

They show a mastery of the art of story-telling such as has perhaps never since been equalled in any literature till the nineteenth century.

A separate saga (*Kristni saga*) was written about the introduction of Christianity in Iceland and the formal acceptance of that religion by the community, and another (*Hungurvaka*) relating the career of the first five bishops who held the see of Skálholt. *Hungurvaka* and *Kristni saga* are continued by separate sagas of some of the leading bishops, two of which, both of considerable historical interest, date from the fourteenth century. 'The Lives of the Bishops' are veritable mines of information, and for about two-thirds of the eleventh century they are our chief authorities for the civil history of the country. From the first quarter of the twelfth century onwards, almost to the close of the thirteenth, we have a steadily increasing saga literature dealing with secular chiefs and extending from 1117—1284. These sagas are preserved in the great composite work known by the title of *Sturlungasaga* or the history of the Sturlungs, written by different authors, but the main part of it is the work of *Sturla Thórðarson* (1214—1284), Snorri Sturluson's nephew, and is called the *Íslendingasaga*. It is the general history of Iceland during Sturla's own time, where special prominence is given to the saga of the author's own family, the Sturlungs, and it furnishes an admirable description of Icelandic life and manners during this troubled period, when the factions of the *goðar* (chiefs) and their unrelenting contentions for power exceeded all bounds and ultimately led to the fall of the Icelandic republic. The *Íslendingasaga* is written with the utmost minuteness of detail and such impartiality that the compiler of the Sturlunga says of Sturla: 'and we trust him both as regards wisdom and frankness to tell the story (truthfully), for we knew him to be the wisest and most moderate of men'.

Now, turning to the other main branch of our historical literature, Ari, as already stated, was the first man who wrote in Icelandic a work on the kings of Norway. Others took up his work, and at first stories of individual kings were written and certain periods of Norwegian history dealt with. Some of the authors of these sagas are known to us, as abbot *Karl Jónsson* who put together the *Sverrir's saga*; others are anonymous works, now lost in their original shape or embodied in compilations of Norwegian history which are still extant and go down to the year 1177, when *Sverrir's saga* begins. But the most famous recension of the lives of the Norwegian kings and earls is that written by *Snorri Sturluson* (1178—1241), the great chief