

hand. How was it to be disposed of? In whatever new course directed, that course was certain to be pursued with extraordinary vigour. It seems reasonable to suppose—so reasonable as to be assumed almost as a matter of course—that, under all the circumstances, the Icelander would betake himself, with his spare time, and with his energy craving to be put to use, to intellectual self-culture. He did so, in fact. He became learned; he became a poet, a historian, a geographer—in short, a cultivator of literature and the sciences generally. The process by which this state of affairs came about can be easily conjectured. In the long winter evenings, when something had to be done to pass the time, the older members of the family circle would entertain and inspire the younger ones with tales—*Sagas*—of the heroic deeds of their fathers in the mother land, or in other countries; or with still older *Sagas* which they had learned in their youth, in old Norway itself. If the actions communicated were of a specially heroic, or otherwise touching character, their narration was clothed in numbers. These frequent repetitions of poems from the *Skalds*, and of tales from the *Sagamen*, would naturally lead admiring listeners to original efforts in the same direction. The Icelander became himself frequently, not only a *Skald*, but even an *Improvvisatore*. The *Sagamen* eventually developed into a historian—into a dispenser of general literature. This result was materially furthered by the spirit of mercantile enterprise which, as already mentioned, had already superseded the Icelandic Norseman's piratical habits. The Icelander, sailing upon every known sea, and endowed with a keenly observing and an inquiring mind, brought home with him from divers countries stores, not only of current news, but also of such valuable information upon general subjects as those foreign parts had to give; and the eagerness with which these stores

were sought by his mentally hungering fellow countrymen, was only equalled by the readiness with which they were dispensed. Thus the Icelanders became what we are now accustomed to call *well-informed* people—the most so, indeed, of any in that portion of the world which, comparatively speaking, we would designate as the most civilized of that period.

The Statehood into which Iceland grew, and the fundamentals of which had been brought over from Norway, was admirably suited to the intellectual development of its people. The *Landnamabok* was a book in which were enrolled the names of all the first Norwegian settlers in Iceland. The *Doomsday Book*, drawn up long afterwards in England, by William the Conqueror, was a similar achievement, although a less perfect work; for this *Landnamabok* is described as 'the most complete national record that has ever been compiled.' The descendants of these original *Landnamens*, with probably a few others who subsequently became land-holders, constituted the State. Of course the most of these—probably all of them, in the earlier history of the State—had servants; some of them, only a few; others, a large retinue. The government of the island, then, was a Republic; or, to speak with more particularity, an Oligarchy, founded upon a very wide basis. We find that between the *Landnamens*, or between the more powerful, or more active of them, on the one hand, and the poorer, or less influential, and the members of the servant class, on the other, there were maintained relationships very similar to those between Patrons and Clients, in the old Roman days. The former frequently employed his eloquence and learning, as well as his other influences—not always strictly incorrupt—in advocating the cause of the latter in their Things. The *Thing*—meaning literally *to speak*, and therefore equivalent to the English word *Parliament*—was an institution which