

the sagas themselves; that would be like recarving a perfect statuary in order to produce something more than perfect.

The historical bent is also seen in our patriotic poetry, in which the nineteenth century is particularly rich. Almost every poem on Iceland teems with reflections on her history, sometimes expressing regret for lost renown, sometimes predicting a bright future yet in store for the nation. Even in poems picturing Icelandic scenery the historical element is present, and the reason is not far to seek: almost every local name has its history, every farm has been the scene of events preserved in tradition and saga, so that the mind is unconsciously attracted to the past as much as to the present. But these are not the only themes our poets work on; they produce humorous verses, satires, elegies, philosophical poems, and stanzas on all the workings of the human heart; they present us with pictures of every phase of Icelandic life, of the farmer with his scythe, and the shepherd with his flock; of the sailor in his boat, and of travels across hill and dale; there are poems on the weather, on the seasons, on our flora and fauna. In this connexion one kind of Icelandic poetry may be mentioned which can scarcely be paralleled in other literatures, viz. the *Pony Verses*. The pony is the most useful servant of the Icelander, and without the services of this excellent animal the country would have been uninhabitable. Many an Icelandic steed has therefore had a funeral poem which a prince might envy; and a selection of the best of this poetry would fill a bulky volume. In a word, any and every incident may call forth a poem, for making ditties has always been a popular sport among the Icelanders, and some of our best poets have been men in humble life.

During this period many foreign metres have been adopted in addition to the court and *rimur* metres which are still as much in vogue as ever. But the foreign metres have been changed so as to bring them into accordance with Icelandic metrical rules, retaining the alliteration, rime-syllables, etc.

I shall now proceed to mention the principal poets of this era.

The Rev. *Jón Thorláksson* (1743—1819) partly belongs to the eighteenth century; but with his translations of foreign works, e. g. Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Klopstock's *Messias*, Pope's *Essay on Man*, a. s. o., he has had great influence on the poets who came after him. He is also the author of hymns, occasional poems and witty verses which to this day live on the lips of the people.

*Bjarni Thorarensen* (1786—1845) governor (*amtmaður*) wrote mostly