

voyage to Iceland, the colonization of that country together with all that happened there while the young nation was settling down. Those were stirring times, particularly the tenth century, the so-called Saga Age, when most of the events, related in the Icelandic sagas (*Íslendinga sögur*) took place. Quarrels and skirmishes, manslaughter and blood feuds were of almost daily occurrence, for the colonists were a strong-willed, hardy, enterprising breed of men, who would brook molestation or encroachment of no kind whatsoever, either in word or deed, and would take terrible vengeance on those who offended them. Stories of these events were in the first place told in the families which were involved in them, but they doubtless had a wider circulation, for the general assembly for the whole country (Althingi), established in 930, was not only a meeting for the transaction of legislative or judicial business, but an intellectual centre as well. Every year all men of means and prominence from all over the country would go to Althingi, for all important matters were settled there. Here was therefore an excellent place for the exchange of the latest news. Newly returned travellers would naturally come to Althingi and there relate their news from foreign parts. Here, then, was a rare opportunity for the poet who was collecting materials for the poem he was composing on the king he meant to visit when going abroad. And so far did the Icelandic bards roam in those days, that it does not sound strange at all when one of them says:

*Lít ek of öxl til Krítar*, i. e. 'I look over my shoulder to Crete'.

Many of these scalds remained for years with foreign kings and princes, not only in the Scandinavian countries, but also in the Orkneys, in Scotland, England, and Ireland; they even travelled as far as Normandy, Rome, and Constantinople. And their poems would in due time be carried back to Iceland and preserved there together with the stories on which they were founded. Thus there were two main streams into which this historical literature divided itself; on the one hand there were the stories of events taking place in Iceland, on the other those related about events happening in Scandinavia and other countries visited by the Icelanders.

During the greater part of the eleventh and twelfth centuries the country was peaceful. The ascendancy of the church was growing, though as yet gradually, but the church was national in its policy, for the sons of many leading Icelanders took interest in learning and scholarship and even studied sufficiently to be ordained as priests. In the latter half, and towards the end, of the eleventh century, we hear