

The Sagas of Iceland and Ireland.

Literary Influence :

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I.

THE most interesting branch of early Norse literature is the saga or prose story. Of these there are many varieties but the most distinctive are the following : (1) the *Islendinga Sögur*, or stories relating to prominent Icelanders, (2) *Konunga Sögur*, or stories of Kings, chiefly of Norway ; (3) *Fornaldar Sögur*, or stories about early times. All these are essentially Icelandic in origin ; sagas having their origin in Norway are by no means unknown, but they are, as a rule, translated or derived from French and other foreign sources. [1] In their present form the sagas relating to the history of Iceland date for the most part from the thirteenth century, though some of them were probably committed to writing in the latter part of the twelfth.

The earliest Icelandic document of which we have any record is the original text of the Laws, said to have been written in the year 1181. Ari's *Islendinga-Bok*, containing a short account of the settlement of Iceland with notices of the more important events, and accounts of the succession of lawmen and bishops, was written a few years later, though the form in which it has come down to us is that of an abbreviated text written about the year 1130. This work, the foundation of all subsequent historical writing in Iceland, contains some short notices, which apparently had been handed down by tradition, but these stories, usually known as sagas, would seem to have been written down somewhat later. Indeed until the close of the twelfth century the language employed for historical writings in Iceland, as elsewhere, was for the most part Latin.

Though the writing of the sagas did not begin until the latter part of the twelfth century, sagas in some form or other must have been in existence much earlier, carried on from generation to generation by oral tradition. This faculty of reciting sagas was a special characteristic of the Icelanders, by whom it was carefully cultivated. In the preface to his *Historia Danica* Saxo acknowledges his indebtedness to the "men of Thule," who "account it a delight to learn and to consign to remembrance the history of all nations, deeming it as great a glory to set forth the excellence of others as to display their own. Their stores, which are stocked with attestations of historical events, I have examined somewhat closely and have woven together no small portion of the present work by following their narrative." [2]

That the art of storytelling did not decline in Iceland even after the majority of the sagas were written down is attested by *Sturlunga Saga*. Here we are told that when Sturla visited King Magnus' court at Bergen in 1263 the king received him coldly, but afterwards allowed him to accompany the royal party on a voyage to the south of Norway. In the evening one of the sailors asked if there was anyone among them who could tell stories, but he received no answer. He turned to Sturla, "Sturla, the Icelander, will you entertain us?" "Willingly," said Sturla. Then he related the story of Huld [3] better and with much more detail than any of those present had ever heard it told before. Then many men made their way to the deck so as to hear as clearly as possible, and there was a great crowd there. The queen asked : "What is that crowd on the deck?" A man answered, "Men who are listening to the tale the Icelander is telling." "What story is that?" she asked. "It is about a great giantess ; it is a good story and well told." On the following day the queen sent for Sturla and asked him to come and bring with him the saga of the giantess. [4] So Sturla went aft to the quarterdeck and told the story over again. When he had finished, the queen and many of the listeners thanked him and took him to be a learned and wise man. [5]

A much earlier reference to the recitation, and indeed the composition of sagas is found in *Thorgils Saga ok Haflitha*, in which there is an account of a wedding-feast at Reykholar in 1119 :

"There was fun and merriment and great festivity, and all kinds of amusements, such as dancing, wrestling and story-telling. . . . Hórlfr of Skalmarnes told a story about Hrongvithr the Viking, and Olaf 'the sailor's king,' and about the rifling of the barrow of Thrainn the berserkr, and about

Hrómundr Gripsson, and he included many verses in his story. King Sverrir used to be entertained with this story, and he declared that fictitious stories like these were the most entertaining of any ; and yet there are men who can trace their ancestry to Hrómundr Gripsson. Hrólfr had put this saga together. Ingimundr the priest told the story of Ormr, the poet of Barrey and included many verses in it, besides a good poem which Ingimundr had composed, therefore many learned men regard this saga as true.” [6]

The former of these stories is the *Hrómundra Saga* which belongs to the class commonly called *Fornaldar Sögur*. [7]

Still further back in the reign of Harald Hardradith (1047-1066) we have a most important allusion to the art of story-telling. According to the saga [8] a young Icelander came one summer to King Harald seeking his protection. The king received him into his court on the understanding that he should entertain the household during the winter. He soon became very popular, and received gifts from members of the household and from the king himself. Just before Christmas the king noticed that the Icelander seemed dejected, and he asked the reason. The Icelander replied that it was because of his ‘ uncertain temper.’

“ That is not so,” said the king.... “ I think your stock of sagas must be exhausted, because you have entertained us all through the winter, whenever you were called upon to do so. Now you are worried because your sagas have come to an end at Christmas time, and you do not wish to tell the same over again.”

“ You have guessed rightly,” said the Icelander. “ I know only one more saga, but I dare not tell it here, because it is the story of your adventures abroad.”

“ That is the saga I particularly want to hear,” said the king, and he asked the Icelander to begin it on Christmas Day and tell a part of it every day. During the Christmas season there was a good deal of discussion about the entertainment. Some said it was presumption on the part of the Icelander to tell the saga and they wondered how the king would like it ; others thought it was well told, but others again thought less of it. When the saga was finished, the king, who had listened attentively throughout, turned to the storyteller and said : “ Are you not curious to know, Icelander, how I like the saga ?”

“ I am afraid to ask,” replied the storyteller.

The king said : “ I think you have told it very well. Where did you get the material for it, and who taught it to you ?”

The Icelander answered : “ When in Iceland I used to go every summer to the *Thing*, and each summer I learned a portion of the saga from Halldór Snorrason.”

“ Then it is not surprising that you know it so well, since you have learned it from him,” said the king.

We may in fact see the origin of the *Islendinga Sögur* in certain passages of the sagas themselves. In *Fóstbroethra Saga*, for instance, the story is told of an Icelander named Thormóthr, who went to Greenland in order to avenge the death of his foster-brother Thorgeirr. On one occasion he fell asleep in his booth, and when he awoke some time later he found, to his surprise, that the place was quite deserted. Then his servant Egill “ the foolish” came to him and said : “ You are too far off from a great entertainment.”

Thormóthr asked : “ Where have you come from and what is the entertainment ?”

Egill replied : “ I have been to Thorgrímr Einarsson’s booth and most of the people who are attending the *Thing* are there now.”

Thormóthr asked : “ What form of amusement have they ?”

Egill answered : “ Thorgrímr is telling a saga.”

“ About whom is the saga ? “ asked Thormóthr.

“ That I do not know clearly,” replied Egill, “ but I know that he tells it well and in an interesting manner. He is sitting on a chair outside his booth and the people are all around him listening to the saga.”

Thormóthr said : “ But you must know the name of some man who is mentioned in the saga, especially since you think it so entertaining.”

Egill replied : “ A certain Thorgeirr was a great hero in the saga, and I think that Thorgrímr himself must have had some connection with it, and played a brave part in it, as is most likely. I wish you would go there and listen to the entertainment.” [9]

Then Thormóthr and Egill went to Thorgrímr’s booth and stood close by listening to the saga, but they could not hear it very distinctly. Thormóthr had, however, understood from Egill’s remarks that this was the same Thorgrímr who had slain his foster-brother and was now recounting his exploits for the amusement of the crowd.

More famous is the scene in *Njáls Saga* where Gunnar Lambi's son, who has just arrived at Earl Sigurthr’s palace in the Orkneys is called upon to tell the story of the burning of *Njáll's* homestead.

“ The men were so pleased that King Sigtryggr [of Dublin] sat on a high seat in the middle, but on either side of the king sat one of the earls. . . . Now King Sitryggr and Earl Gille wished to hear of these tidings which had happened at the burning, and so, also, what had befallen since.

Then Gunnarr Lambi’s son, who had taken part in the burning was got to tell the tale, and a stool was set for him to sit upon.

. . . Now King Sigtryggr asked : “ How did Skarphethinn bear the burning ?”

“ Well at first for a long time,” said Gunnarr, “ but still the end of it was that he wept.” And so he went on giving an unfair bias to his story, but every now and then he laughed aloud.

Kári (Kjall’s friend who was listening outside) could not stand this and he then ran in with his sword drawn . . . and smote Gunnarr Lambi’s son on the neck with such a smart blow that his head spun off on to the board before the king and the earls.

“ ... Now Flosi undertook to tell the story of the Burning and he was fair to all, and therefore what he said was believed.” [10]

For the way in which such stories were preserved from generation to generation we may refer to the end of *Droplaugarsona Saga* (Ljósvetninga) : “ Thorvaldr (born c. 1006) son of Grímr “ one of the chief actors in the story” had a son called Ingjaldr. His son was named Thorvaldr, and he it was who told the story.” [11]

The passage quoted from *Njáls Saga* and *Fóstbroethra Saga* seem to show that the art of story-telling was already developed at the beginning of the eleventh century. In these instances, it is true, we have only the records of events given by the actors themselves or by eye-witnesses, and we cannot be certain that such stories had assumed anything like a fixed form. Far more important is the passage from *Harolds Saga Hardrada*, for there the story-teller was not an eye-witness, but had obtained the story, or the material for it, from Halldór Snorrason, an Icelandic follower of King Harald. From what is said about the length of the saga, there can be no doubt that it had been worked up in a very elaborate way. For such elaborate secondhand stories we have no other definite evidence, but again, considering the time which the recital is said to have occupied, it would be unwise to conclude that this later form of the art was entirely new.

We have, therefore, clearly to distinguish two stages in the history of the oral saga ; (i) the story as told by someone who had taken part in the events described ; (ii) the secondhand story. The story was soon embellished, especially in the second stage, not merely with such devices as the records of con-

versation, but even by the introduction of imaginary adventures. Indeed we need not assume that even in the first stage the stories were told in strict accordance with fact. Reference may be made, for instance, to the passage quoted above from *Njáls Saga*, where Gunnarr Lambi's son is said to have told the story of the burning unfairly. Even in the *Islendinga* and *Konunga Sögur* fiction forms a not inconsiderable element : in the *Fornaldar Sögur* it is obviously much greater.

Yet there is good reason for believing that in the main the *Islendinga* and *Konunga Sögur* are historical. This may be seen by the general agreement between the various sagas, since the same characters constantly reappear, and there is little inconsistency with regard to their circumstances or personal traits. Again, the description of houses, ships, weapons, and other articles seems generally to correspond to those known to date from the period to which the stories refer. There is, moreover, one feature which points to a more or less fixed tradition dating from the closing years of the tenth century, namely, the attitude towards those characters who figured prominently in the struggle between Christianity and heathenism. Thus there are indications that the rather unsympathetic representation of Harold Greycloak and his brothers may be due to the fact that they were Christians. Still more significant is the attitude of the sagas towards Haakon the Bad, whose character seems to undergo a great change—probably a reflection of the change in the popular opinion of Christianity.

Sagas like those of Egill and Kormak relating to the middle or first part of the twelfth century are few in number and usually contain a considerable amount of poetry ; in fact, the prose is not infrequently based upon the poetry. Stories dealing with early Icelandic history from A.D. 874 onwards and Norwegian history of the same period are much less full. In general they appear to be trustworthy, but the details are such as might have been preserved by local or family tradition without the special faculty which is characteristic of the sagas.

Of a totally different character are the sagas relating to times before the settlement of Iceland (A.D. 874). Some of these, such as *Völsunga Saga* and *Hervarar Saga*, deal with events as far back as the fifth century, and are, to a great extent, paraphrases of poems, many of which have come down to us. Very frequently, too, whether based on poems or not, the narrative bears the stamp of fiction.

Conditions in Iceland were especially favourable to the development of the art of story-telling, owing partly to the isolated position of the country itself and to the difficulties of communication across the wide tracts of land separating the various settlements within it, partly also to the love of travel which characterised its inhabitants. In Icelandic literature the recital of stories is mentioned in connection with public meetings such as the annual general assembly (*Althingi*)—and with social gatherings at the “ winter-nights,” the chief season for hospitality in Iceland, when travellers had returned from abroad.

The Icelanders were famous, too, for the cultivation of poetry. This art was evidently much practised in Norway in early times, but we hear of hardly any Norwegian poets after Eyvindr (c. 980), whereas in Iceland poetry flourished for a considerable period after this. Icelandic poets were received with favour not only in Norway, but elsewhere, for instance, in England and Ireland. It has been stated that sagas dealing with the early part of the tenth century owe a good deal to poetry, while stories relating to times earlier than the settlement of Iceland are often almost entirely dependent on poetic sources. Moreover, the cultivation of poetry probably contributed very largely to the development of the faculty of story-telling, and the two arts may have been practised by the same person. On this point, however, we have no precise information.

II.

Yet the remarkable fact that this faculty of story-telling was peculiar to the Icelanders alone among the Teutonic peoples still remains to be explained. It can hardly be without significance that the only parallel in Europe for such a form of literature is to be found in Ireland.

From the allusions to this type of composition in old Irish literature it would seem to have existed at a very early period ; so early, that its very origin is obscure. There is, for example, mention of a king's “ company of story tellers” in the eight lines of satirical verse, said to have been composed by the poet Cairbre on Bress, the niggardly king of the Formorians. [12]

Story-telling was one of the many attractions of the great *aonachs* or fairs which played the same part in the national life of Ireland as the *things* or popular assemblies in Iceland. From the poem on the ancient fair of Carman preserved in the *Book of Ballymote*, we can form an idea of the entertainment provided by the professional story-teller : —

“ The tales of Fianna of Erin, a never-wearying entertainment : stories of destructions, cattle-preys, courtships, rhapsodies, battle-odes, royal precepts and the truthful instructions of Fithil the sage : the wide precepts of Coirfic and Cormac.” [13]

The *Book of Leinster* states that the poet who had attained the rank of *ollamh* was bound to know for recital to kings and chieftains two hundred and fifty tales of prime importance (*prím-scéla*), and one hundred secondary ones. [14] The same source gives the names of one hundred and eighty-seven of these tales, the majority of which have not come down to us. These include stories from the three great cycles of legend, viz., that relating to the gods ; to Cuchulain and the warriors of the Red Branch, and to Finn and Fianna. A number of stories relating to the kings of Ireland mentioned in this list have an historical basis ; while there are others purporting to deal with kings as far back as 1000 B.C., which are no doubt partly imaginary, and were invented to arouse popular interest in the past history of the country.

We know of several stories and poems about kings and chieftains who played a prominent part in the wars against the Vikings. The list in *The Book of Leinster* mentions only one, *The Love of Gormflaith for Niall* (i.e., Niall Glundubh (d. 919), a summary of which is contained in the mediæval English translation of *The Annals of Clonmacnois*. In the case of *The Victorious Career of Cellachan of Cashel*, it is difficult to say whether this was originally an oral narrative committed to writing for the first time in the fifteenth century, or whether it was copied from an older manuscript, now lost. Brian Borumha and his sons are the principal characters in *The Leeching of Cian's Leg*, a tale preserved in a sixteenth century manuscript. [15] It is interesting to note here the presence of a strong folk element which would seem to point towards a popular, not a literary origin.

At the close of the tenth century story-telling was in high favour in Ireland, and the professional story-teller was able not only to recite any one of the great historical tales, but to improvise, if the occasion arose. Mac Coisse, the poet attached to the court of Maelsechnaill II., tells in an interesting prose work how his castle at Clartha (Co. Westmeath) was once plundered by the O'Neills of Ulster. He immediately set out for Aileach in order to obtain compensation from the head of the clan, King Domhnall O'Neill (d. 978). On his arrival, he was received with great honour and brought into the king's presence. In response to Domhnall's request for a story, Mac Coisse mentioned the names of a large number of tales including one called *The Plunder of the Castle of Maelmilscotach*. This was the only one with which the king was unfamiliar, so he asked the storyteller to relate it. In it Mac Coisse described, under the form of an allegory, the plundering of his castle by the king's kinsmen. When he had finished he confessed that he himself was Maelmilscotach [16], and he begged the king to grant him full restitution of his property. This the king agreed to do, and the grateful poet then recited a poem of eighteen stanzas which he had composed about the king and his family. [17]

III.

The resemblance which we have noted between Icelandic and Irish customs seem to justify us in suggesting that they may be due in part to some influence exercised by the one people upon the other. There is in fact a certain amount of evidence which renders such influence probable. We know that Irish poets and storytellers were welcome guests at the court of the Scandinavian kings in Ireland. In an elegy on Mathgamain, Brian's brother, [18] one of the Munster bards, says he finds it difficult to reproach the foreigners because of his friendship with Dubhcena, Ivarr's son. [19] And during the lifetime of Brian, Mac Liag, Brian's chief poet, and Mac Coisse, poet and storyteller to Maelsechnaill II., visited the court of Sigtryggr and remained there for a whole year. On their departure they gave expression to their feelings of regret in a poetical dialogue : —

Mac Liag : It is time for us to return to our homes,
We have been here a whole year ;
Though short to you and me may seem
This our sojourn in Dublin,

Brian of Banba deems it too long
That he listens not to my eloquence. [20]

Another poem of Mac Liag's, in which he addresses the Scandinavians of Dublin as "the descendants of the warriors of Norway," was also composed in Dublin, at the court of 'Olaf of the golden shields,' soon after the battle of Clontarf. [21]

On the other hand Icelandic sources mention at least three skálds who made their way to Ireland during the tenth century : Thorgils Orraskáld, " who was with Olaf Cuaran in Dublin, [22] and Kormak (Ir. Cormac) who fought with Harold Greycloak in Ireland (c. 961). [23] In *Gunnlaugs Saga Ormstungu* (ch. 8) there is a charming account of the poet's reception in Dublin, shortly after Sigtryggr became king (c. 994) : Gunnlaug went before the king and said :

" I have composed a poem about you, and I would like to get a hearing for it."

The king answered : " No man has yet made a poem about me, and I will certainly listen to yours."

Then Gunnlaug recited his poem in praise of " Cuaran's son," and the king thanked him for it.

Sigtryggr then called his treasurer and asked : " How shall I reward him for this poem ?"

" As you will, lord," replied the treasurer.

" Shall I give him two merchant-ships ?" asked the king.

" That is too much," said the treasurer, " other kings give, as rewards for songs, costly gifts, good swords or gold rings."

So the king gave Gunnlaug his own garments of new scarlet cloth, a tunic ornamented with lace, a cloak lined with choice furs, and a gold ring which weighed a mark. Gunnlaug remained for a short time there and then went to the Orkneys.

It is to be noted, too, that among the original settlers in Iceland there were a not inconsiderable number who came from Ireland and the islands off the west coast of Scotland. These included some of the most important families in the country. We may mention especially Authr, widow of Olaf the White, king of Dublin, with her brothers Ketill the Foolish, Björn, Helgi Bjóla and all their families and dependants ; [24] also Helgi the Lean who had been brought up partly in the Hebrides, partly in Ireland, Jörundr the Christian and Orlygr the Old. [25] Not a few of these were partly of Irish stock such as Helgi the Lean, Askill Hnokkan and his brother Vilbaldr who were descendants of Cearbhall, king of Ossory (d. 877). [26] Sometimes we hear of settlers who were of pure Gaelic blood, like Kalman (Ir. Colman) from the Hebrides, [27] and Erpr, son of a Scottish earl Maeldúin, [28] and Myrgjol (Ir. Muirgheal), daughter of Gliomall, an Irish king. [29]

It has been urged [30] that the persons mentioned in the *Landnámabók* as coming from Ireland and Scotland form a very small percentage of the whole number of settlers. But we have to remember that by no means all the colonists are mentioned in the records and genealogies. There can be no doubt that a number of slaves and freedmen accompanied the more important settlers to Iceland, and of these probably the great majority were of Celtic blood. Their numbers, too, were being continually reinforced during the tenth century. It is difficult, however, to estimate how many they were, because in the case of thralls Icelandic names were not infrequently substituted for Irish ones. Thus, of the Irish thralls whom Hjörleifr brought to Iceland only one, Dufthakr, had a Gaelic name.

Such slaves were not always people of humble origin. Gilli (Ir. Giolla), the slave who killed Thorsteinn, son of Hallr [31] of Side, was a descendant of Cearbhall, king of Ossory. Mention is made elsewhere of Nithbjörg, daughter of the Irish king Biolan (Ir. Beollán) who was carried off from Ireland in a Viking raid ; [32] also of Melkorka, King Myrkjartan's daughter, who was bought from a slave dealer in Norway. [33] Icelandic custom did not necessarily prevent the children of slave women from becoming persons of wealth and influence ; indeed Osvífr, son of Nithbjörg and Olaf Pái, son of Melkorka, were among the leading men in Iceland in their time. It is not unreasonable, then, to sup-

pose that by the end of the tenth century Irish blood had found its way into a large number of Icelandic families.

Lastly we may observe that the Irish and Icelandic sagas bear certain resemblances to one another which are at least worthy of attention. In both cases the narrative prose is frequently interspersed with poetry, and in both the use of dialogue is a prominent feature. Nor is the subject matter dissimilar. Indeed it is possible to apply to the Irish stories a classification roughly similar to that which is adopted for the more important of the Icelandic sagas. [34]

As far as the “ stories of the kings” are concerned, the resemblance is most striking in the case of sagas relating to early times such as *Ynglinga Saga*. There are Irish stories, too, corresponding to a certain extent to the *Islendinga Sögur*, though they are comparatively few in number, while many of the *Fornaldar Sögur* may be said to bear a certain resemblance to the Irish epic stories.

The evidence discussed above seems to afford some ground for suspecting that the saga literature of Iceland and Ireland may not be wholly unconnected, and, as we have seen, the conditions of the time, particularly the frequent intercourse between the two countries, were such as to favour the exercise of literary influence by one people upon the other. If so, one can hardly doubt that in this case the influence came to Iceland from Ireland.

We have seen that the prose saga appears to have developed in Iceland in the course of the tenth century. There are indeed narratives relating both to the settlement of Iceland and to still earlier events in Norway. But these, in so far as they can be regarded as trustworthy traditions—not embellished by fiction in later times—are quite brief, and not far removed from such local or family traditions as one could find in other parts of the world. The detailed and elaborate type of story which we dealt with in Section I., and which is the distinctive feature of Icelandic literature, can hardly be traced back beyond the end of the tenth century.

The prose stories of Ireland, on the other hand, are without doubt much earlier. Although we have few MSS. of Irish prose dating from a period before the twelfth century, yet it is generally agreed that many of the forms preserved, e.g., in the *Yellow Book of Lecan* MS. of the *Tain Bo Cualnge* must be derived from an earlier MS. of not later than the seventh or early eighth century. The oral saga in Ireland is therefore of great antiquity.

It may, of course, be argued that if the prose saga arose spontaneously in Ireland, there is no reason why it should not also have arisen independently in Iceland. But the existence of this form of literature in Ireland may be due to special circumstances for which Iceland offers no parallel. The oldest Irish sagas belong to that class of literature known as the heroic epic, a class which among the Teutonic peoples—as indeed among all other European peoples—makes its first appearance in verse. The exceptional treatment of this subject in Irish is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that among the Celtic peoples the *file* or professional minstrel occupied a distinguished position in society. It would be strange if the professional minstrel were not primarily concerned with heroic epic poetry in Ireland as in other countries, since in the times to which our records refer the recitation of the heroic prose epics was one of the chief functions of the *file*.

On the other hand, we know nothing of the ancient forms of Irish poetry. The earliest poems that have come down to us have a metrical form which is not native. Earlier than these—in the fifth and sixth centuries—there is evidence for the cultivation of “ rhetorics,” or metrical prose, but this too appears to be of foreign origin. [35] The unique feature in Irish literature, namely, the fact that the early epic, as it has come down to us, appears in prose instead of poetry may be due, at least in part, to the disappearance of native metrical forms before the fifth century. It may be that the prose epics originated in paraphrases of early poems such as we find, for instance, in the *Völsunga Saga*, which is a paraphrase of older poems dealing with the story of Sigurthr. Or the change may have been more automatic, the outcome of a process of metrical dissolution similar to that of which the beginnings may be seen in certain Anglo-Saxon and German poems. Such metrical dissolution would be favoured, if not necessitated, by the extensive phonetic changes which took place in Ireland in the fifth century. But into this question it is not necessary to enter here. It is sufficient to point out that Irish Saga literature, according to all appearances, began in the heroic epic, a form which in all other literatures, including Norse, originated in poetry.

The preservation of poetry, narrative or other, by oral tradition is a common enough phenomenon among many peoples, but the traditional prose narrative, except in such primitive forms as folk-tales, is very rare. Since we find it both in Ireland and Iceland—and apparently in no other European countries—and since we have found so many other connections between these two countries, the theory that the Icelandic Saga owes its origin, however indirectly, to the Irish Saga, seems to deserve more serious consideration from scholars than it has yet received.

- [1] It has been stated (cf. E. Mogk : *Geschichte der Norwegisch-Isländischen Literatur*. Strassburg, 1904, p. 830) that many of Saxo's stories came from Norway, where they had been collected by an Icelander in the twelfth century. There can be no doubt that stories of some kind relating to families and localities especially stories which accounted, or professed to account for local names were current in Norway down to this time. Such stories form the basis of many of the *Fornaldar Sögur*, but in all probability these had been familiar to Icelanders from the first settlement of the island, or at least during the tenth century. We have no evidence that they ever gained literary form in Norway. (Cf. Fiunur Jónsson : *Old Norskt Litteraturs Historie*, II., p. 791.)
- [2] First Nine Books of the Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus. Translated by Oliver Elton ed. by F. York Powell, p. 5). It is not clear whether Saxo had Icelandic manuscripts before him, but his words leave no doubt that he was aware of the fact that stories had been carried on by oral tradition.
- [3] This was probably something in the nature of a fairy-tale like the *Huldre-eventyr* of modern Norway. We may refer to the story of the witch Huldr given in *Ynglinga Saga* (ch. 16), and to the supernatural being Holda or Holle in German folk-lore.
- [4] "*hafa meth sér trottkonu-söguna*," From these words Finnur Jónsson (*op. cit.*, II., p. 792) concludes that Sturla possessed a written copy of the saga.
- [5] *Sturlunga Saga*, II., pp. 270-271.
- [6] *Thorgil's Saga ok Hafliða* (*Sturlunga Saga*, Vol. I., p. 19).
- [7] *Fornaldar Sögur*, Vol. II., p. 323.
- [8] *Harald's Hædrada Saga*, ch. 99 (*Fornmanna Sögur*, VI., pp. 354-356).
- [9] *Fóstbroethra Saga*, ch. 23.
- [10] *Njáls Saga* (by G. W. Dasent), chs. 153, 154.
- [11] *Droplaugarsona Saga* (*Ljosvetninga Saga*), p. 175 (*Austfirihinga Sögur*, ed. Jakobsen).
- [12] The poem is preserved in the *Book of the Dun Cow* (twelfth century), but the form of the language in which it is written is considerably earlier than this date ; indeed, the meaning of the verses would be quite obscure if we did not possess explanatory glosses.
Cf. D'Arbois de Jubainville : *The Irish Mythological Cycle*, p. 96 (Best's translation) : also D. Hyde : *A Literary History of Ireland*, p. 285.
There is a possible reference to an Irish storyteller in an inscription on a stone cross at Bridgend (Glamorganshire). The inscription, which is thought to date from the seventh century, runs :—
(Co)nbellini possuit hanc crucem pro anima eius Scitliuissi . . . Rhys takes *scitliuissi* to be an Irish word, a compound of *viss* (Ir. *fis*, 'knowledge') and *scitl* (*scetlon*, *scél*, a 'story' 'news') and surmises that *scitliviss* might mean a 'messenger,' a 'bringer of news,' a 'scout.' (Cf. *Celtic Britain*, pp. 313-315.) But *scitliviss* can also be explained as "one who knows stories." In that case we might infer that story-telling was a profession in Ireland as early as the seventh century ; but the reading appears to be too uncertain to justify us in attaching any great importance to the inscription.
- [13] O'Curry : *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, II., p. 543.
- [14] O'Curry : *Lectures on the MS. Materials of Irish History*, pp. 243, 583.
- [15] Printed in *Silva Gadelica* (ed. Standish O'Grady), Vol. I., pp. 296-305.
Stones of Brian and his sons are still current in the Gaelic-speaking districts of Ireland. (See *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, Band I., pp. 477-492.) They are, however, more likely to be folk tales, in which the deeds of mythical heroes have been transformed to historical people, than sagas transmitted by oral tradition from generation to generation.
- [16] *i.e.*, "son of the honeyed words," a poet.
- [17] O'Curry : *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, II., pp. 130-135.
- [18] Mathgamain was murdered at the instigation of King Ivarr of Limerick in 976.
- [19] *War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill*, pp. 98-99.
- [20] O'Curry, *op. cit.*, II., p. 128.

- [21] *Ibid.*, II., p. 125.
 [22] *Landnámabók*, I., ch. 19.
 [23] *Kormak's Saga*, ch. 19.
 [24] Cf. *Landnámabók*, II., ch. 16, etc.
 [25] *Landnámabók*, V., ch. 15.
 [26] *Ib.*, IV., ch. II.
 [27] *Ib.*, II., ch. I.
 [28] *Ib.*, II., ch. 16.
 [29] *Ib.*, II., ch. 16.
 [30] Finnur Jónsson, *op. cit.*, II., pp. 187-188 (n) ; W. A. Craigie : *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, Band I., p. 441.
 [31] " This Gilli was the son of Jathguth, who was the son of Gilli, son of Bjathach (Ir. Blathach), son of King Kjarval of Ireland." (*Thorsten's Saga Síthu—Hallssonar*, appendix. ' *Draumr Thorsteins Síduhalssonar*, Asmundarson's Ed., pp. 26, 27.
 [32] *Landnámabók*, II., ch. n.
 [33] Cf . p. ante.
 [34] Cf . p. 66, ante.
 [35] See Kuno Meyer : *Learning in Ireland in the Fifth Century* (Dublin, 1913).

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