

ing to Iceland its full due, of emulating its freedom and enlightenment during the days when it was a flourishing republic, and before it became christianized."* Norse ethics "have been the source of infinite good."† The literature of Iceland presents "in many respects an ideal civilization."‡ The Scandinavian North has "individually and collectively sustained the most brilliant role that has ever been acted in Europe, or in the world. * * * * The assumption of Christian humility and weakness so completely destroyed their ancient pride that they were not capable of reasserting themselves and gaining their former rank."§ These exalted ideas are supposed to be culled from the sagas. If the sagas were actually silent as to the moral character of the people in pagan times, the red-handed Erik and the treacherous Freydis, who not only caused the death of so many innocent men, but with her own hand butchered five women, solely for the sake of gain, should put to shame such declarations. The sagas are not silent on the moral characteristics of the people, and whosoever reads the accounts therein contained must wonder if they had within them the divine image. The feuds of the Icelanders were notorious. The degree of a man's civilization may be measured according to his ideas of woman. Saxo Grammaticus, the ablest of all the sagamen, says: "Thus you will see the worth of a woman's word. They are chaff before the wind, and change like the billows of the sea. Who can rely on a woman's heart that alters like a flower shedding its leaves, or as the seasons change, obliterating each other's traces?" In matters of marriage there was little love-making. The wishes of the women were seldom consulted, and they were disposed of to the best of advantage by their fathers or guardians. Even the very word (*brud-kaup*) means "wife-deal," in the sense of a sale. On the marriage day it was bad taste not to be drunk and find a bed on the rushes on the floor. Solid drinking continued from Wednesday until Saturday. Polygamy was also practiced. Divorce was frequent. In the *Laxdaeler's* saga—one of the complex sagas of West Iceland—examples are given showing on what slight grounds divorce could be obtained. Gudrun, in 989, at the age of fifteen, was married to the Thorwald of Garpsdolen. Because she was not consulted in regard to certain personal ornaments she formed an acquaintance with Thord Ingunsson, and through his advice she made her husband a shirt with a large opening in the neck. Now it was the law if a woman dressed as a man, or vice versa, it was a reasonable ground for a divorce. Thorwald wore the shirt, which was so low as to expose the nipples of his breast. A divorce was declared. This same Thorwald Ingunsson had a wite nicknamed Brok Aude, because she wore breeches like a man. So Thorwald declared himself divorced, and shortly after married Gudrun.

*Icelandic Discoverers, p. 183.

†Ibid., p. 192.

‡Ibid., p. 195.

§Ibid., p. 195.