

In a foot-note Mr. Fiske cites Vigfusson as his principal authority for this characterization of Icelandic literature; but Vigfusson's exact language is: "What we hold is that the Sagas are to be looked upon as epics, founded on fact, not as exact histories."<sup>1</sup> The Saga of Eric the Red is regarded by Mr. Fiske as belonging to the class of historical Sagas, and it is to be found in two versions,—an earlier (Western) one, the *Hauksbok*, which gives an account of events that happened three centuries before it was written; and a later (Northern) version, the *Flateyrbok*, containing considerable additional material concerning the Vinland voyages. This, however, can scarcely be thought to add to its historic value. Mr. Fiske thinks that the *Hauksbok* "may be a faithful transcript of some earlier document since lost." He does not believe that "it will ever occur to any rational being to suggest that Hauk may have written down his version of Eric the Red's Saga from an oral tradition nearly three centuries old. . . . One cannot reasonably doubt . . . it was copied by him . . . from some older vellum not now forthcoming." Finally, in his summing up of his argument Mr. Fiske says:

"It is probable that the facts mentioned in Hauk's document rested upon some kind of a written basis as early as the eleventh century. The data are more scanty than we could wish, but they all point in the same direction. . . . For these reasons it seems to me that the Saga of Eric the Red should be accepted as history."

Such is the line of argument, drawn mainly from a supposed transmission through imagined copies, that is relied upon by Mr. Fiske to establish the historical character of this "quiet and sober narrative, not in the least like a fairy tale," notwithstanding all its strange stories about the "uniped"; and the "big ball swing from a pole over the heads of the white men, falling to the ground with a horrid noise"; "the ships of the Skraellings, with their crews and oars"; the grapes found by Leif's foster-father, Tyrker, upon whose juice he became "quite merry"; the fields of "self-sown wheat," and similar veracious narratives. Because your Committee were unable to see in a Saga abounding in episodes like this more than a poetic narrative based upon certain actual occurrences handed down

<sup>1</sup> "Leif Erikson," by Mrs. Ole Bull. (*Magazine of American History*, March, 1888.)