

metres, and a long practice has enabled the Icelanders to detect at once the least flaw in the alliteration and assonance of verse. Indeed, most Icelanders may be said to have at one time or other of their life turned a *ríma*-verse as neatly as a Welshman an "englyn"; for the art of verse-making is at present as high in reputation among the Icelanders as ever. The greatest Icelandic poet now living, Mr. Einar Benediktsson, has rendered homage to the *ríma* by composing one himself (about 160 stanzas) in the most intricate *ríma*-metre (sléttubönd, palindrome). And though the more complicated metrical forms have for the second-rate poet proved so difficult to handle as sometimes to necessitate the sacrifice of both thought and natural sequence of words, it is none the less true that much of the finest and most vigorous poetry in our language is composed in elaborate metres. — The forms based on the old metrical rules have always been faithfully adhered to, though foreign influences have now and then for a short space of time dulled the ear and tempted to easier metre and a less polished rime. This was the case with the Danish ballads introduced into Iceland in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. They were slipshod translations, which enjoyed some popularity for a time, but soon receded into oblivion. The same fate awaited the Lutheran hymns (of foreign origin) with which the country was flooded during, and some time after, the Reformation. They were poor translations marred by extremely faulty rimes, though the metres themselves were for the most part new and good. The national tendency soon asserted itself; the hymns were gradually recast, and bishop *Guðbrandur Thorláksson* (1542—1627), the great champion of Lutheranism in Iceland, even went so far as to have certain portions of the Bible turned into metrical form (*rímur*) so as to make them current coin among the people. But native hymns which soon arose, though poor enough at first, gradually developed considerably, and reached their highest level in the *Passion-Hymns* of the Rev. *Hallgrímur Pétursson* (1614—1674) who with his intensity of feeling, his inexhaustible wealth of imagery and wise thought is by far the greatest religious poet Iceland ever produced. But he is also great in his secular poetry, much of which still lives on the lips of the people. His *Passion-Hymns* went into their forty-sixth edition on the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the poet's death. Every year, almost down to the present day, these hymns have been sung at family worship in every Icelandic home, and have thus been to the people an ever-flowing fountain of faith and wise thoughts.