Assonet neck, in the town of Berkely, county of Bristol, and Commonwealth of [241] Massachusetts; although, probably from the fact of its being generally visited from the other side of the river, which is in Dighton, it has always been known by the name of the 'Dighton Writing Rock.' It faces northwest, towards the bed of the river, and is covered by the water two or three feet at the highest, and is left ten or twelve feet from it at the lowest tides: it is also completely immersed twice in twenty-four hours. The rock does not occur *in situ*, but shews indubitable evidence of having occupied the spot where it now rests, since the period of that great and extensive disruption, which was followed by the transportation of immense boulders to, and a deposit of them in places at a vast distance from their original beds. It is a mass of well characterized fine grained *greywacke*. Its true colour, as exhibited by a fresh fracture, is a bluish grey. There is no rock in the immediate neighbourhood that would at all answer as a substitute for the purpose for which the one bearing the inscription was selected, as they are aggregates of the large conglomerate variety. Its face, measured at the base, is eleven feet and a half; and in height, it is a little rising five feet. The upper surface forms, with the horizon, an inclined plane of about sixty degrees. The whole of the face is covered, to, within a few inches of the ground, with unknown hieroglyphics. There appears little or no method in the arrangement of them. The lines are from half an inch to an inch in width; and in depth sometimes one-third of an inch, though generally very superficial. They were, inferring from the rounded elevations, and intervening depressions, picked [242] in upon the rock, and not chiselled or smoothly cut out. The marks of human power, and manual labour are indelibly stamped upon it. No one who examines attentively the workmanship, will believe it to have been done by the Indians. Moreover, it is a well attested fact, that nowhere, throughout our wide-spread domain, is there a single instance of their recording, or having recorded, their deeds or history on stone."

This remarkable monument had long been an object of interest to American antiquaries, and several drawings and examinations were made of the rock and inscription, at various periods, beginning in the year 1680, but without any satisfactory result; and it remained for Professors Finn Magnusen and Rafn to shew that the whole was a *Runic inscription*, containing various cryptographs, and rude combinations of figures illustrative of the settlements of the Northmen, among which devices may be yet traced the name of THORFINN, and the figures CXXXI. being the number of Karlsefni's associates (151), [\(106\)](#) which after the departure of Thorhall, accompanied him to Hope [\(107\)](#). [243]

A perspective representation of this remarkable rock, together with fac-similes of the several drawings that have been made of the inscription, ending with the most recent and accurate, made by the Committee of the Rhode Island Historical Society in 1830, are appended to the *Antiquitates Americanæ*; and the analogy between these and inscriptions which have been found both in Sweden and Iceland is shewn by contiguous representations of the Scandinavian remains. The same plate contains also the delineation of a curious fragment of metallic *tessera*, found near Dublin, upon which is inscribed a monogram similar to that

seen upon the Assonet Rock, as well as the Runic letter Þ (th), shewing the Scandinavian origin of the fragment, which may be ascribed to the 9th or 10th century.

The Rhode Island Historical Society have also forwarded to Professor Rafn descriptions and delineations of several other remains which bear a striking analogy to that at Dighton; among these the Portsmouth and Tiverton Rocks form interesting subjects for examination and comparison [\(108\)](#).<sup>[244]</sup>

## RUNIC STONE AT KINGIKTORSOAK

BUT traces of the adventurous spirit, and early voyages of the Northmen are to be found in much higher, and far less inviting latitudes, shewing the progress of their course through regions, which even in the present age of high scientific advancement, and maritime enterprise, have tested, and not unfrequently baffled the skill and hardihood of our most distinguished navigators.

In the year 1824, a remarkable Runic stone was found upon the island of Kingiktorsoak, lying in 72° 55' north latitude and 56° 5' west longitude.

The following is a representation of this remarkable monument which was transported to Copenhagen, and found on examination, to present a complete inscription in Runic characters, which in modern Icelandic orthography would run thus --

ELLIGR · SIGVATHS: SON : R · OK : BJANNE : TORTARSON : OK : ENRITHI ·  
ODSSON : LAUKARDAK : IN : FYRIRGAKNDAG HLOTHU ·VARDATE  
·OKRYDU :MCXXXV.<sup>[245]</sup>

Or

Erling Sighvatsson and Biarni Thordarsson, and Eindrid Oddsson, on the seventh day [\(109\)](#), before the day of Victory, [\(110\)](#) erected these stones, and explored. MCXXXV.

Some doubts have been expressed by Runic scholars as to the signification of the characters representing the date, but the peculiar formation of the Runes, and other unerring indications shew that the inscription cannot be later than the 12th century.

It appears from various Icelandic documents given in Professor Rafn's work, that the Northmen had two principal stations in the Arctic regions, the one called Greipar, lying immediately south of the island of Disco, in Davis' Straits, and the other called Kroksfjardarheidi, situated on the north-side of Lancaster's sound.

Their general name for these regions was Nordrsetur, to which vessels were dispatched from Greenland for the purpose of carrying on the operations of hunting and fishing. But voyages of discovery were also made in this direction; and a clear account of such an expedition, undertaken in the year 1266, follows the narratives which have been given in the preceding pages. It is contained in a letter addressed by a clergyman named Halldor, to a brother ecclesiastic named Arnold, who, after having lived in Greenland, had become chaplain to king Magnus Lagabæter in Norway; and the voyage appears to have been made under the auspices of some clergymen of the [246] Bishopric of Gardar in Greenland. The object of the expedition is stated to have been, to explore regions lying more to the northward than those which they had been hitherto accustomed to frequent, consequently further north than Lancaster's sound. They sailed from Kroksfjardarheidi, but meeting with southerly winds, and thick weather, were obliged to let the vessel run before the wind; on the fogs clearing off they described several islands, and saw many seals, whales, and bears. They penetrated into the innermost part of the gulf, and saw icebergs lying to the southward, as far as the eye could reach; they observed traces of the Skrælings having inhabited these regions in former times, but were unable to land, in consequence of the bears. They, therefore, went about, and sailed back for three days, when they again found traces of the Esquimaux, upon some islands lying to the southward of a mountain, which they call Snæfell. After this, on St. James's Day (25th July), they proceeded southwards, a long day's rowing (einn mikin dagrodr). It froze during the night, but the sun was above the horizon both night and day; and "it was not higher when on the meridian than that when a man lay across a six oared boat, towards the gunwale, the shade of that side of the boat which was nearest the sun fell on his face; but at midnight was it as high as at home in the settlement, when it is in the northwest." The expedition afterwards returned to Gardar.

These observations are of course very loose and uncertain; the relative depth of the man's position with regard to the gunwale of the boat, would be necessary in General Chart Exhibiting Discoveries of the Northmen in the Arctic Regions And America[247] order to be able to make anything of the first observation, and the result of the other can only be deduced by presuming the day of the summer solstice to be implied. This, however, is not an unreasonable supposition, more particularly when we find so many other circumstances corroborative of the locality which is thence determined, and Professor Rafn, proceeding upon this assumption, draws out the following result:

"In the 13th century, on the 25th July, the Sun's declination was  $17^{\circ} 54'$  North Inclination of the Ecliptic,  $23^{\circ} 32'$ ."

If we now assume that the colony, and particularly the episcopal seat of Gardar, was situated on the north side of Igaliko frith, where the ruins of a large church, and of many other buildings, indicate the site of a principal settlement of the ancient colony, consequently in  $60^{\circ} 55'$  N. lat. then at the summer solstice, the



height of the sun there, when in the N. W. was  $3^{\circ} 40'$ , which is equivalent to the midnight altitude of the sun on St. James's day (25th July) in the parallel of  $75^{\circ} 46'$ ." Now the parallel of  $75^{\circ} 46'$  north latitude, would fall to the northward of Wellington Channel, the highest latitude reached by Parry in his most favourable expedition in search of a North-west passage; and the description of the land seen, and objects met with on the voyage, corresponds well with the characteristics of these regions, as given by the distinguished English navigator. The Northmen sail from Kroksfjardarheidi, a name implying a frith bounded by barren highlands (heidi), and known to be[248] on the north side of Lancaster's sound; this frith must have been of considerable extent, as three days sailing are specifically mentioned in that part of the narrative describing their return;--they descry several islands, and meet with many seals, whales, and bears;--they see icebergs lying to the southward, as far as the eye can reach;--they observe traces of the Esquimaux (Skrælings) in various directions; the sun was above the horizon both night and day, and although in the month of July, it froze during the night. There is little doubt, therefore, that these early explorers of the arctic regions, starting from Lancaster's sound, were driven through Barrow's straits, and Wellington Channel, into the Polar sea, from whence they saw the North Georgian Islands, and where they naturally fell in with a multitude of seals, whales, and bears.

It is a startling conclusion, and somewhat mortifying to national pride, to find that these simple navigators of the 13th century, in their humble barks, rivalled the most distinguished arctic explorers of the present day; but however unwilling we may be to admit the evidence of a progress in maritime discovery, which tends to dim the lustre of our own enterprising age, the simple documents in support of these early voyages carry a degree of conviction to the mind which disarms scepticism, and compels us to admit their credibility.

It is a great mistake, however, to suppose that the Northmen of this period were altogether ignorant of astronomical science, and still greater, as some writers have done, to confound them with the Vikings or Pirates [249] of a more barbarous age. The discoverers of America were Merchants, their ships were called trading ships [Kaupskip]; sea-roving had been almost altogether discontinued by the Northmen before the voyages of Bjarne Herjulfson and the descendants of Erik; and all the expeditions which are related in these Sagas were undertaken either for the purposes of discovering new countries, or making settlements in, or trading with, countries that had been already discovered. In the ancient Icelandic work called Rimbegla, which has been before quoted, many rules are given for the measurement of time, the study of astronomy, geometry, etc., and although these are probably translations or compilations from foreign works, they correspond with what the Icelandic clergy taught their people, after the introduction of Christianity. Among these are found scientific rules for finding the course of the sun, moon, and stars, also the division of time thereon depending; information respecting the astronomical quadrant, and its proper use; different methods for ascertaining the spherical figure of the earth; the longitude

and latitude of places, and of calculating their distances from each other; the sun's declination; the earth's magnitude and circumference, the times when the ocean could best be navigated, etc.

Early in the eleventh century (1018-1026) the rich chieftain Raudulf, of Oesterdal, in Norway, taught his son Sigurd the science of computing the course of the sun and moon, and other visible celestial bodies, and particularly to know the stars which mark the lapse of time, that he might be able to ascertain the time both by [250] day and by night, when neither the sun nor moon was visible. Even in heathen times we have similar accounts of Icelandic chieftains and their sons, nay even of simple peasants, who paid sedulous attention to the motions of the heavenly bodies, in order from thence to ascertain the true lapse of time; also of their belief in astrology, which was intimately connected with old Scandinavian mythology. Olaus Magnus said that in his time (about 1520) it was generally acknowledged in Sweden that the common people in ancient times had more knowledge of the stars than they possessed in his days.

Some idea may be formed of the character and acquirements of the Scandinavian merchants in the 11th and 12th centuries from the *Speculum Regale*, a work written in the latter period. Here the merchant is exhorted to make himself acquainted with the laws of all countries, especially those regarding commerce and navigation, as well as with foreign languages, particularly the Italian and Latin, which were then in more general use. He was also enjoined to obtain a complete knowledge of the places and motions of the heavenly bodies, the times of the day, the division of the horizon according to the cardinal and minor points, the movement of the sea, the climates, the seasons best adapted for navigation, the equipping and rigging of vessels, arithmetical calculation, etc. Moreover, to distinguish himself by a becoming and decorous way of living, both as to moral conduct, manners, and attire, etc.: and thus it may be safely inferred that the better educated of the northern merchants in the tenth and eleventh centuries were not so inferior [251] to their southern neighbours, as may be generally supposed.

The extended voyages and commercial intercourse of the Northmen must have also contributed to the amelioration of their habits and character. From the 8th to the 11th centuries they carried on a more active commerce, and a more extensive maritime communication with foreign countries than any other nation in Europe. Such intercourse appears quite incompatible with that extreme degree of ignorance and barbarity in which so many writers would clothe all their actions and enterprises. England, Ireland, Italy, Sicily, France, Spain--were visited by these daring adventurers; true, in the character, and with the spirit, for the most part, of reckless invaders, but that they should have continued to return from such enterprises without exhibiting some modification of that ferocity, which might be expected to yield to the salutary influence of association with more civilized countries, seems scarcely credible. Their long continued intercourse of more than 200 years, with Ireland alone, a country which in the 8th century

enjoyed a European reputation for intellectual eminence [\(111\)](#), cannot but have had a beneficial influence upon their character and habits, and we should receive with caution all statements [252] upon a subject to which national or religious feeling is likely to have given an exaggerated colouring. Our knowledge of the excesses of the northern invaders is chiefly derived from the evidence of monkish chroniclers, whose Christian faith and feelings were no less outraged by the deeds than the infidelity of the Pagan ravagers, and who, writing in many cases long after the events, would naturally aid defective evidence with a fervid zeal and fertile imagination. The particular periods, also, and tribes to which this brutal ferocity of the Northmen is referred, should be more clearly distinguished. The peaceful Norwegian settlers in Iceland, for instance, in the 9th century were very different from those fierce invaders, who, in the same age, shook the kingdoms of Edmund and of Alfred to their centre, and committed barbarities which have called forth the just animadversions of the distinguished historian of the Anglo-Saxons. Flying from the despotic rule of Harald Haarfager, the Norwegian emigrants sought peace and freedom in a remote and sterile island, where the labours of the field, and the trading intercourse necessary to their isolated position were relieved by the relaxation of innocent domestic reunions, and intellectual pursuits; and although some ardent spirit, greedy of fame or plunder, or stimulated by the more honourable ambition of acquiring knowledge and experience by intercourse with foreign lands, might occasionally join the fierce band of the reckless viking, the voyages of the Icelandic Northmen were almost exclusively confined to trade, or discovery, or the formation of peaceful settlements on those [253] shores, which their own enterprise, perseverance, and skill had opened to their connection.

It may, perhaps, be urged in disparagement of the early voyagers in the Polar Seas, that the seasons were then more favourable to arctic discoveries than they have been in later ages, and that therefore the difficulties encountered by modern navigators were unknown to their predecessors; but the popular belief of a milder and more genial climate having formerly prevailed in Europe, is not supported by any satisfactory evidence: indeed the opinions of scientific enquirers would lead to a directly opposite conclusion, and there is, at least, every reason to believe that the periodical changes, which so often call forth complaints, and retrospective comparisons from the aged and infirm, respecting the altered condition of the seasons in the present day, were not less frequent or severe in those favoured periods on which their praises are bestowed.

The supposed settlement on the eastern coast of Greenland (Eystribygd), now nearly inaccessible, has tended to give currency to the popular notion of a less rigorous climate prevailing in those regions, at the period of the Icelandic emigration to that coast, but the able and arduous investigation of Captain Graah has dispelled that illusion, and there is now little doubt that the so called *eastern settlement* extended little further than the southeastern point of the Greenland coast, the chief and almost only habitations being seated upon the western

shore. Of their remains Captain Graah has given highly interesting and minute descriptions, enabling us from these [254] and more recent examinations of several localities on the west coast of Greenland, to trace the vestiges of the old colonies from the most southern fjord at Cape Farewell, up to the neighbourhood of Holsteinborg.

## **MINOR NARRATIVES**

A. FROM THE HISTORY OF KING OLAF TRYGGVASON.  
ACCORDING TO THE SECOND VELLUM CODEX, No. 61, Fol.

*Supposed to have been copied at the end of the 14th or beginning of the 15th Century.*

THUS says the holy priest Bede, in the chronicles which he wrote concerning the regions of the earth: that the island which is called Thule in the books, lies so far in the north part of the world, that there came no day in the winter, when the night is longest, and no night in summer, when the day is longest. Therefore think learned men that it is Iceland which is called Thule, for there are many places; in that land, where the sun sets not at night, when the day is longest, and in the same manner, where the sun cannot be seen by day, when the night is longest. But the holy priest Bede died DCCXXXV years after the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, more than a hundred and twenty years before Iceland was inhabited by the Northmen. But before Iceland was colonized from Norway, men had been there whom the Northmen called Papas. They were Christians; for after them were found Irish books, bells, and croziers, and many other things from whence it could be [255] seen that they were Christian men, and had come from the west over the sea: [\(112\)](#) English books also shew that, in that time, there was intercourse between the two countries.

### **B. FROM THE SCHEDÆ OF ARI FRODE - No. 54, Fol.**

AT that time was Iceland covered with woods, between the mountains and the shore. Then were here Christian people, whom the Northmen called Papas, but they went afterwards away, because they would not be here amongst heathens; and left after them Irish books, and bells, and croziers, from which could be seen that they were Irishmen. But then began people to travel much here out from Norway, until King Harold forbade it, because it appeared to him that the land had begun to be thinned of inhabitants.

### **C. FROM THE PROLOGUE TO LANDNAMABOK - No. 53, Fol.**

BUT before Iceland was colonized by the Northmen, the men were there whom the Northmen called Papas; they were Christians, and people think that they came from the

west over the sea, for there was found after [256] them Irish books, and bells, and croziers, and many more things from which it could be seen that they were Westmen; such were found eastwards in Papey, and Papyli; it is also mentioned in English books that in that time, was intercourse between the countries.

The particulars given of Thule by the Irish monk Dicuil, who wrote in the year 825, offer a remarkable confirmation of the Icelandic manuscripts respecting the residence of the Irish ecclesiastics in that region, which, in his work, is evidently identified with Iceland. He speaks of Thule as an uninhabited island, which, however, in his lifetime, about the year 795, had been visited by some monks, *with whom he himself had spoken*, and who had once dwelt upon the island from the first of February to the first of August. They denied the exaggerated statements that had been made by ancient writers respecting the perpetual ice, continued day from the vernal to the autumnal equinox, and corresponding interval of night, but stated that a day's journey further northward, the sea was really frozen, and that with respect to the length of the days and nights, at, and a few days before and after the summer solstice, the sun sank so little below the horizon during the night that one could pursue their ordinary occupations as well as by day-light. The author further describes several islands lying in the north part of the British ocean, and which, with a fair wind, might be reached from the north of Britain in two days and a night; and states that here *nearly a hundred years before*, namely A. D. 725, hermits from Ireland had taken up their abode, but, disturbed by the roving Northmen, had since departed, leaving the place uninhabited. These islands are further described as having upon them a great number of sheep, which circumstance [257] leads to the conclusion that they were the Farøe islands, the name of which is known to be derived from the original Icelandic term *Fareyjar* or sheep islands.

### **ARI MARSON'S SOJOURN IN GREAT IRELAND - A. D. 982.**

*From the Landnamabok, collated with accounts of the same transactions in Hauksbok.*

ULF the squinter, son of Hogna the white, took all Reykjanes, between Thorkafjord and Hafrafell; he married Bjorg, daughter to Eyvind the Eastman, sister to Helge the lean; their son was Atli the red, who married Thorbjorg, sister to Steinolf the humble; their son was Mar of Holum, who married Thorkatla, daughter of Hergil Neprass; their son was Ari; he was driven by a tempest to White Man's Land, which some call Great Ireland; it lies to the west in the sea, near to Vinland the Good, and VI days' sailing west from Ireland. From thence could Ari not get away, and was there baptized. This story first told Rafn the Limerick merchant, who had long lived at Limerick in Ireland. Thus said [also] Thorkell Gellerson, that Icelanders had stated, who had heard Thorfinn Jarl of the Orkneys relate, that Ari was recognised in White Man's Land, and could not get away from thence, but was there much respected. Ari married Thorgerd daughter to Alf of Dolum, whose sons were Thorgils, Gudleif and Illugi: this is the family of Reykjanes. Jorund hight a son of Ulf the squinter; he married Thorbjorg Knarrarbringa; their daughter was Thjodhild, who married Erik the Red; their son [258] [was] Leif the Lucky of Greenland. Jorund hight the son of Atli the Red, he married Thordis, daughter of Thorgeir Suda; their daughter was Otkatla, who married Thorgill Kollson. Jorund was

also father to Snorri.

## **VOYAGE OF BJORN ASBRANDSON**

TO THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE AND SETTLEMENT IN GREAT IRELAND. A.D. 999

BORK the fat and Thordis Surs daughter had a daughter that Thurid hight, and she was married to, Thorbjorn the fat, who lived at Froda; he was son of Orm the lean, who had taken and cultivated the farm of Froda. Thurid, daughter of Asbrand of Kamb in Breidavik had he formerly married; she was sister to Bjorn Breidvikingahappa, who is hereafter mentioned in the Saga, and to Arnbjorn the strong: her sons by Thorbjorn were Ketill the Champion, Gunnlaug and Hallstein. . . .

Now shall something be told about Snorri Godi, that he took up the process about the murder of Thorbjorn his brother-in-law. He also took his sister home to Helgafell, because there was a report, that Bjorn, son of Asbrand from Kamb, began to come there to inveigle her. . . .

Thorodd, hight a man from Medalfellstrand: an honourable man; he was a great merchant, and owned a trading ship. Thorodd had made a trading voyage westwards to Ireland, to Dublin. At that time had Jarl [259] Sigurd Lodversson, of the Orkneys, sway to the Hebrides, and all the way westward to Man: he imposed a tribute on the inhabitants of Man, and when they had made peace the Jarl left men behind him to collect the tribute; it was mostly paid in smelted silver; but the Jarl sailed away northwards to the Orkneys. But when they who had waited for the tribute were ready for sailing, they put to sea with a south-west wind; but when they had sailed for a time the wind changed to the south-east and east, and there arose a great storm, and drove them northwards under Ireland, and the ship broke there asunder upon an uninhabited island. And when they had gotten on shore there came, by chance, the Iclander Thorodd, on a voyage from Dublin. The Jarl's men called out to the merchantmen to help them. Thorodd put out a boat, and went into it himself, and when it came up, the Jarl's men begged Thorodd to help them, and offered him money to take them home to Sigurd Jarl in the Orkneys; but Thorodd thought he could not do that, because he was bound for Iceland; but they pressed him hard, for they thought it concerned their goods and freedom, that they should not be left in Ireland or the Hebrides, where they before had waged war, and it ended so that he sold them the ship's boat, and took therefore a great part of the tribute; they steered then with the boat to the Orkneys; but Thorodd sailed without the boat to Iceland, and came to the south of the land; then steered he westwards, and sailed into Breidafjord, and landed, with all on board, at Dogurdarness, and went in autumn to winter with Snorri Godi at Helgafell; he was since then [260] called Thorodd the tribute-buyer. This happened a little after the murder of Thorbjorn the fat. The same winter was at Helgafell Turid the sister to Snorri Godi, whom Thorbjorn the fat had married. Thorodd asked Snorri Godi to give him Thurid his sister in marriage; and because he was rich, and Snorri knew him from a good side, and saw that she required some one to manage her affairs,--with all this together resolved Snorri Godi to give him the woman, and their marriage was held there in the winter at Helgafell. But in the following spring Thorodd betook himself to Froda, and became a good and upright yeoman. But so soon as Thurid came to Froda, began Bjorn Asbrandson to visit there, and there was spread a general report that he and Thurid had

unlawful intercourse; then began Thorodd to complain about his visits, but did not object to them seriously. At that time dwelled Thorer Vidlegg at Arnarhvol, and his sons Orn and Val were grown up, and very promising man; they reproached Thorodd for submitting to such disgrace as Bjorn put upon him, and offered Thorodd their assistance, if he would forbid the visits of Bjorn. It happened one time that Bjorn came to Froda, and he sat talking with Thurid. Thorodd used always to sit within when Bjorn was there, but now was he nowhere to be seen. Then said Thurid: "Take care of thy walks, Bjorn, for I suspect that Thorodd thinks to put an end to thy visits here, and it looks to me as if they had gone out to! fall upon thee by the way, and he thinks they will not be met by equal force." "That can well be," said Bjorn, and chaunted this stave:[261]

O! Goddess of the arm-ring gold (113)  
Let this bright day the longest hold  
On earth, for now I linger here  
In my love's arms, but soon must fear  
These joys will vanish, and her breath  
Be raised to mourn my early death.

Thereafter took Bjorn his arms, and went away, intending to go home; but when he had gotten up the Digramula, sprang five men upon him; this was Thorodd and two, of his servants, and the sons of Thorer Vidlegg. They seized Bjorn, but he defended himself well and manfully; Thorer's sons pressed in hardest upon him, and wounded him, but he was the death of both of them. After that Thorodd went away with his men, and was a little wounded, but they not. Bjorn went his way until he came home, and went into the room; the woman of the house told a maid servant to attend him; and when she came into the room with a light, then saw she that Bjorn was very bloody; she went then in, and told his father Asbrand that Bjorn was come home bloody; Asbrand went into the room and asked why Bjorn was bloody; "or have you, perhaps, fallen in with Thorodd?" Bjorn answered that so it was. Asbrand then asked how the business had ended. Bjorn chaunted:

Easier far it is to fondle,  
In the arms of female fair,  
(Vidlegg's sons I both have slain)  
Than with valiant men to wrestle,  
Or tamely purchased tribute bear.

[262]Then bound Asbrand his wounds, and he became quite restored. Thorodd begged Snorri Godi to manage the matter about Thorer's sons' murder, and Snorri had it brought before the court of Thorsness; but the sons of Thorlak of Eyra assisted Breidvikinga in this affair, and the upshot was, that Asbrand went security for his son Bjorn, and undertook to pay a fine for the murder. But Bjorn was banished for three years, and went away the same summer. During the same summer Thurid of Froda was delivered of a male child, which received the name of Kjartan; he grew up at Froda, and was soon large and promising.

Now when Bjorn had crossed the sea [to Norway], he bent his way southwards to Denmark, and therefrom south to Jomsborg. Then was Palnatoki chief of the Jornsvikings. Bjorn joined their band, and was named Champion. He was in Jomsborg when Styrbjorn the strong took the castle. Bjorn was also with, them in Sweden, when the Jornsvikings aided Styrbjorn; he was also in the battle of Fyrisvall, where Styrbjorn fell, and escaped in the wood with other Jornsvikings. And so long as Palnatoki lived, was Bjorn with him, and was looked upon as a distinguished man, and very brave in all times

of trial.

. . . The same summer came the brothers Bjorn and Arnbjorn out to, Iceland, to Raunhafnarsos. Bjorn was afterwards called the Champion of Breidavik. Arnbjorn had brought much money out with him, and immediately, the same summer that he came, bought land at Bakke in Raunhofn. Arnbjorn made no display, and [263]spoke little on most occasions, but was, however, in all respects, a very able man. Bjorn, his brother, was, on the other hand, very pompous, when he came to the country, and lived in great style, for he had accustomed himself to the court usages of foreign chiefs; he was much handsomer than Arnbjorn, and in no particular less able, but was much more skilled in martial exercises, of which he had given proofs in foreign lands. In the summer, just after they had arrived, a great meeting of the people was held north of the heath, under Haugabret, near the mouth of the Froda; and thither rode all the merchants, in coloured garments; and when they had come to the meeting, was there many people assembled. There was Thurid, the lady of Froda, and Bjorn went up, and spoke to her, and no one objected to this, for it was thought likely that their discourse would last long, since they, for such a length of time, had not seen each other. There arose that day a fight, and one of the men from the northern mountains received a deadly wound, and was carried down under a bush on the bank of the river; much blood flowed from the wound, so that there was a pool of blood in the bush. There was the boy Kjartan, son of Thurid of Froda; he had a small axe in his hand; he ran to the bush, and dipped the axe in the blood. When the men from the southern mountains rode southwards from, the meeting, Thord Blig asked Bjorn how the discourse had turned out betwixt him and Thurid of Froda. Bjorn said that he was well contented therewith. Then asked Thord, whether he had that day seen the lad Kjartan, her and Thorodd's united son. "Him saw [264] I," said Bjorn. "What do you think of him?" quoth Thord, again. Then chaunted Bjorn this stave:

"A stripling lo!  
With fearful eyes  
A woman's image,  
Downwards ran  
To the wolf's lair;--  
The people say  
The youth knows not  
His Viking father."

Thord said: "What will Thorodd say when he hears of your boy?" Then sung Bjorn:

"Then will the noble lady,  
When pressing to her breast  
The image of his father  
In her fair arms to rest,  
Admit Thorodd's conjecture,  
For me she ever loved,  
And ever shall I bear her  
Affection deep and proved."

Thord said: "It will be better for ye, not to, have much to do, with each other, and that thou turn thy thoughts from Thurid." "That is surely a good counsel," replied Bjorn, "but far is that from my intention, although it makes some difference when I have to do with such a man as Snorri her brother." "Thou wilt be sorry for thy doings," said Thord, and therewith ended the talk between them. Bjorn went home now to Kamb, and took upon himself the management of the place, for his father was then dead. In the winter he began



his trips over the heath, to visit Thurid; and although [265] Thorodd did not like it, he yet saw that it was not easy to find a remedy, and he thought over with himself, how dearly it had cost him, when he sought to stop their intercourse; but he saw that Bjorn was now much stronger than before. Thorodd bribed, in the winter, Thorgrim Galdrakin to raise a tempest against Bjorn, when he was crossing the heath. Now it came to pass one day that Bjorn came to Froda, and in the evening, when he was going home, was there thick weather, and some rain; and he set off very late; but when he had gotten up on the heath, the weather became cold, and it snowed; and so dark that he saw not the way before him. After that arose a drift of snow, with so much sleet that he could scarcely keep his legs; his clothes were now frozen, for he was before wet through, and he strayed about so that he knew not where to turn; at night he arrived at the edge of a cave, went in, and was there for the night, and had a cold lodging; then sung Bjorn:

"Fair one! who dost bring  
Vestments to the weary, [\(114\)](#)  
Little know'st thou where  
Hid in cavern dreary,  
I now shelter seek;  
He that once on ocean  
Boldly steered a bark,  
Now lies without motion  
In a cavern dark."

And again he chaunted:[266]

"The swan's cold region I have crossed  
All eastwards with a goodly freight,  
For woman's love, by tempest tost  
And seeking danger in the fight:  
But now no woman's couch I tread,  
A rocky cavern is my bed."

Bjorn remained three days in the cave, before the weather moderated; but on the fourth day came he home from the heath to Kamb. He was much exhausted. The servants asked him where he had been during the tempest--Bjorn sang:

"Well my deeds are known  
Under Styrbjörn's banner,  
Steel-clad Erik slew  
Gallant men in battle;  
Now on mountain wild,  
Met by magic shower,  
Outlet could not find  
From the Witches power." [\(115\)](#)

Bjorn was now at home for the winter. In spring his brother Arnbjorn fixed his residence at Bakka in Raunhofn, but Bjorn lived at Kamb, and kept a splendid house. . . .

The same summer bade Thorodd the tribute-buyer his brother-in-law Snorri Godi to a feast at home at Froda, and Snorri betook himself thither with twenty men. And while Snorri was at the feast, disclosed Thorodd to him, how he felt himself both disgraced and injured by the visits which Bjorn Asbrandson made to Thurid his [267] wife, but sister to Snorri Godi: Thorodd said that Snorri should remedy this bad business. Snorri was there a few days, and Thorodd gave him costly presents when he went away. Snorri Godi rode from thence over the heath, and gave out that he was going to the ship in the bay of Raunhafn. This was in summer, at the time of haymaking. But when they came south on

Kamb's heath, then said Snorri: "Now will we ride from the heath down to Kamb, and I will tell you," said he, "that I will visit Bjorn, and take his life, if opportunity offers, but not attack him in the house, for the buildings are strong here, and Bjorn is strong and hardy, and we have but little force; and it is well known that men who have come even so, with great force, have with little success attacked such valiant men inside in the house, as was the case with Geir Godi, and Gissur the white, when they attacked Gunnar of Lidarend, in his house, with eighty men, but he was there alone, and nevertheless were some wounded, and others killed; and they had staid the attack had not Geir Godi, with his heedfulness, observed that he was short of arms. But forasmuch as," continued he, "Bjorn is now out, which may be expected, as it is good drying weather, so appoint I thee, my kinsman Mar, to fetch Bjorn the first wound; but consider well, that he is no man to trifle with, and that wherever he is you may expect a hard blow from a savage wolf, if he, at the onset, receives not such a wound as will cause his death." And now when they rode down from the moor to the farm, saw they that Bjorn was out in the homestead, working at a sledge, and there was nobody [268] with him, and no weapons had he except a little axe, and a large knife, of a span's length from the haft, which he used for boring the holes in the sledge. Bjorn saw that Snorri Godi with his followers rode down from the moor, into the field, and knew them immediately. Snorri Godi was in a blue cloak, and rode in front. Bjorn made an immediate resolve, and took the knife, and went straight towards them; when they came together, he seized with the one hand the arm of Snorri's cloak, and with the other held he the knife in such a manner as was most easy for him to stab Snorri through the breast, if he should think fit to do so. Bjorn greeted them, as they met, and Snorri greeted him again; but Mar dropped his hands, for it struck him that Bjorn could soon hurt Snorri, if any injury was done to him. Upon this Bjorn went with them on their way, and asked what news they had, but held himself in the same position which he had taken at the first. Then took up Bjorn the discourse in this manner: "It stands truly so, friend Snorri, that I conceal not I have acted towards you in such wise that you may well accuse me, and I have been told that you have a hostile intention towards me. Now it seems to me best," continued he, "that if you have any business with me, other than passing by here to the high road, you should let me know it; but be that not the case, then would I that you grant me peace, and I will then turn back, for I go not in leading strings." Snorri answered: "Such a lucky grip took thou of me at our meeting that thou must have peace this time, however it may have been determined before; but this I beg of thee, that from [269] henceforth, thou cease to inveigle Thurid, for it will not end well between us, if thou, in this respect, continue as thou hast begun." Bjorn replied: "That only will I promise thee, which I can perform, but I see not how I can hold to this so long as Thurid and I are in the same district." "Thou art not so much bound to this place," answered Snorri, "but that thou couldst easily give up thy residence here." Bjorn replied: "True is that which thou sayest, and thus shall it be, since you have yourself come to me, and as our meeting has thus turned out will I promise thee, that Thorodd and thou shalt have no more trouble about my visits to Thuridd for the next year." After this, they separated; Snorri Godi rode to the ship, and then home to Helgafell. The day following rode Bjorn southwards to Raunhofn to go to sea, and he got immediately, in the summer, a place in a ship, and they were very soon ready. They put to sea with a north-east wind, which wind lasted long during the summer; but of this ship was nothing heard since this long time.

The following narrative will shew that Bjorn was driven to that part of the eastern coast of North America, where White Man's Land, or Great Ireland was supposed by the Northmen to be situated, and where, thirty years afterwards (1029), Gudleif Gudlaugson, driven in the same direction by easterly winds, recognised his countryman in a Chief, to whose position and influence both he and his companions were indebted for a safe return to their native land. This narrative is contained in the same Saga from whence the preceding has been derived; but before introducing the second [270] period in the history of Bjorn Asbrandson to the notice of the reader, a short sketch from the able pen of Bishop Muller, of the general characteristics of the *Eyrbyggja Saga*, its high position among Icelandic MSS. its well authenticated details, and its consequent claims to credibility as regards all the leading incidents which it records, will serve to place the two narratives in their proper light, and render the whole more worthy of consideration in a historical point of view:

"This Saga contains a number of occurrences and names of persons that are also mentioned in other places. Thorolf Mostrarskeg's death is fixed by the annals in 918; of him and his son Thorstein much is to be found in the Landnamabok; Thorgrim Thorsteinson's death is related at length in Gisle Surson's Saga; the Landnama mentions the most of Snorri's actions; the Annals record his birth in 964, and his death in 1031. . . . Besides, many of the persons named here are also mentioned in the Kristnisaga, and many are to be found in the Njala and Laxdæla Sagas."

"The author cites the testimony of Ari Frode; he remarks himself that Snorri appears in many other Sagas, and expressly mentions Laxdæla Saga, and Heidarviga, Saga. Certain circumstances are stated to have thus happened "according to what most people said;" and, we read, "one sees still the mark of the new barrow, which Arnkel raised over his father, and where he made a fence across, so that no animal should come there." It is also stated: "at that time it was the merchants' custom that they had no cook on board ship, but that all the ship's company should take it in turn to cook the victuals: there should also stand a covered can with drink by the sail." These expressions prove that the writer of this Saga lived some time after the events which he here relates; that already a part of the [271] Saga was current, and that from these statements, and other individual oral relations, he put his work together."

"Again: verses are often introduced, as well by the acting persons as other Skalds who sung of the events. These must, therefore, on the whole, be considered credible, and contain many not unimportant characteristics of the times. Traces of later decoration appear in the description of the hardihood of those who were wounded at the battle of Alptefjord, and of Thorgunna's witchcraft, but it is only natural that somewhat more of superstition should appear in this than in many other Sagas, and the circumstance proves nothing against its antiquity. The greater number of these embellishments are no more

than what we commonly find, where such superstitious faith is entertained, and the additions are accordant with the credulity of the times. The Eyrbyggja Saga is expressly quoted in the Landnamabok. Besides, we can determine the date of this with greater accuracy than that of most other Sagas: it must have been written before 1264, when Iceland became subject to Norway, because as it is stated: "All should pay tribute to the temple, and be liable for the journeys of the Chief, just as in the present time the Thingmen for their Chief:" hence it follows, that the aristocratic form of society, which ceased when the island became subject to Norway, must have existed at the period in question. The Saga must also have been written whilst Thord Sturleson and his mother yet lived, for it says: "when the church which Snorri Godi had built was removed, his bones were taken up, and brought down to the place where the church now stands; there were present Gudny Bodvar's daughter, Thord and Sighvat Sturleson's mother; and Thord Struleson says, that they were the bones of a middle sized man, and not large. There were also taken up the bones of Bork [272] the fat, Snorri Godi's uncle: they were very large; also was taken up the wife of Thordis, Thorbjorn Surs' daughter, Snorri Godi's mother. Gudny says that they were small women's bones, and as black as if they were singed." This proves that the writer of the Saga was present with Thord Sturleson, and his mother. Gudny died in the year 1220 odd, and the Saga must therefore have been written in the beginning of the 13th century."

## VOYAGE OF GUDLEIF GUDLAUGSON TO GREAT IRELAND

EYRBYGGJA SAGA, CAP. 64. VELLUM FRAGMENT, No. 4456, in 4to.

*Collated with the before mentioned MSS. - A. D. 1029*

Gudleif hight a man; he was son of Gudlaug the rich, of Straumfjord, and brother of Thorfinn, from whom the Sturlungers are descended. Gudleif was a great merchant, he had a merchant ship, but Thorolf Eyrar Loftson had another, that time they fought against Gyrd, son of Sigvald Jarl; then lost Gyrd his eye. It happened in the last years of the reign of King Olaf the Saint, that Gudleif undertook a trading voyage to Dublin; (116) but when he sailed from the west, intended he to sail to Iceland; he sailed then from the west of Ireland (117), and met with north-east winds, and was driven far to the west, and south-west, in the sea, where no land was to be seen. But it was already far gone in the summer, and they [273] made many prayers that they might escape from the sea; and it came to pass that they saw land. It was a great land, but they knew not what land it was. Then took they the resolve to sail to the land, for they were weary of contending longer with the violence of the sea. They found there a good harbour; and when they had been a short time on shore, came people to them: they knew none of the people, *but it rather appeared to them that they spoke Irish* (118). Soon came to them so great a number that it made up many hundreds. These men fell upon them and seized them all, and bound them, and drove them up the country. There were they brought before an assembly, to be judged. *They understood so much* that some were for killing them, but others would have them distributed amongst the inhabitants, and made slaves. And while this was going on saw they where rode a great body of men, and a large banner was borne in the midst. Then thought they that there must be a chief in the troop; but when it came near, saw they that under the banner rode a large and dignified man, who was much in years, and whose hair was white. All present bowed down before the man, and received him as well as they could. Now observed they that all opinions and resolutions concerning their business, were submitted to his decision. Then ordered this man Gudleif and his companions to be brought before him, and when they had come before this man, spoke he to them in the Northern [274] tongue, and asked them from what country they came. They answered him, that the most of them were Icelanders. The man asked which of them were Icelanders? Gudleif said that he was an Icelandic. He then saluted the old man, and he received it well, and asked from what part of Iceland he came. Gudleif said that he was from that district which hight Borgafjord. Then enquired he from what part of Borgafjord he came, and Gudleif answered just as it was. Then asked this man about almost every one of the principal men in Borgafjord and Breidafjord; and when they talked thereon, enquired he minutely about every thing, first of Snorri Godi, and his sister Thurid of Froda, and most about Kjartan her son. The people of the country now called out, on the other side, that some decision should be made about the seamen. After this. went the great man away from them, and named twelve of his men with himself, and they sat a long time talking. Then went they to the meeting of the people, and the old man said to Gudleif: "I and the people of the country have talked together about your business, and the people have left the matter to me; but I will now give ye leave to depart whence ye

will; but although ye may think that the summer is almost gone, yet will I counsel ye to remove from hence, for here are the people not to be trusted, and bad to deal with, and they think besides that the laws have been broken to their injury." Gudleif answered: "What shall we say, if fate permits us to return to our own country, who has given us this freedom?" He answered: "That can I not tell you, for I [275] like not that my relations and foster-brothers should make such a journey hereto, as ye would have made, if ye had not had the benefit of my help; but now is my age so advanced, that I may expect every hour old age to overpower me; and even if I could live yet for a time, there are here more powerful men than me, who little peace would give to foreigners that might come here, although they be not just here in the neighbourhood where ye landed." Then caused he their ship to be made ready for sea, and was there with them, until a fair wind sprung up, which was favourable to take them from the land. But before they separated took this man a gold ring from his hand, and gave it into the hands of Gudleif, and therewith a good sword; then said he to Gudleif: "If the fates permit you to come to your own country, then shall you take this sword to the yeoman, Kjartan of Froda, but the ring to Thurid his mother." Gudleif replied: "What shall I say, about it, as to who sends them these valuables?" He answered: "Say that he sends them who was a better friend of the lady of Froda, than of her brother, Godi of Helgafell; but if any man therefore thinks that he knows who has owned these articles, then say these my words, that I forbid any one to come to me, for it is the most dangerous expedition, unless it happens as fortunately with others at the landing place, as with you; but here is the land great, and bad as to harbours, and in all parts may strangers expect hostility, when it does not turn out as has been with you." After this, Gudleif and his people put to sea, and they landed in Ireland late in harvest, and were in Dublin for [276] the winter. But in the summer after, sailed they to, Iceland, and Gudleif delivered over there these valuables; and people held it for certain, that this man was Bjorn, the Champion of Breidavik, and no other account to be relied on is there in confirmation of this, except that which is now given here.

The reader will no doubt come to the same conclusion drawn by the Icelanders respecting the identity of the aged chief, to whose generosity and friendly feeling Gudleif and his companions were so much indebted, and unhesitatingly pronounce him to have been none other than Bjorn Asbrandson, the Champion of Breidavik, who, it will be remembered, had set sail about thirty years before, with a northeast wind, and had not since been heard of. The remarkable accordance of all the personal details, to which the writer evidently attaches the principal importance, with the historical events, which are only incidentally alluded to, enable us to determine dates and intervals of time with a degree of accuracy that places the truth of the narrative beyond all question, and gives a high degree of interest to these two voyages. The mention of Sigurd Jarl of the Orkneys, Palnatoki, Styrbjorn the nephew of Erik of Sweden, the battle of Fyrisvold, Snorri Godi, "the latter part of the reign of king Olaf the saint," gives a chronological character to the narratives, and enables us to fix with confidence, nearly the exact period of the principal events. Hence it appears that Gudleif Gudlaugson, sailing from the west of Ireland in the year 1029, with a N. E. wind, is driven far to the south and south-west, where no land was to be seen, and that after being exposed for many [277] days to the violence of the winds and waves, he at length finds shelter upon a coast, where Bjorn Asbrandson, who had left Iceland with N. E. winds thirty years before, had become established as chief of the

inhabitants of the country. He finds him, as might naturally have been expected, "stricken in years," and "his hair was white," for Bjorn had left Iceland for Jomsborg in the prime of life, had, after taking part in the achievements of the Jomsvikings up to the death of Palnatoki in 993, returned to and resided in Iceland until 999, and now thirty winters had passed over his head since his ultimate departure from his native land. The locality of the newly discovered country is next to be determined: Now if a line be drawn running N. E. to S. W. the course of Bjorn Asbrandson, from the western coast of Iceland, and another in the same direction (the course of Gudleif Gudlaugson) from the west coast of Ireland, they would intersect each other on the southern shores of the United States, somewhere about Carolina or Georgia. This position accords well with the description of the locality of their country, given by the Skrælings to Thorfinn Karlsefne, and which the Northmen believed to be White Man's land or Great Ireland, as also with the geographical notices of the same land which have been already adduced; and when to these evidences be added the statements of Gudleif and his companions respecting the language of the natives, "*which appeared to them to be Irish*," there is every reason to conclude that this was the Hvítramannaland, Albania, or Ireland ed mikla of the Northmen.

The notices of the country contained in these two narratives are, doubtless, scanty, and merely incidental, the object of the narrators being evidently to trace the romantic [278] and adventurous career of the Champion of Breidavik, and the perilous voyage of his countrymen, but this very circumstance is an argument in favour of the honesty of the statement as regards the supposed Irish settlement; and the simple and unpretending character of both narratives, supported, as they are, by historical references, confirmatory of the principal events, gives to these incidental allusions a degree of importance to which they would not otherwise be entitled.

Professor Rafn is of opinion that the White Man's Land, or Great Ireland of the Northmen was the country situated to the south of Chesapeake Bay, including North and South Carolina, Georgia, and East Florida. It is well known that the Esquimaux Indians formerly inhabited countries much further south than they do at present, and a very remarkable tradition is stated to be still preserved amongst the Shawnese Indians, who emigrated 87 years ago, from West Florida to Ohio, that Florida was once *inhabited by white men, who used iron instruments*. A German writer also mentions an old tradition of the ancestors of the Shawnese having come *from beyond the sea*.

Various circumstances shew that Great Ireland was a country, of the existence of which the Icelandic historians had no doubt; it is spoken of in the Saga of Thorfirm Karlsefne as a country well known by name to the Northmen; in the account of Ari Marson's voyage, and the geographical fragment, its position is pointed out:--"west from Ireland, near Vinland the good"--"next and somewhat behind Vinland," and the following extract, taken from the collection of Bjorn Johnson, will shew that a Chart had actually been made of this distant land:

"Sir Erlend Thordson had obtained from abroad the [279] geographical chart of that Albania, or land of the White men, which is situated opposite Vinland the good, of which mention has been before made in this little book, and which the merchants formerly

called Hibernia Major or Great Ireland, and lies, as has been said, to the west of Ireland proper. This chart had held accurately all those tracts of land, and the boundaries of Markland, Einfoetingjaland, and little Helluland, together with Greenland, to the west of it, where apparently begins the good Terra Florida." This Sir Erlend was priest of the parish of Staden in Steingrimsfjord, on the west coast of Iceland, in the year 1568, but no further information has been obtained respecting the chart, which probably contained the outlines of all the countries known to the Northmen soon after their discovery of the American continent.

From what cause could the name of Great Ireland have arisen, but from the fact of the country having been colonized by the Irish? Coming from their own green island to a vast continent possessing many of the fertile qualities of their native soil, the appellation would have been natural and appropriate; and costume, colour, or peculiar habits, might have readily given rise to the country being denominated White Man's Land by the neighbouring Esquimaux. Nor does this conclusion involve any improbability: we have seen that the Irish visited and inhabited Iceland towards the close of the 8th century, to have accomplished which they must have traversed a stormy ocean to the extent of about 800 miles; that a hundred years before the time of Dicuil, namely in the year 725, they had been found upon the Farøe islands; that in the 10th century, voyages between Iceland and Ireland were of ordinary occurrence; and that in the beginning of the [280] 11th century, White Man's Land or Great Ireland is mentioned,--not as a newly discovered country,--but as a land *long known by name* to the Northmen. Neither the Icelandic historians nor navigators were, in the least degree, interested in originating or giving currency to any fable respecting an Irish settlement on the southern shores of North America, for they set up no claim to the discovery of that part of the Western continent, their intercourse being limited to the coasts north of Chesapeake Bay. The discovery of Vinland and Great Ireland appear to have been totally independent of each other: the latter is only incidentally alluded to by the Northern navigators; with the name they were familiar, but of the peculiar locality of the country they were ignorant, nor was it until after the return of Karlsefni from Vinland in 1011, and the information which he obtained from the Skrellings or Esquimaux who were captured during the voyage, that the Northmen became convinced that White Man's Land or Great Ireland was a part of the same vast continent, of which Helluland, Markland, and Vinland formed portions.

The traces of Irish origin which have been observed among some of the Indian tribes of North and Central America tend also to strengthen the presumption that these countries had been colonized from Ireland at some remote period of time. Rask, the eminent Danish philologist, leans to this opinion which he founds upon the early voyages of the Irish to Iceland and the similitude between the Hiberno-Celtic, and American Indian dialects. "It is well known," he says, "that Iceland was discovered and partially inhabited by the Irish before its discovery and occupation by the Scandinavians; and when we find that the Icelanders, descended from the Scandinavians, discovered North[281] America, it will appear less improbable that the Irish, who, at that period, were more advanced in learning and civilization, should have undertaken similar expeditions with success:" the name of *Irland it Mikla* he also considers to be a sufficient indication of the Irish having emigrated thither from their own country.



It seems to be generally admitted by historians and antiquaries that the main stream of colonization has flowed from east to west, the Celts preceding the Teutonic and Sarmatian races, by a long interval of time. Herodotus, four centuries before the Christian era, places the Celts beyond the pillars of Hercules, and upon the borders of the most westerly region in Europe, and Cæsar in the first century finds them in Gaul and Britain; that their successors, the Goths, should have driven them to seek for regions still further westward is therefore in full accordance with the course of their former migrations, and the same nomadic principle which brought them from Asia to the British isles, might have wafted them in later ages to the western world.

The illustrious Leibnitz seems to have contemplated the possibility of such a remote Celtic settlement when he wrote:--"And if there be *any island beyond Ireland*, where *the Celtic language* is in use, by the help thereof we should be guided, as by a thread, to the knowledge of still more ancient things."

The remarkable narrative of Lionel Wafer who resided for several months amongst the inhabitants of the Isthmus of America, contains some remarkable passages bearing upon this subject, and which, as the author had no preconceived opinions on the affinity of languages, or favourite theory to uphold, are deserving of notice: speaking of their language, he says: [282]

"My knowledge of the Highland language made me the more capable of learning the Darien Indians' language, when I was among them, for there is some affinity; not in the signification of the words of each language, but in the pronunciation, which I could easily imitate, both being spoken pretty much in the throat, with frequent aspirates, and much the same sharp or circumflex tang or cant." This writer, however, had evidently not paid much attention to the affinities of the two languages which he compares and finds only to resemble in pronunciation, for many of the words which he afterwards adduces as examples of the Indian language, bear a marked similitude to those of the Celtic, as may readily be seen by the following comparison:

American-Indian	Celtic
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Tautah--Father	Taduys (Welsh), Tad (Corn.) Tat (Armoric) Dad or Daddy (vulg. Irish).
Namah--Mother	Naing (Irish).
Poonah--Woman	Bean (Ir.), Bun (Armor.).
Neenah--Girl	Neean (ancient Scotch).
Nee--the Moon	Neul, a star--light--neultaib njme, the stars of heaven(Ir.).
Eechah (pron. Eetsha)--Ugly	Etseact--Death (Ir.)--the ugliest of all things.
Paecchah--Foh! Ugly	Pah, prefixed to a word in Welsh augments its signification.
Eechah Malooquah, an expression of great dislike	Malluighe or malluigte, cursed, accursed (Irish).
Cotchah, sleep	Codalta and Codaltac, sleepy (Ir.).
Caupah (pron. Capa), hammock	Cába, a cloak, Caban, tent, cottage (Ir.), Caban, ib.(Welsh).
Eetah, got	Ed, to take, handle (Irish).
Doolah, water	Tuile, a flood (Ir.).
Copah, drink	Ceóbac, drunkenness (Ir.).
Mamaumah, fine	Ma, ma, ba, would be nearly the sound of the repetition of the word ba, which signifies good in Irish: the m and b are also often used indiscriminately. See O'Brien--Remarks on letter M.
Eenah, to call	Enwi, to name (Welsh), Henu, a name (Armor.).

Wafer further says: "Their way of reckoning from score to score is no more than what our old English way was, but their saying, instead of thirty-one, thirty-two, etc., one score and eleven, one score and twelve, etc., is much like the Highlanders of Scotland and Ireland, reckoning eleven and twenty, twelve and twenty, etc.; so for fifty-three, the Highlanders say thirteen and two score, as the Darien Indians would two score and thirteen, only changing the place. In my youth I was well acquainted with the Highland or primitive Irish language, both as it is spoken in the north of Ireland, particularly at the Navan upon the Boyne, and about the town of Virgini upon Lough Rammer in the Barony of Castle Raghen, in the County of Cavan; and also in the Highlands of Scotland, where I have been up and down in several places. . . . I learned a great deal of the Darien language in a month's conversation with them."

Wafer's description of the dress of this tribe of American Indians, presents also a remarkable coincidence with the short notices of the inhabitants of White Man's Land, as

given to Karlsefni by the Esquimaux:-- [284]

"They have a sort of long cotton garment of their own, some *white*, others of a rusty black, shaped like our carters' frocks, hanging down to their heels, with a fringe of the same of cotton, about a span long, and short, wide, open sleeves, reaching but to the middle of the arms. These garments they put on over their heads. . . . When they are thus assembled, they will sometimes walk about the place or plantation where they are, with their robes on; and I once saw Lacenta (a chief) thus walking about with two or three hundred of these attending him, as if he was mustering them: and I took notice that those in the black gowns walked before him, *and the white after him, each having their lances of the same colour with their robes*. . . . They were all in their finest robes, which are *long white gowns*, reaching to their ancles, with fringes at the bottom, and in their hands they had half pikes."

The affinity between the American-Indian and Celtic languages, and consequent probability of an European settlement having been formed upon the shores of New Spain before the arrival of the Spaniards, appears to have been entertained by many writers of eminence in the 17th century. In the remarkable work entitled the "Turkish Spy," we find the author positively affirming the similarity of the two languages, and stating the tradition of an early European settlement:

"This prince (Charles II.) has several nations under his dominions, and 'tis thought he scarce knows the just extent of his territories in America. There is a region in that continent inhabited by a people whom they call Tuscorards and Doegs. *Their language is the same as is spoken by the British or Welsh*. . . . Those Tuscorards and Doegs of America are thought to descend from them. . . . It is certain [285] that when the Spaniards first conquered Mexico they were surprised to hear the inhabitants discourse of a strange people, that formerly *came thither in corraughs*, who taught them the knowledge of God, and of immortality, instructed them also in virtue and morality, and prescribed holy rites and ceremonies of religion. 'Tis remarkable also what an Indian King said to a Spaniard, viz.: That in foregoing ages a strange people arrived there by sea, to whom his ancestors gave hospitable entertainment; in regard they found them men of wit and courage, endued also with many other excellencies: but he could give no account of their origin or name. . . . The British language is so prevalent here, that the very towns, bridges, beasts, birds, rivers, hills, etc., are called by British or Welsh names." "Who can tell," truly adds the author, "the various transmigrations of mortals on earth, or trace out the true originals of any people?"

The improbability of the Irish having, at any very remote period of time, been in possession of vessels of sufficient power and capacity to enable them to accomplish a voyage across the Atlantic may, perhaps, be urged as an objection to this supposed early migration to the American coast; but, without resting upon their ancient Spanish or Carthaginian connexion, a very little enquiry will show, that at least in the first centuries of the Christian era they were amply provided with the means of accomplishing a voyage to the New World, which, from the western coast of Ireland, little exceeds 1600 miles.

O'Halloran states, on the authority of the Psalter of Cashel, said to be the oldest Irish MS., that Moghcorb, King of Leath Mogha, or Munster, prepared *a large fleet* in the year 296, and invaded Denmark; and that in the [286] following century (A. D. 367), Criomthan, who in the Psalter of Cashel is styled Monarch of Ireland and Albany, and leader of the Franks and Saxons, prepared a formidable fleet, and raised a large body of troops, which were transported to Scotland, for the purpose of acting in conjunction with the Picts and Saxons against the Roman wall, and devastating the provinces of Britain. In 396, an expedition, upon a most extensive and formidable scale, was undertaken by the celebrated Niall of the Nine Hostages, one of the most distinguished princes of the Milesian race:

"Observing," says Moore, "that the Romans, after breaking up the line of encampment along the coast opposite to Ireland, had retired to the eastern shore and the northern wall; Niall perceived that an apt opportunity was thus offered for a descent upon the now unprotected territory. Instantly summoning, therefore, all the forces of the island, and embarking them on board such *ships* as he could collect, he ranged, with his *numerous navy*, along the whole coast of Lancashire," etc. It was to this expedition that the poet Claudian, lauding the achievement of his patron Stilicho, alluded, in the memorable lines:--

By him defended, when the neighbouring hosts  
Of warlike nations spread along our coasts;  
When Scots [\(119\)](#) came thundering from the Irish shores,  
And the wide ocean foamed from hostile oars.  
De Laudab, Stil. Lib. 2.

This same Niall extended this enterprise to the coast of Brittany, and ravaged the maritime districts of the northwest of Gaul, during which expedition was captured the great Christian apostle, St. Patrick.

That such expeditions could have been carried on by means of the little fragile currachs, to which mode of transport some writers would limit the sea expeditions of the Irish at this period, seems scarcely credible, and while allowing full force to the fearless and enterprising spirit of the gallant Scoti, and the "contempto pelagi," alluded to by Eric of Auxerre, we must allow them some more rational means for conveying a body of troops across the British and Gallic channels than these frail barks.

Not that the currachs were insufficient for individual enterprise of a more peaceful character, and it seems probable that the monks of the 8th century launched themselves on the northern ocean in these simple hide-covered skiffs, and thus effected a passage to their island retreats; for we find St. Cormac committing himself to the sea in a similar bark, and on one occasion he is said to have been out of sight of land for fourteen days and nights.

But the remarkable passage in Tacitus, which has been so often cited by Irish historians in proof of the early maritime importance of their country, would lead to the conclusion that at a period anterior to that now under consideration, the Irish were possessed of

ships, or vessels of no mean size or description. "Ireland," the Roman historian says, "situated midway between Britain and Spain, and convenient also to the Gallic sea, connected a most powerful portion of the empire by considerable mutual advantages; the soil and climate, and the dispositions and habits of the people do not differ much from those of [288] Britain: *the approaches and harbours are better known, by reason of commerce and the merchants.*" "From this it appears," says Moore, "that though scarce heard of till within a short period by the Romans, and almost as strange to the Greeks, this sequestered island was yet in possession of channels of intercourse distinct from either; and that whilst the Britons, shut out from the continent by their Roman masters, saw themselves deprived of all that profitable intercourse which they had long maintained with the Veneti and other people of Gaul, Ireland still continued to cultivate her old relations with Spain, and saw her barks venturing on their accustomed course, between the Celtic Cape, and the Sacred Promontory, as they had done for centuries before."

That Ireland must have been included amongst the Cassiterides which are known to have been visited by the Phœnicians, before the Gallic invasion of Britain, seems to be admitted by all unprejudiced writers upon this subject, [\(120\)](#) and that the mystery, in which these wily traders sought to conceal their commercial monopoly, has led to the obscurity in which the records of their voyages is involved. That the nautical knowledge and equipments of the Celtic population of Spain and Ireland must have received considerable advancement from this connection, is a natural consequence. Inhabiting the maritime regions of the Spanish peninsula, they were necessarily brought into immediate contact with the Carthaginian merchants, who had formed settlements on the same coast, and from whom they probably obtained not only their knowledge of navigation,[289] but of those religious rites and ceremonies which were afterwards developed in the form of Druidism.

That the latter was not of British origin seems obvious. Caesar's description of its observances is only reconcilable with his account of Britain, on the assumption that the chief seat of the Druids was in Ireland, for while he describes the Gauls as deriving their knowledge of Druidism from the British, he represents the latter as inferior in civilization to the Gauls. Even in the time of Tacitus the Britons are represented as *ferocæ*, a state of barbarism obviously incompatible with the creation of a highly wrought mysterious superstition, implying considerable intellectual advancement and scientific knowledge: a superstition, be it remembered, which is known to have existed amongst the Phœnicians and Carthaginians.

The Roman knowledge of the British isles was extremely limited and imperfect; before the time of Tacitus they were ignorant of the insular position of Britain, and the acquaintance of Agricola with Ireland was principally derived from the doubtful information of a faithless Irish chief, who sought the Roman camp to betray his country. Ireland also, according to Ptolemy, was formerly called *Little Britain*, therefore when Caesar speaks of the Gauls repairing to Britain in order to become instructed in the mysteries of Druidism, the term may have been intended as a general expression for the British isles [\(121\)](#). [290] The Druids, Caesar tells us, are concerned in divine matters, superintend public and private sacrifices, interpret religious rites, determine

controversies, inheritance, boundaries of land, rewards and punishments . . . . "They are said to learn by heart a great number of verses, for which reason some continue in the discipline twenty years."--"*They use written characters.*"--"Much besides they discourse, and deliver to youth, upon the stars, and their motion, on the magnitude of the world and the earth, on the nature of things, on the influence and power of the immortal Gods."

This particular class, combining the double office of judge and priest, although common in the time of Caesar to the British isles, would naturally be found most enlightened in that part of the three kingdoms, whose direct communication with Spain, from a remote period, brought it into more immediate contact with the Phœnician navigators; and the appellations of "Sacred Isle," and "Sacred Promontory," in the works of Ptolemy and Avienus, lead us involuntarily to the conclusion that, hundreds of years before the Roman invasion of Britain, Ireland was the depository of those Phœnician superstitions which afterwards became adopted throughout the British Isles under the form of Druidism.

The root of the word Druid is to be found with little variation in the Hiberno-Celtic language of the present day, *Draoj* signifying a Druid, magician or wise man, and *Draoideacht* or *Draoide-achta*, magic or the Druidical form of worship; the golden ornaments in the shape of a half moon, which have been frequently found in the Irish bogs, are supposed to have been connected with these superstitions, of which lunar worship formed a part, and add to the numerous testimonies in proof of its great antiquity. [291] But the high state of perfection, if it may be so called, in which the Druidical form of worship existed in Ireland, and the superior acquirements of her Pagan priesthood to those of the British, is best evinced by the vestige of the Ogham or occult character in which their mysteries were recorded, and which presents a marked resemblance to the secret mode of writing, known to have been used for similar purposes by the hierarchies of the East.

It may therefore be presumed without much stretch of credulity that the same communication with the Phœnician settlers on the coast of Spain which transmitted these eastern superstitions to the Irish shore, may have also brought with it some knowledge of navigation, and the construction of ships; and therefore, that we are not driven to the hide-covered currach for a means of transporting the Celtic settlers to the American coast. Or if the theory of those be adopted, who would bring the first colonists of Ireland from Belgic, or Celtic Gaul, the description of that people by Caesar will furnish equal evidence of maritime knowledge at a period sufficiently early to transport an expedition to America in the first centuries of the Christian era. The Veneti, inhabiting that district of Armoric Gaul, now known by the name of Vannes, are stated to have had vessels of considerable bulk and power, and admirably adapted as well for coasting voyages, as a stormy sea. The hull was of oak, the beams a foot in breadth, and fastened with iron, the bottom flat, the sails of leather, and what to nautical men may, perhaps, appear somewhat wonderful in those early days, the anchors were secured by means of *chain cables*.

Looking therefore, either to the Phœnician, Carthaginian, Iberian, Belgic, Gallic, or Scythic intercourse of an [292] early period,--to the more continuous Scandinavian occupation of later years,--or to the primitive mode of transport of the simple skiff, it is

evident that ample nautical means were not wanting in Ireland to transfer any part of her population to the western shores of America long before the period when Great Ireland became known to the Northmen.

The absence of any notice of such a migration in Irish Annals,--if such be the case,--is no argument against the probability of its existence. The most brilliant period of Irish History remains unsupported by Irish manuscripts. Of that enlightened age when pupils from all parts of Europe sought learning from Irish seminaries and Irish ecclesiastics,--when Columbkille dispensed the light of Christianity to the Picts, Columbanus to the French, Callus to the Swiss, and the brothers Ultan and Foilan to the Belgians,--when Virgilius, the Apostle of Carinthia, astounded the German bishops with his superior knowledge of cosmography and science--not one authentic written record now remains [\(122\)](#) .

Invasion from without, and internal dissension from within, have swept away all written testimonies of a time, when the intellectual and religious eminence of Ireland attracted the attention and admiration of neighbouring nations, and obtained for her the just distinction of "Sacred Island" and "School of the West:" it cannot therefore be a matter of surprise that the records of earlier history should [293] have been lost amid the ravages of such general devastation [\(123\)](#).

But further examination of Icelandic Annals may possibly throw more light upon this interesting question, and tend to unravel the mystery in which the original inhabitants of America are involved. Lord Kingsborough's splendid publication [\(124\)](#) in 1829 first brought to the notice of the British public the striking similitude between Mexican and Egyptian monuments; the ruins of Palenque, Guatemala and Yucatan, the former rivalling the pyramids of Egypt or the ruins of Palmyra, were only known to a few hunters until the end of the 18th century, and modern travellers are still engaged in bringing the hidden wonders of this and other regions of the vast American continent to the knowledge of the literary world.

The argument founded upon the absence of Irish records might as reasonably be applied to these later publications of the north; and why, may it as well be asked, was the discovery of America by the Northmen in the 10th century not satisfactorily established until the nineteenth?--The [294] name of Vinland was, doubtless, known to Torfæus; and Wormskiold, Malte Brun and others, following the erroneous calculation which he had made of its locality, fixed it in a latitude with which the physical features of the country did not correspond: [\(125\)](#) hence the whole statement in the Sagas was long looked upon as fictitious; but the more accurate recent investigations of Danish archaeologists have set the question at rest, and the discovery of America by the Northmen has assumed its proper position in the history of the tenth century.

The existence of a Celtic or Irish settlement upon the south-eastern shores of North America, does not preclude the co-existence of other races upon the western and northern shores. A colony from western Ireland may have been planted on the east, while tribes from eastern Asia had settled on the west; and both have driven before them the less civilized, or more feeble Scythic wanderers, who may have entered at the north: all

emanating,--but by distinct and separate channels,--from the one great center, which peopled the wide spread sphere, and thus multiplying, in every region and every clime, the living evidences of those sacred records which offer peace and immortality to man.