

CONSTITUTION AND LAW

I. HISTORICAL SUMMARY

The colonization of Iceland was an entirely private undertaking on the part of the colonists themselves, who came thither in straggling bands from different quarters, and had no community of government. The first 60 years of the history of the country form a separate period, while as yet there was no political organization for the whole island. It is not till 930 that *the Icelandic commonwealth* comes into being, when Althingi (the general assembly for the whole country) is established and a code of laws (Úlfjót's Code) adopted for the whole country.

The Icelandic commonwealth was a free and sovereign state, the most characteristic features in its constitution being the assemblies („Things“) and the aristocracy. The *godar* (chiefs or priests), wielding the general government of the country, were at first probably 36. But later on, or about 965, their number was increased to 39, with a further addition of 12 *godords* (priesthoods or chieftaincies) in 1005. The old *godar* or chiefs were invested with much greater influence on the government than the new ones. The *godords* were not strictly geographical; they were a kind of personal union between the *godar* or chiefs on the one hand and their thingmen on the other, based on mutual confidence, and entered into for purposes of defence and dissolvable by either party at will. The office of the *godar* was indeed of a public character, but in some respects it was treated as the *godar*'s private property. It could not only be transmitted as an inheritance, but it might also be sold or given away without the thingmen having a voice in the disposal of it. A *godord* could be vested in several persons jointly, and similarly a single *godar* might hold a number of *godords*. This gradually led to the accumulation of the *godords* in the