

and poet. He put the coping-stone, as it were, on Icelandic history writing. His immortal work, the '*Heimskringla*', is the history of the Kings of Norway from the earliest times to the fall of Eysteinn in 1177. In scientific exactness, in splendid stateliness and purity of diction it far surpasses all other works on the Norwegian Kings. Snorri makes copious use of the writings of his predecessors, sometimes embodying whole passages from them in his work, but polishing them and rejecting all spurious matter and skilfully weaving them into a connected saga, where one thing prepares and leads up to another. His characters are drawn with masterly skill, and in profound understanding of all sorts of men, heathen and Christian, and their motives, he stands almost unrivalled among historians. His style combines ease and stateliness in a rare degree in its simple grace of movement. Snorri is justly numbered among the greatest historians of all times, and 'in dramatic conception of history he surpasses even Thucydides' (E. Mogk).

And later, when Snorri's nephew, Sturla Thórðarson, had written the sagas of King Hákon Hákonarson and his son, King Magnús lagabætir (the Law-Mender), the Icelanders had succeeded in presenting an unbroken record of the Norwegian Kings from pre-historic times down to the year 1280. But they did more. They wrote about the colonization of Greenland by the Icelanders and of their life there; about the discovery of Vinland (America) and the voyages thither; they wrote the *Færeyinga saga* (the Saga of the Faroese) about the colonization of the Faroe Islands, the quarrels of the islanders, the introduction of Christianity there, and how the isles came under Norwegian rule; they put together the history of the Orkney Earls (*Orkneyinga saga*, *Jarla saga*), telling the story of these islands from their colonization by the Norsemen down to about 1170; and finally, they wrote a collection of stories of the Kings of Denmark (*Knytlinga saga*), from Harald Gormsson, called Bluetooth, to the death of Knut the Saint in 1186. The *Ynglinga saga* deals in the main with Sweden, but, besides, the history of that country is often touched upon in the lives of the Norwegian Kings.

Besides all these historical works the Icelanders, at the close of the thirteenth century, began to write down those sagas which are known under the title of *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* or sagas of olden times in Scandinavia. For centuries many of them had, no doubt, been handed down from generation to generation, and told for purposes of entertainment, before they were deemed worthy of being reduced to