

writing, while the scientific tendency reigned supreme and historical subjects had not yet been exhausted. Some of these sagas are doubtless founded on genuine traditions, though the facts are now so intermingled with fictitious elements as to make it impossible to separate the one from the other. Others, on the other hand, are pure fiction, mostly centring round some famous hero, possessed of rare magic weapons and going through some stock adventures, such as fighting trolls and monsters, and always in the end winning a glorious victory. But these sagas are unlike the Icelandic sagas in one essential particular: they all end well.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the Icelanders translated a number of sagas from Latin, both of religious and secular character. And in the fourteenth century they began to write novels, the heroes of some of them being Icelanders who are known to have existed; others were written in the style of the *Fornaldarsögur*, and yet others after the manner of foreign chivalric romances.

As regards *other branches of literature*, mention should here be made of the remarkable collection of laws (*Grágás*) from republican times; of the two codes (*Járnsiða* and *Jónsbók*) which came with the union with Norway; of *Snorri Sturluson's Edda*, which contains the Scandinavian mythology and *Skáldskaparmál*, i. e. a scientific treatise giving a complete analysis of Scaldic versification (a kind of poetic gradus); of four articles on linguistics, the first of which, dating from about 1140, discusses Icelandic phonetics, and how the Latin alphabet should be adapted for the requirements of the Icelandic language. The author of this article proves himself an able phonetician. Translations were also made of a great many homilies, and a number of articles written on geography, on natural history, on mathematics, on chronology, etc. The Icelanders of that age could have said of themselves: "Nothing of what is human do I account foreign to myself" (*Humani nihil a me alienum puto*).

Thus, at the end of the thirteenth century, the small Icelandic nation had created a wonderful literature which has ever since been her vital nerve and an ever-flowing fountain of strength. This literature she has preserved by diligently copying the manuscripts and handing them down from generation to generation until the time of collecting (by *Árni Magnússon*, 1663—1730) and printing them began. But not content with the mere custodianship of these literary treasures, the Icelanders have to the best of their ability tried to increase and