

his wife Halveig about their mother's property. On the night of September 22d, 1241, he was assassinated by Gissur Thorvaldsson, accompanied by seventy men, all of whom had sworn to kill Snorri Sturlasson, his own friends and kinsmen being the murderers. In this atmosphere of strife he found time to write his history and traditions. The prominent features of his character were cunning, ambition and avarice, combined with want of courage and aversion to effort.

The first sagas were written down on separate scrolls in the generation succeeding that of Ari, or from about 1140 to 1220. Then they passed through different phases, edited and compounded from 1220 to 1260. After this they were padded and amplified (from 1260 to 1300), and during the fourteenth century were collected in large manuscripts. The sagas grew up in the milder days that immediately succeeded the change of faith, when the deeds of the principal families were still cherished, and their exploits narrated by the firesides during the long winters. At all feasts and gatherings there were those particularly adapted to the reciting of the occurrences of the past, and who wove their recitations into such a form as would most readily appeal to the imagination. Each reciter improvised his own comments and injected such statements as best suited his imagination. The artistic features of the story were carefully elaborated and the appropriate finishing touches supplied. The Irish characteristics greatly predominated in the sagas of the west. The best compositions belong to the west, and the name of nearly every classic writer belongs there—or in the place where there is the greatest admixture of Irish blood. But in all the Icelandic sagas there is the same keen grasp of character, the love of action, and that intense delight in blood, which almost assumes the garb of religious passion. The romancing spirit of the south had entered distant Iceland, and the fireside stories became impregnated more or less by its influence. Horn has very justly observed that "some of the sagas were doubtless originally based on facts, but the telling and retelling have changed them into pure myths."\*

In speaking of "dreams of the Sagas," Vicary remarks: "The sagas are often so full of periphrase, and the figurative meaning so dark, and taken at so great a distance from its original sense that more thought must have been suggested to the mind than the skald had conceived. This, no doubt, led the imaginations of people in the saga time to dwell on the nature and importance of dreams, with the result that we have the stories, if not the histories, of the dreams of persons who lived eight or ten centuries since. Their strong points are that they are graphic and with decided color. . . . The real criticism is that the period of the sagas is short relatively, and, however

\*Winsor's "Narrative and Critical History," Vol. I, p. 88.