

but in order to understand and explain this phenomenon, it is necessary to take a brief survey of the origin and character of the Icelandic people.

Iceland was colonized by the strong Norwegian race, and many of the settlers were of high birth and independent spirit. They were men of a wide horizon, had seen much of other lands, and, occupying an uninhabited country, were hampered with no laws but those which the natural conditions of the land, their own intellect, will and energy prescribed. In 930 they founded an aristocratic republic with an organization in many respects unique and their own. Seventy years later Christianity was established by law as the religion of the country. The government of the church was, however, in many ways different from that adopted in other catholic countries. In all their work there is a creative force, which stamps it as their own. They had inherited such culture as Norway had to offer and carried it with them to their new home, where it blossomed forth into a new and original growth. The old lore, preserved in tradition, saga, and poetry of times past, was to them more valuable than gold, for in their view fame was the only immortal thing: I know one thing alone that never dies: a dead man's fame.

And there were many things worthy of being remembered: The old country which they had left with all that it held dear to them: Their homesteads (*óðul*), their kinsmen and their friends. These recollections ever gained in force and fullness from the continual goings abroad of the settlers, either to see their friends and kindred, to take possession when they fell heirs to properties, or to procure some necessities which were unobtainable in Iceland, or to seek wealth and renown at the courts of kings. The family feeling was strong, the family a kind of mutual insurance association, and kinsman avenged kinsman, or took weregild for him, etc. A man's position in the community depended in no small degree on the offensive and defensive power of the family to which he belonged, and as most of the Icelanders were of high birth, it must naturally have been a source of pride to them to recall and recount the names of their forefathers and kinsmen both in Norway and Iceland. The spirit of rivalry among the families made them keen to detect the characteristics and individual qualities of persons, and by letting their thoughts roam between the old country and the new one and over the events taking place in both, their minds were kept awake and fertile. And, indeed, there was much, worth remembering: the departure of the settlers from Norway, their