

of men who are termed learned (*fróðir*); they are the men who gathered together the traditions of the past; they collected genealogies and stories of events in by-gone times and probably worked them into more or less connected series, and were, most likely, the sources of the saga writers.

The first matter that was reduced to writing in Icelandic was the old laws of the country; this was done during the winter 1117—1118, and soon after that were penned the genealogies which constitute one of the chief elements of the written saga now about to take its rise. *Sæmundur* the priest (the learned = *fróði*) who had studied in Paris, wrote an historical work in Latin, now lost. — *Ari Thorgilsson* the learned (*hinn fróði*, 1067—1148) was the first man to write history in the vernacular. This was the famous *Íslendingabók* or Book of Icelanders. Of this booklet he made two recensions, the second and shorter of which has come down to posterity. In this second recension he has, he says, omitted, genealogies and Lives of Kings, which probably means a list of the kings of Norway down to his own time together with their regnal years and perhaps short sketches of their lives. *Íslendingabók* is a short history of Iceland from its colonization in 874 down to 1120. It is a history of the Icelandic commonwealth and church, briefly told, indeed, but in a lucid and vigorous language. Ari's method is strictly scientific: he relates nothing that may not be considered as fully reliable, and gives his authorities for almost every statement. Ari's book, therefore, became the great pattern for later Icelandic history writers, to whom he points the way in the following words: 'And as to whatever be misstated in this history, it is right to hold rather that which shall be proved more true'. — Professor Sig. Nordal has well described the development of historical writing in Iceland as follows: 'At first it combines a strictly scientific method with simpleness and purity of style. But gradually it has to yield more and more to the demands of the art of popular story-telling both in point of entertainment and artistic delineation of character. In the clash and combination of these two tendencies historical writing reaches its highest level. But then the informative and entertaining elements become more and more divergent, and soon decline sets in'.

Ari's work opened, as it were, the sluice-gates of historical writing which now pours forth with incredible force during the latter part of the twelfth and the whole of the thirteenth century in two main currents, one relating stories of events which had occurred in Iceland, the other those taking place abroad. In the great number of sagas,