

stronger than other men, and when not under the influence were tolerably tractable; but otherwise were dangerous, sparing neither friend nor foe, man, woman nor child; would howl like beasts, bite their shields, fall upon sharp weapons and eat fire. Before leaving for Iceland, they compelled Vernund to bind himself to supply them with everything they asked for, in return for their services. They came to Iceland the same year that Erik the Red sailed for Greenland. Soon after their arrival Halle demanded of Vernund to procure him a wife of good Icelandic family. Knowing that no respectable woman would desire such a husband, Vernund temporized with him, which Halle's impatient nature brooked only for a short time, and then gave Vernund sufficient cause to regret that he had brought them to Iceland. Knowing his brother Styr had a blood feud in which he wanted to take action he contrived to hand over to him the two Bærsærks, who proved of great service to him. Halle made love to Styr's daughter Asdis, who was a proud, strong and manlike woman. She entertained no thought of marrying a person of Halle's type. Styr strongly disapproved of the suit. Halle threatened to carry her off by force, when, in order to temporize with him, Styr promised he should marry her provided he and Leikner should make a road through the lava to Björnshavn, and build a fence between the lava and his lands, and also make an enclosure inside the lava. This work was at once performed by the exercise of unusual strength. When it was finished Asdis put on her best dress and met the Bærsærks on their return home, saying nothing to them, but simply walked by their side. They were in a state of great exhaustion as a consequence of the Bærsærkegang, or excitement, having just left them. Styr advised them to have a hot bath, which he heated to such a pitch that the Bærsærks burst the door open, when he speared them as they came out.

Sorcery and witchcraft are also important features in some of the narratives.

In treating of the sagas the extent of those forged must also be considered, and how far those remaining have been tampered with. Some of the Icelandic sagas are known to have been forged. They appear as early as the thirteenth century. All are quite poor, and appear to be wholly apocryphal or else worked up on hints given in genuine stories. Some of these apocryphal writings have been composed within the present century.

That some of the sagas have been worked over by later writers, and others interpolated, there is no room for doubt. As an instance of the former the Nialsaga may serve as an illustration. In style, contents, legal and historical weight, it is the foremost of all sagas. It deals especially with law, and contains the pith and the moral of all early Icelandic history. Its hero is Nial, a type of the good lawyer, placed in contrast with