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## *Icelandic church saga*

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CHAPTER NINE.REFORMATION.

The years 1540-51 saw the passing of the Icelandic Church from the Roman obedience, and its adoption of Lutheran reforms in religion, forcibly sponsored by the Danish administration. This political and ecclesiastical change took effect in the southern and northern dioceses in successive stages, and was followed by a period of religious reconstruction latent in the earlier stages.

(i) The first phase concerns the application of the reforming movement to the southern diocese of Skálholt, which being easier of access to the Continent was earliest to be influenced by the new teaching, and was first tackled by King Christian III's aggressive representatives. The Monastery of Videy was seized, so that Bishop Ógmund's friends were provoked to slay the Danish official responsible, which led to the bishop's supercession and capture, and as he was blind and aged, to his speedy death in 1541.

(ii) The second phase concerns the northern diocese of Hólar, whose fighting bishop Jón Arason took ten years to subdue. He was put to death in 1550, more as a victim of his factiousness than as a martyr for his faith.

(iii) But the Reformation of the Church was not complete without its third and positive phase, in which the inherent individualism and independence of Icelanders, so long repressed, began to respond to evangelical principles and to recover their intellectual and moral vigour.

(i) First Phase (1525-41).

At the beginning of the second quarter of the xvth century the stage was set for the "Change of Fashion" (sidaskipti), as Icelanders term their ecclesiastical reformation:

The Icelandic stage was very small, but the principles at issue were those which were convulsing the countries

of Europe at the time and finding this or that occasion for working themselves out. In Iceland, as usual more than elsewhere, the issue hinged on a few outstanding characters.

Masterful men who might have stepped out of the old sagas held the two episcopal sees; at Skálholt, Øgmund Pálsson (1518-41), and at Hólar, Jón Arason (1534-50). Øgmund was tall, blunt and homely; Jón was dignified, witty and debonair. Øgmund did his best to keep Jón from being elected to Hólar, and when after four years, he was consecrated, clashes arose between the two arrogant and vigorous prelates.

At their first meeting at the Althing in 1526, Øgmund attended with 1,300 retainers, Jón had an escort of 900, and a battle was averted by abbots and priests, on condition that the quarrel should be settled by a fight between two selected champions. The story of these years is recorded in his Annals by Jón Egilsson, grandson of one of the spectators. The duel was fought in the traditional fashion on an island in the Oxará in the presence of the rival parties headed by the bishops. Øgmund's representative succeeded in throwing his opponent, but Jón Arason refused to accept this as final, and both bishops went home in cantankerous mood.

Øgmund returned to Skálholt to find that the cathedral had been burnt to the ground with all its fittings, which he regarded as a sign of Divine displeasure, and in much distress took measures to rebuild it, and to make peace with his colleague in face of larger issues beginning to threaten their common churchmanship. Superstitious people looked on the catastrophe as a sign that the old régime was doomed.<sup>1</sup>

(a) Martin Luther having denounced the papal traffic in Indulgences had faced the Diet of Worms in 1521 on a moral issue, with his: "Here stand I; I can no other". But Luther's moral reforms became entangled in politics; and the double issue reached the north. The kingdom of Denmark-Norway was in the throes of party strife over the royal succession; a conflict which involved Iceland. For in 1533 the Althing,

1. F.J. II p 527 "causa aut casu". cp Oswald: By Fell and Fjord p 241 for the "old wives" amazement.

encouraged by the two bishops, passed a decree to support the King of Norway and the Catholic Church. The latter allegiance made it plain that the Catholic Christian II was their choice. But he was defeated by Christian III, the Lutheran; so that the archbishop of Trondheim fled, and in 1536 Bishop Øgmund had to take the oath to Christian III.<sup>1</sup>

On December 12th of that year Luther wrote to the new king approving the suppression of episcopacy, but urging that confiscated church property should be used to establish schools.<sup>2</sup>

It was natural that the South of Iceland should first feel the political weight of the 'Change of Fashion' for the Danish Governor lived at Bessastadir, on the peninsular just south of Hafnarfjörður, then the chief port for the continent. Claus van Merwitz the Governor, and his Deputy, Didrek von Minden (both German adventurers, though Claus was of Danish extraction), proved inconsiderate and grasping administrators. Bessastadir was exposed to all the gales that blew, while round the corner in Faxafjörð nestled Videy island with its tempting rich monastic farm.

(b) Meanwhile the inward and spiritual side of the Reformation had been making headway in the country. German merchants had brought Lutheran books in their ships from Hamburg. Young ecclesiastics, travelling to improve their education in Denmark and Germany, returned with the new teaching; and, despite the bishops, spread it surreptitiously even in the cathedral precincts.

One of the Skálholt priests, Jón Einarsson, was moved by Lutheran writings to preach a sermon at Candlemas urging that the veneration of saints was idolatrous. This would have been a thankless task, for the cult of Icelandic saints was very popular. At the beginning of the century pilgrimages were so thronged that sixty pilgrims had been drowned on Holy Cross Day in passing over the bridge to the Cross at Kaldadarnes. Jón Einarsson was

1. Jón Espolin: Arbaekur III 79. The Annals state that Christian II appealed to Henry VIII for help, offering him Iceland in return.
2. For Refn in Denmark see Kurtz: Church Hist. 139.2..

reprimanded by the bishop, but he continued his ecclesiastical polemic on ground congenial to Icelandic practice by claiming the authority of St. Paul for the marriage of priests. A young priest, Gisli Jónsson, destined to be a future bishop and re-builder of the Church, was caught studying Luther's translation of St. Luke's Gospel.<sup>1</sup> More influential was the work of Odd and Gissur, both foster-sons of Bishop Ögmund, whose training he had undertaken in the admirable Icelandic manner, with a view to their future usefulness in the Church.

Odd Gottskalksson, son of a former bishop of Hólar, studied in Norway, where he wrestled with the new doctrine in the watches of the night, getting out of bed to engage in fervent prayer, and after three days embraced Lutheranism. On his return home in 1533, the summer of the Althing's manifesto on behalf of Catholicism, he became secretary to the aging Bishop Ögmund. Nevertheless he started to translate the New Testament in Icelandic. After discovery by the bishop, he carried on this epoch-making work in a cow-byre, saying that "as the original Incarnation of the Word of God took place in a stable at Bethlehem, so in similar surroundings the Icelandic Word of God was brought to light". Odd's translation, published in 1540 at the Royal Danish Press at Roskilde, is the earliest existing book printed in Icelandic. It became the basis of the noble Icelandic Bible, which did much to stabilise the old Norwegian language and set the standard of literary revival in the country.<sup>2</sup> To help clergy to face the new demands for evangelical preaching and teaching, Odd also translated Corvinus' Sermons (1546), Bugenhagen's "Passion and Resurrection" (1558) and (? Luther's) Catechism, printed in Iceland in 1562. Odd subsequently became Lawman, and was drowned in 1556 while crossing the Laxá on his pony. Rightly recognised as one of the chief benefactors of his country, his body was buried in the mother-church at Skálholt.

The bishop at this time failing to see the growing strength of the new teaching, sent Gissur Einarsson to be trained in Germany with a view to nominating him as his successor at Skálholt. The young man was a nephew of the Abbess of Kirkjubaer, who had taught him as a boy. But in

1. F.J. II p 539.

2. B.S. II, I. pp 76-7; F.J. III pp 202 sq.; Haraldur Nielsson) Studier pp 182-4.

snite of his patron and his up-bringing, Gissur was greatly impressed by the preaching of Luther and Melancthon in Wittenberg, and returned a convert. When the new Church Code was sent to Iceland by Dr. Pétur Palladius, the Lutheran administrator in Denmark, although it was ignored by Bishop Ógmund, Gissur translated it into the vernacular.<sup>1</sup>

Ógmund by then had grown old and feeble. He was riding in the sunshine one day with some retainers, when his sight suddenly went from him. He was told that the sun was still shining brightly; then he said "Farewell, world! Thou hast served me long enough."<sup>2</sup> He decided on a plan, unusual in Iceland, of appointing an assistant; and, probably suspicious of the Lutheran proclivities of his foster-sons, sent his nephew Sigmund to Trondheim to be consecrated. But Sigmund died soon afterwards, and in 1538 the bishop, with the assent of the clergy, chose his able and astute protégé, Gissur, whose real opinions by then can hardly have been concealed. It is certainly significant that the bishop-elect went, not to Norway whose archbishop was strongly anti-Lutheran, but to Denmark, where Bugenhagen and Palladius were violently promoting Lutheranism under the aegis of King Christian III.

(c) After Gissur set off, the deputy Governor Didrek took action. On the plea that the king had granted to the Governor the monastery of Videy, he attacked the island on Whit-Sunday 1539, rowing across the bay with thirteen retainers, and drove out the monks. He seized the place for the Governor with its 20 cows, 120 sheep and 620 stock-fish.<sup>3</sup> At the ensuing meeting of the Althing the blind old bishop bravely demanded Didrek's authority for this outrage, only to receive an insulting reply, which aggravated popular dissatisfaction and bade fair to undo such spiritual and intellectual work as had been achieved for the reformed Faith.

Didrek went from the Althing to seize the monasteries of Thykkvabaer and Kirkjubaer in the South-east, staying on the way at the bishopstead at Skálholt, where he was hosp-

1. Dipl. Isl. X no. 95, 2 Sept. 1537, Latin & Icelandic.
2. B.S. II pp 267 sq; W.P. Ker: article on Jón Arason.
3. F.J. IV p 92.

itably received by Øgmund, though he again questioned him as to his authority. The bishop was met with further abuse, and replied with the warning that, although he himself was blind and useless, he would not answer for his people if they were further provoked. At that, the cathedral Treasurer sent word round the countryside, and a band of yeomen-farmers marched on the bishopstead and slew Didrek and his followers.<sup>1</sup> These franklins were subsequently exonerated by a local jury of 12 men on the ground that they had executed criminals, but the Governor ignored this finding and denounced Bishop Øgmund to the king.

(d) On March 15, 1540 Gissur was commissioned by the king as Superintendent of Skálholt, and returned soon afterwards to take over the bishopstead and diocese, though on account of his youth, did not receive the Royal sanction for his consecration as bishop until 1542.<sup>2</sup> He was welcomed by the Althing and laid before them the new Church Ordinance, and a letter from the king demanding its adoption and blaming Øgmund for Didrek's death. After heated discussion -- dominated by Bishop Jón, the Code was rejected, -- a rebuff which the bishop rubbed in with a letter he sent the king from the 24 Hólar members. The Althing added a petition for a new Governor in place of "one who does not know or keep the law of the land, and is not of the old Norse tongue". (i.e. Icelandic). To this the king and his council agreed; Van Merwitz was recalled and imprisoned, and it seemed as if the first round of the political and ecclesiastical struggle had been won by the old Icelandic Church.

But the new Governor, Christopher Huitfeldt, ominously arrived next Spring in a Danish warship, having the king's authority to seize the bishops and their extensive property. Soon after his arrival Huitfeldt ordered the arrest of Bishop Øgmund, probably with the connivance of Gissur, who shows up badly at this juncture. The bishop, blind and eighty years of age, was dragged from his bed by night -- an ignoble strategem which would not have been tolerated in heroic days. He was carried off to the official residence at Bessastadir,

1. B.S. II pp 27sq; Jón Egilsson: Annals p 70.
2. Dipl. Isl. X no 228, 29 June 1540, "Eg Gizur Einarsson Sup. Schalholtz stiklis...." For Ordinance see Appendix p 175.

and all his property was confiscated.

That Gissur was implicated in this sorry and unnecessary episode is indicated by a letter written in low German on Whit-Sunday 1541, evangelical in language but not in spirit, urging the 'Good Christopher'... not to let the old fox loose on land again.... lest the people raise an uproar". The letter is headed Jhesus, and signed Gissurus Finari, Superintendens Skálholt.<sup>1</sup> Huitfeldt then put the aged bishop on a ship bound for Denmark, an ordeal which he did not long survive. On a pretext of ransom the governor secured all the bishop's silver and valuables, even to his sister's brooch, and persuaded him to hand over all the episcopal estate, which included about 120 farms - enough to tempt the avarice of an unscrupulous reformer. Gissur had already moved into the bishopstead at Skálholt, after the Althing accepted his appointment as Superintendent of the see, when Øgmund retired to Haukadal. The subsequent Althing in the summer of 1541 met in the presence of the Governor and a Danish Force, and so the new Church Ordinance at last was adopted, though the Hólar members did not vote.

Thus was completed the first phase of the Icelandic Reformation, and no further opposition was encountered from the South. The relative contributions of force and persuasion in this first stage should be fairly borne in mind. Though the result was finally affected by political aggression, in which the new bishop was involved, the ground had been prepared morally and intellectually by the work of Gisli and Odd. The Reformation was much more than an external State imposition. The partisan and political intrigues, scandals and extortions, were but by-products of a deep widespread spiritual movement in the hearts and minds of ordinary men and women groping after real personal religion.

1. Dipl. Isl. X. 618; Ker: Art. on Jón Arason p 15.

SUMMARY OF THE NEW CHURCH ORDER. 2nd Sept. 1537.

(Dipl. Isl. X No 95, pp 117-328 in Icelandic & Latin.)

Adopted Skálholt 1541. Hólar 1551.

1. Doctrine. ... e.g. "This sacrament to be the Body and Blood of Christ to those Christians who eat and drink (the same); and the Body and indeed the Blood of Christ to be solely for eating and drinking in memory of Christ."
2. Education. "There shall be masters in each city and town to ground the youth in reliable teaching."
3. Ceremonial. "Useful and uniform rites to be adopted, so that lower differing rites be not followed."
4. Sustentation. Provision to be made for clergy and poor.
5. Superintendents and their Provosts. (Superattendentes..) Fol. 46. "Superintendents, who are true bishops or archbishops of the Churches..."  
Ordination of... Fol. 62. Some Preacher or Provost to be ordainer.... Supt. to be ordained in his see-town, in church before the altar (ad altare) by a Provost and five or six neighbouring pastors.  
Status of... "The Supt. with an honest wife and children shall have two maids for domestic purposes, a notary, a groom and four-horsed carriage, a page and foster-son with a view to being trained for ordination."  
Ordination of Prestur. To be conducted at the altar. After Veni Creator the Bishop i.e. Superintendent (episcopus sive superattendens) with presbyters lay their hands on the ordinand with Pater noster (vulgariter) and prayer to which all add Amen; followed by the Holy Communion.
6. Books. Bible. Luther's Sermons and Lesser Catechism; 1 Apologies of Philip (Melanchthon); and The New Order-Book.

1. Docts. of the Chr. Church pp 283-94.

IX. Reformation. (ii) Second Phase. Hólar (1542-51)

In the diocese of Hólar transition to the new order proved a much slower and more desperate business than in the South. In the North social and economic causes were not so clamant, and foreign commerce was less flourishing. Men fished and farmed as of old, and so remained independent and conservative. Hólar too had made little recovery from its fifteenth century deadness of scholarship. Bishop Gottskalk, who saw the xivth century in, spent his energies in extortion and excess, showing none of the humane graces of his southern brother. His successor, Jón Arason (1524-50) like the soldier and chieftain he was at heart, made light of any Latin he had learnt as a poor boy from the Abbot of Munkathvera.<sup>1</sup>

But it was Jón Arason's character and conduct rather than any lack of intellectual powers that hindered reformation in the north. He turned his native combativeness and his long standing family feud into a crusade on behalf of the old order. His final attack on his chief antagonist, Dadi Gudmundsson, brother-in-law of Marteinn, Lutheran Bishop of Skálholt, led to his defeat, capture and death in 1550, and the compulsory adherence of his diocese to the new Church Ordinance.

(a) Jón Arason, as was shrewdly said by one of his biographers, had the misfortune to be born out of due time.<sup>2</sup> He was a prelate of the turbulent type, like his predecessor and namesake, Gudmund Arason (1203-37), who had a better excuse by three centuries for his buccaneering episcopate. Bishop Jón lived as an old-fashioned chieftain delighting in wealth and dominance. He married extra ecclesiam, taking a concubina, like a Roman general, in the semi-official way. His helpmeet, Helga, a church Provost's daughter, was a strong-minded woman, and they had a large family. Of the three sons, Ari became Lawman, and Sigurd and Björn became priests. All supported their father's catholic campaign,

1. B.S. II p 326; J.H. II p 12.

2. Adeo miserum est, infelici tempore natum est. Jón Egilsson: *Memoirs*; Björn of Skardsá: *Annals*; W.P.Ker: *Art on JA* p 10.

though at least two of them had other inclinations. A daughter Thorunn married a priest Isleif Sigurdsson, but after her husband's death she was known from her property as Thorunn of Grund, one of the first instances of a topographical surname. Her signature has survived to the present day, as she inscribed it on the flyleaf of a noble copy of Grágás - the "grey-goose" Law Book, which was inherited by the antiquarian bishop Brynjolf and given by him in 1656 to the King of Denmark.<sup>1</sup>

Like an ancient chieftain, Jón Arason cherished a family feud, which the spirit of the times and himself exalted or debased into a religious conflict. It began in 1523, the year before he was consecrated bishop, as part of the protracted lawsuit of Glaumbaer, coming to a head in a rivalry with Dadi Gudmundsson, and finished, as far as the bishop was concerned with his capture in 1550 at the hands of Dadi, who handed him over to his allies, the state promoters of the Reformation.

The story is told that Jón's mitre fell off as he was coming from the cathedral after his consecration, a mishap which he at once accepted as an omen indicating that his episcopate would be forcibly terminated.<sup>2</sup> Certainly the incident provides an illustration of his reckless haughtiness. And for the first twenty years of his life he worked chiefly for worldly ends, using worldly means to attain them - legal craft, guile and violence. He exploited his position to exact fines, and confiscated the property of those who could not or would not pay them. With his sons he made forays on the lands of his rival Dadi, whose claims are extant for various petty larcenies.<sup>3</sup> When Jón succeeded as bishop to the Hólar estates, they had been swelled by 109 farms left to the Church by Olaf Rögnvaldsson, (ob. cAD1495) "for the good of his soul". By the time Jón had finished his accumulations, the property had been doubled. From a lowly origin and poor upbringing he had grown to be the richest man in the country, surrounded always by a bodyguard of sons and retainers.

1. Hence called Codex Regius. See Cod.Reg.Grágás Introd. Páll Olason, Cpn. 1932.
2. F.J. II p 655.
3. e.g. mustard and pepper mills, W.P.Ker: l.c.p4,17.

The statement in traveller's tales that Jón Arason was "illiterate" and "extremely ignorant" is unsupported.<sup>1</sup> It may have arisen from Danish or German self-justification or more probably from a characteristically flippant remark of the bishop himself in one of his poems. He was no student or man of letters in the best post-Reformation sense, but he was a wit and a poet, maintaining in this way the more graceful traditions of the chieftains of his land. Fishermen in the Faroes long used his poem 'Ljómur' (The Light of the World) as a charm.<sup>2</sup> He must be given credit for bringing over to Iceland its first printing press, which he set up in Hólar with a Swedish priest, Jón Matthiasson, in charge; but the inventory made at the bishop's death indicates that no more than a breviary was printed on it before 1550.<sup>3</sup> However it was destined to become a mighty instrument of evangelical propaganda. But Jón Arason held that the sword was mightier than the pen.

(b) The brunt of the first phase of the Reformation fell on the South. Nevertheless Jón Arason joined his old opponent, Bishop Ógmund and 'the best men in Iceland' in 1533 in pledging their allegiance to the King of Norway, (as they still called the ruler of the united kingdom) and to the Catholic Faith. As we have seen, he led the Althing to reject the new Ordinance in 1540, and followed up the accompanying protest of the Hólar members with a dignified remonstrance to the Royal Commissioner against the high-handed capture of his fellow-bishop,<sup>4</sup> though he discreetly kept away from next year's assembly. When the State had replaced Ógmund by Gissur in 1542, the two bishops were summoned to Denmark, but Jón evaded this trap by pleading his age and sending three deputies - his son Sigurd, his son-in-law Isleif and Olaf Hjal-tason. All of them signed the new Church Ordinance, and Olaf

1. von Troil: Letters on Iceland (AD1772) p 181; Mackenzie: Travels (1811) p 57; ct. J.H. II pl2: Gj. p 282.
2. Finnur Jónsson: J.A.'s Religious Poetry. Cpn. 1918.
3. B.S. II p 377; Gudspjallabók, Introd. Halldor Hermannson. But Sigfus Blöndal: Islandske Kulturbilleder p 15 suggests that Arason's Gospels etc. were destroyed by puritan zealots. The last copy of the breviary perished in the fire of Cpn (AD1728)
4. F.J. II p 566; Gj. pp288, 290-1.

on his return preached the new doctrine, - the only one of the Hólar priests who appears to have taken any active part in the promotion of Lutheranism.<sup>1</sup>

Bishop Jón did not for some years interfere with Olaf's preaching, and his diocese at least up to 1545 paid the king's new taxes: but he ignored the new Church Order, maintaining his religious practices (as the historian Finnur Jónsson says) more papistico. With Bishop Gissur, who was a friend of his son Ari, his relations appear to have been non-committal in church matters, though characteristically he seized an estate which he claimed in the diocese of Skálholt without waiting for arbitration.<sup>2</sup>

Gissur died in 1548, when only 33 years of age. Had he fulfilled the usual span of life or had Jón Arason died instead, the further course of the Reformation in Iceland might have proceeded peacefully. Except in relation to Bishop Ógmund, Gissur proved an able diplomat and a considerate administrator, tempering the harsh wind of State Lutheranism to the shorn lambs (and pastors) of the old régime. On Gissur's death, Jón Arason took action. He came south and announced that he would assume the administration of the diocese of Skálholt, probably with a view to getting his son Björn elected bishop. But Jón was not popular with the clergy, especially in the south, and Björn, who had all his father's haughtiness without his bonhomie, was actively disliked. Moreover seven years of steady quiet propaganda had put Lutherans in a majority, and when leading priests and laymen met to elect a bishop, though the catholic party nominated the abbot of Thykkvabaer, they were outvoted, and Martein Einarsson, nephew of the able bishop Stéfan Jónsson, was elected.

Martein had worked for nine years with English traders, sailing with them to England, where he went to school and learnt to be a painter. Then he lived as a merchant at Grindavik until he was twenty years old, when he was brought to the notice of Bishop Ógmund and was ordained, though, like most of Ógmund's proteges, he came to favour the new teaching, probably under the influence of Odd.<sup>3</sup>

1. J.H. II p57.
2. Sigfus Blöndal: l.c. p 15; Gj p 292.
3. Jón Gizurarson's Annals, Rolls S., 88.4 p 447.

After his election he spent a winter in Copenhagen studying evangelical theology under John MacAlpine, sometime Prior of Blackfriars in Perth, who had become Dr. Hans Machabeus, professor of Divinity in Denmark.<sup>1</sup>

Jón Arason persuaded the Althing to appoint him to the charge of Skálholt diocese during the interregnum, but Martein's deputies in the see proved strong enough to prevent this, so that Jón had to retire to Hólar. Some months later he sallied forth with 100 men, a significant diminution of his earlier force of 900, and marched on Skálholt. But the news got out, and under the direction of Martein's brother, who had studied strategy abroad, the bishopstead was fortified with redoubts and guns, and manned by Dadi's bodyguard and neighbouring supporters. Bishop Jón demanded their surrender, but was met with jeers and taunts, so the stalwart prelate attacked. However, his efforts failed, and he was forced again to withdraw to Hólar, where reading the signs of the times, he prepared himself a fortified retreat to the mountains, of which traces remain to this day.<sup>2</sup> Personal point was given to Jón's opposition, as the new bishop was Dadi's son-in-law.

(c) Martein was consecrated (using the word in its new sense) by Palladius, King Christian's Lutheran Primate, in 1549. His rival the abbot, at the suggestion of Jón Arason, had also gone to see the king, but when his claim was unheard, he turned Lutheran and died in Denmark two years afterwards.<sup>3</sup> Martein returned in the Spring of 1549, with a letter from the king which he read at the Althing, proclaiming Jón Arason an outlaw: "He has treated us with disrespect, and not regarded our letters in no wise." The bishop's old rival, the chieftain Dadi, was instructed to arrest him and his sons - a task which was all the more congenial, as a few months before Jón had sacked three of Dadi's estates and put him under the ban of the Church.

As an experienced warrior Jón held that the best defence was to attack. He kept away from the Althing, but on receipt of a letter from the Pope commending his loyalty and urging him to continue his resistance, he called together his clergy, read them the Pope's letter, and before the altar of his cathedral made a vow to die rather than be unfaithful.

1. W.P.Ker l.c. pp 17-8.
2. cp. E.H. p101.
3. Gj.p295.

Jón's son Ari did his best to persuade his father from further violence, and had to be shamed into co-operation by the time-honoured method of a present of a woman's skirt.

On learning that Bishop Marteín was travelling on a diocesan visitation in the West, Jón sent his sons, Ari and Björn with 100 armed retainers to capture him at the parsonage at Stadarstað beneath Snaefellsjökul. The plan was successful and the unsuspecting bishop with his chaplain Arni was carried off. Arni had been officialis during the interregnum and had led the Skálholt opposition to Jón, so the vindictive bishop for a time put him in a privy and made scurrilous rhymes about him. Marteín was confined in the monastery at Möðruvellir and set to help in the unsavoury job of drying cod.

It was at this time that Jón took notice of the Lutheran teaching of Olaf Hjaltason and deprived him of his orders. Olaf went to Denmark and reported the situation to the king, who sent a letter to Hólar, again declaring Jón an outlaw and announcing the selection of Gísli Jonsson for the bishopric. Whereupon Bishop Jón excommunicated Gísli and seized his benefice and property so that he had to flee to Palladius.<sup>1</sup>

Then the redoubtable old prelate rose to the occasion and with great courage and resource carried the attack into the enemy's camp. In the summer of 1550 he rode to the Althing with a bodyguard of 200 men, followed by his sons, Ari and Björn, each with a force of a hundred. The King's Commissioner was unable to face such opposition, and could offer no resistance. Jón compelled the Lutheran State Lawman to resign, and reinstated his son Ari. Then with Bishop Marteín in tow, he marched in triumph to Skálholt, which surrendered to him. He left Marteín there under guard in his own bishopstead, and continuing his victorious march to Faxafjörð, he crossed to Videy, where the monastery had been turned into a state residence for the royal commandant and his staff. The Danes no doubt considered themselves safe on an island; nevertheless they were captured and driven into a boat back to where they belonged. Jón exacerbated their discomfiture in his usual manner with

1. F.J.III pp 300-1.

barbed verses. Then the bishop re-consecrated the building and reinstated the abbot, Alexius Pálsson. The hearts of all Icelanders, whatever their shade of belief, must have warmed at this patriotic act of justice against foreign tyranny.

Afterwards the bishop rode up the West coast to Helgafell, and restored the abbot and the old régime. Then he returned again to Hólar. At this juncture on Aug. 10 1550 the bishop's family wrote to the king professing the readiness of their father and themselves "to keep the holy Evangelium the king enjoined". It is doubtful if Jón Arason concurred in this offer, which reflects the spirit of his son Ari, who at this time counselled the bishop to stay quietly at Hólar. Had he done so, content with his admirable retaliation at Videy, he would no doubt have been supplanted by the king's nominee, but probably he would have been allowed to escape (as was the Archbishop of Trondheim) and have ended his days, like most of the abbots, in pensioned retirement. But Jón Arason was not made like that, and would have considered it dishonourable thus to retire from "God's Battle". More than that, his old rival Dadi Gudmundsson, was still at large, and with his native arrogance, Jón thought that his recent successes would carry him through a victory over his real foe. But overwhelming audacity proved no match for much-trying craftiness. Jón set out again with his two sons and a force of 150 men, with a view to taking over the estate of Saudafell, which both he and Dadi claimed. Dadi laid in wait for him, camouflaging his men in grey to match the rocks and misty atmosphere, and made a surprise attack. The bishop's force gave in. Jón and his sons retreated to the church, where they were taken prisoner.<sup>1</sup>

Dadi escorted them to Bessastadir, where he handed them over to the only remaining Danish official, a clerk called Christian (the) Skriver, who felt himself unequal to the task of guarding such a famous group of prisoners with so many resourceful friends.<sup>2</sup> So they were sent to Skálholt, where a priest ignobly suggested that an axe and the earth would keep them best, thus putting his party in the wrong and conferring on the bishop the semblance of martyrdom.

1. A full account of the Battle of Saudafell (proelium Saudafellense) is given by F.J. II pp 708-12, and Dadi's Apologia pp 745-54.
2. B.S. II pp 488sq.

It must be recorded that Dadi strongly opposed this course, though he gave way when it was supported by the Lutheran bishop Martein.

(d) Jón Arason and his sons Ari & Björn were beheaded on Nov. 7 1550. The bishop met his death as a soldier and a wit, with a final bequest to the poor, a skittish remark to the pastor in attendance, and a last epigram on his lips, thus translated by Professor Ker:-

What is the world? A bitter cheat,  
If Danes must sit on the judgement seat,  
When I step forth my death to meet  
And lay my head at the king's feet.

Ari, as he went to his execution, remarked that he had gone into the game unwillingly, and now willingly left it. When he saw the block and axe, he cried out: "Lord, is this to be borne?". When Christian nodded his head, he added: "Confound you, blind idiot! I was not addressing you, but my Lord God". Then without flinching or closing his eyes he knelt at the block and commended his soul to God.

This summary execution was ill received by the bulk of the people, especially in the diocese of Hólar, where such resentment was aroused that when men came down for the winter fishing, a band of them, at the instigation of Thorunn, the bishop's daughter, marched on Bessastadir and slew Christian Skriven with his son and Danish assistants.

After Easter the priest Sigmund, son of the bishop, sent a company of men to Skálholt to bring back the three bodies buried in its churchyard. Bells were fastened beneath the biers and as the procession passed along headed by three priests, church bells tolled and the people came out to pay all due reverence. A great concourse assembled at Hólar where their bodies were buried in the cathedral with the utmost honour.

Sigurd was elected bishop by the clergy, and Jón Arason's vast estate was divided between his descendants and the church. But King Christian III had by now initiated vigorous measures to enforce allegiance, and four warships were already approaching Iceland from Denmark. Two of them went to the south, where the new Governor summoned the Althing, which met in the presence of 200 soldiers and thus took the oath of allegiance. Two ships sailed north, where a special Thing was called to take the oath and hear the royal decisions on the Church question. Olaf Hjaltason was appointed bishop; Jón Arason and his sons were pronounced traitors, and their property confiscated, including the 300 farms belonging to the see with their pasturage for 15,000 cows.<sup>1</sup> The slayers of Christian Skriven were to be punished. Nothing was said of the execution of the bishop without a trial, though it could have been argued that an outlaw might thus be put to death. Hólar church property and treasures were seized, together with the local monasteries at Möðruvellir and Thvera.

Neither in South or North did the people offer any resistance or make any disturbance, so the Danish Force returned before the summer broke.

Thus before the end of 1551 the Reformation was launched in Iceland, or rather all external opposition and obstruction to such launching had been removed. The state contribution had been negative and destructive, and the use of material force had hindered rather than helped the movement of the spirit, except that it was given an opportunity for freely getting under way, though in an atmosphere clouded with apathy and sullen ill-will.

1. Dipl. Isl. XII. pp 361-70. Lists of Hólar property 1553, cp. IX pp 293sq.; Skálholt -do- pp 371-425.

IX. Reformation.(iii) Third Phase. (1551-1630)

Danish aggressions have always been felt by Icelanders to be more intolerable than similar tendencies on the part of Norway, their ancient mother. And at the adoption of Christianity, King Olaf of Norway, respecting Icelandic independence, mediated his authority through native agents, so that strong local opposition could be co-opted on a common front. Thus it is not surprising that the immediate general reaction in Iceland to direct foreign interference with the course of reformation took the form of a wave of non-co-operation.

The spiritual influence of intellectual reformers in the country received a damaging set-back by the intrusion of political violence and acquisitiveness. During the era of reformation, political antagonisms overlaid the spirit of reconstruction and renewal, as a devastating flood of lava, pouring down from some volcano from time to time buried a fertile tract of crops and meadowland. Only after the withdrawal of Danish officials with their booty did the essential character of the Reformation resume its growth in a renewal of Christianity, and in a generation "a flowery crop of knowledge and new light sprang up."<sup>1</sup>

(a) The new life flowed through the historic channels of ecclesiastical order and Christian Faith, the Church and individual salvation. The Government dealt with bureaucratic centralising of administration, so that the Crown arrogated to itself or to its servants the aggressiveness and greed of the pre-Reformation prelates, and in the reformed Church there was little danger of autocracy in its new Superintendents, in Iceland, almost from the start called bishops. Religious Houses, (five at Skálholt and four at Hólar) were dissolved and their extensive property was confiscated.

1. Milton: Areopagitica, AD 1644.

The original suggestion of King Christian III and Bishop Gissur to use them for scholastic purposes was foiled by both religious parties for opposite reasons, but their chapels became parish churches, receiving a portion of their endowments.<sup>1</sup> Such farms as remained to the benefices, pastors had to cultivate themselves in order to augment their sadly reduced stipends, for the grants made by the Crown from confiscated Church lands proved hopelessly inadequate. However, from henceforth the standard of clerical life in Iceland was much on the level of that of their people, and never afterwards were they tempted to become wealthy landlords.

The Augsburg Confession, promulgated in 1530 and adopted at Skálholt in 1541, have only vague directions on the constitution and discipline of the Church, as being matters of secondary importance. "The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the gospel is rightly taught, and the sacraments rightly administered." The one indispensable ministry is the ministry of the word and sacraments. Thus episcopacy is not of the esse of the Church; ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia.<sup>2</sup> Therefore on this premise, what the State made of the Church constitution did not fundamentally matter. In Iceland happily it worked out that when the State had finished its work and done its worst, then the real business of the Reformation began, the 'saints' being 'rightly' taught the gospel, and having the sacraments 'rightly' administered.

Consequently it is unfair to regard the Reformation merely as a political measure, without considering its doctrinal and moral implications. Excesses and scandals form but the ugly by-products of a deep intellectual and spiritual movement. But its essential character took some time to develop. Iceland like England was "slow to imbibe the food of her revived life." Just as after the adoption of Christianity, the conservative folk of Iceland clung to some comparatively harmless customs, so after the Reformation, in the privacy of their homes, many people, though outwardly conforming, continued mediaeval practices, such as the cult of the saints with its consequent burning of

1. F.J. III pp96-7.
2. Kidd; Documents of the Continental Refn. 116; J. Mackinnon: Luther and the Refn. III pp280sq.

candles and visits to sacred sites. In neither case for some time were any strong measures taken to curb this survival, though the popular cross at Kaldadarnes, removed by Bishop Gissur Einarsson in 1548, was broken up by Bishop Gisli Jónsson in 1560. About the same time Bishop Olaf destroyed the northern crosses and the famous Hofstad Virgin's shrine, the name of which indicates that it stood on the site of a pagan high place, probably the historic temple described in Eyrbyggja Saga.<sup>1</sup>

Gisli Jónsson was the third Lutheran Bishop of Skálholt. He had been elected in place of the gentle bishop Marteinn, who "solemnly abdicated" in 1557. Marteinn, who lacked the courage of his German namesake, felt the strain of his office to be intolerable in the face of the rapacity of the political promoters of the Reformation, the hostility of Bishop Jón Arason's family and supporters, and the stubborn ignorance and indifference of the people.<sup>2</sup> Gisli Jónsson proved an able and vigorous administrator during an episcopate of nearly thirty years (1558-87). In his constructive evangelical work he was ably backed by two conscientious Governors, Paul Stigsson and John Buckholt; but their ecclesiastical zeal was considerably discounted, as the Crown further robbed the Church in 1556, by extorting a quarter of the tithe.<sup>3</sup>

Bishop Gisli, of practical rather than intellectual ability, took pains to direct his clergy to visit their people to see that they knew the catechism. With the help of Paul Stigsson, he tried to deal with widespread sexual irregularities, the difficulty here (as the historian Finnur Jónsson points out) being that the reformed religion held as a crime, what under the old régime (sub papatu) was hardly regarded as a misdeed, even if committed by a priest; though it is only fair to add that Lutheran clergy (even such a leader as Gudbrand) were not blameless in this respect. Gisli led no mere institutional life. Just before his death, he recited the catechism and eight psalms, with an invocation to the Holy Spirit and the Holy Cross.

1. F.J.III pp305,361,II p365; Eyrb.S. 4; Lndbk 4,7.
2. F.J.III pp295-6.
3. -do- pp5-11; Arngrim Jónsson:Crymogaea III p145.

Then he went into his historic cathedral and read the Song of Solomon and one of Havermann's Books of Prayers.<sup>1</sup>

(b) After the negative political and ecclesiastical steps had been taken, positive reformation began its task as essentially a movement for helping the individual to a "closer walk with God".

Papal supremacy was abolished, together with traffic in indulgences and benefices, a prime cause of the Reformation. Permission was given to the clergy to marry in a straightforward way, thus regularising the custom of Iceland from the first, openly followed in the early days, latterly, practised unofficially. "There be some priests," writes an English observer in 1542, "the which be beggars, yet they will have concubines."<sup>2</sup>

In the realm of worship the time-honoured outward signs were largely preserved in Iceland. Clergy retained the old orders and titles of bishop and prestur, though, as in Sweden, the order of deacon dropped out. As already noted, a break was made in the transmission of spiritual authority through the hands of bishops (i.e. the ecclesiastical theory of apostolic succession), although the Icelandic Church retained episcopacy according to the practice of Luther, who in this matter followed St. Augustine.<sup>3</sup> Altars with their fittings remained in the accustomed places in churches, unobscured by central pulpits. The mediaeval form of the Eucharist was retained with its title hámessu, but the language of the people was re-instated and the cup restored to the laity. The doctrine of the Real Presence was preserved, though officially 'trans-substantiation' was rejected for 'consubstantiation'. Auricular confession was retained and was in use to modern times.<sup>4</sup> Unlike the Church of England at this time, Iceland continued to commemorate her national saints. Thus the Icelandic Church's severance from Rome did not involve abolition of catholic faith, sacraments or customs. It retained its emotional heritage.

1. F.J. III pp 109, 297-332; B.S. II pp 629-54.
2. Andrew Boorde cp Seaton: Literary Relations of Eng. and Scandinavia p 13.
3. Ep. liii, 2; cp. Headlam: Reunion pp 160-1; ct. Turner: Ch. & Ministry, pp 192sq.
4. Baring Gould: Iceland p 295.

After the people had recovered from the shock of the accompanying political dislocation, with their love of nationalism and independence, and their stress on individual worth and learning, they responded readily to the offer of intellectual and moral regeneration.

(c) The Church became a preaching and teaching body, relying on the open Bible and the Catechism. For the Bible was by no means the only book of Lutherans, nor was it left to stand alone as its own interpreter without instruction or prayer and praise. Every leading reformer became a teacher, beginning with Odd Gottskalksson with his vernacular New Testament, issued in the first phase of the movement, and his subsequent helps for the clergy in translated sermons and catechism. The chief contribution made by Bishop Martein, as became his nature, was a manual of collects and hymns, which he published in Copenhagen in 1555. The latter section consisted of some robust hymns, composed by Luther as a feature of his reforms, which Martein inadequately translated into Icelandic.<sup>1</sup> The collects remained unchanged until 1852.

In the North, Bishop Olaf Hjaltason (1552-69) used Jón Arason's printing press for propagating the reformed teaching, and in 1562 published a Gospel Book printed by the converted Jón Matthiasson, one copy of which is still extant.<sup>2</sup> A year or two before this he translated and issued the evangelical sermons of Corvinus on the Passion, and Justus Jonas' Catechism. Olaf also circulated a practical guide for the clergy with directions for pastoral visitation, conduct of services including marriages and observation of holy days.<sup>3</sup> A real effort was made by leaders of the reformed church to develop in the clergy a sense of ministerial and parochial responsibility, so that their people should learn that the 'change of fashion' in religion made for moral, intellectual and devotional advance, and should turn to positive and practical value in their lives.

1. F.J.-III p292.
2. ut sup. p174; E.H. p473. This Gudspjallabók was reprinted twice in the 16th century, five times in the 17th and thrice in the 18th, and recently with an introduction by Halldor Hermannsson at Cpn in 1933.
3. F.J. III pp361-2 B.S. II pp679-82.

Gisli's successor at Skálholt was Odd Einarsson, whose episcopate lasted forty-one years (1589-1630).<sup>1</sup> He was one of three post-Reformation bishops, whose fathers were named Einar, without any connection between them except that all were catholic priests, (Odd's father being a monk) - a sufficient indication of the glaring need for regularising clerical marriages.

As a student at Hólar, where the Latin school had been re-established, Odd showed such keenness and ability that by the help of Bishop Gudbrand, the successor of Olaf, he was sent to Copenhagen, where Icelandic students were educated free, and read classics and theology, finishing up with mathematics under the famous astronomer Tycho Brahe. After graduating B.A. he returned home to become Rector of his old school at Hólar, the fore-runner of many students who turned the educational opportunities of their day to the benefit of their country. In this way Odd followed the example of the magnanimous early bishops Gizur, Thorlak, Pál and the like.

Odd's long episcopate was characterised chiefly by his pastoral benevolence and his devotion to scholarship. The country at the time was going through a period of distress on account of ravages by English pirates and loss of trade, and the bishop's activities were directed to the support of his destitute clergy and people in the infancy of their evangelical faith. In this he received no help from his wife, who had the reputation of being a virago; so that the saying went round: "The bishop can keep his diocese in order, but not his wife." An instance of her callousness is given in her destruction of a natural rock-bridge over the Thorsá, so as to prevent vagrants from crossing to the bishopstead to ask alms. But Odd is particularly memorable as a lifelong student and collector of a large library of inventories and deeds, with a view to the reconstruction of historical studies on the foundations of the Icelandic Church. He wrote a description of the country, and translated Danish and German works into Icelandic. Most of his library perished in one of the disastrous fires from which Skálholt suffered down the ages. Nevertheless his work for revival of letters in his country was permanent, especially as he inspired a band of students to undertake

1. B. S. II pp 655-78. F.J. III pp 332-356; J.H. II pp 122-9 etc.,

similar research. His son and successor Gisli Oddsson wrote the first treatise extant on the geography and natural history of Iceland.

Sira Arngrim Jónsson (1567-1648) followed Odd's example in his scholastic career at Copenhagen and Hólar, and in promoting historical study. He was the proud owner of 26 codices. He wrote in Latin an epitome of Icelandic history which he called Crymogaea, printed in Hamburg in 1609/10, and other books in Latin forming an Apologia for his country to combat foreign ignorance and misrepresentations. This able prestur, known as "the Learned", the best scholar of his day, deserves commemoration as the restorer of Icelandic learning.<sup>2</sup>

A similarly erudite pastor, Magnus Olafsson (1574-1631) devoted his attention to compiling the first Icelandic dictionary - Lexicon Runicon, and in his lighter moments composed poems and hymns.<sup>3</sup>

This period saw also the production of Annals, valuable as a link with the past, covering the Reformation era and disclosing the various causes which led up to it. The Annals of Björn of Skarðsá comprise the years 1400-1645. He was a self-educated farmer, pioneer of many such homestead students, who spent the long winter nights in diligent reading and in copying old sagas.

Two other pastors helped to restore the national consciousness and historic sense, lost for almost two centuries: Jón Gizuráson (1589-1648) and his contemporary, Jón Egilsson. At this time the attractive Saga of Pál, Bishop of Skálholt 1195-1211, came to light, and Bishop Odd suggested to Jón Egilsson that he should make that appealing Life a model for accounts of later prelates, thus clothing the dry bones of annalistic chronicles. In this way was started the second series of Biskúpa Sögur, which contains a valuable

1. Iceland has happily retained for the clergy the title of Sira, used only (as Reverend should be) with Christian names; Sira Jón etc., ?= Latin dominus for priest under degree of M.A. J.H. uses Meistari (not sira) for Brynjolf (Sveinsson, MA) Cp. Chaucer (AD1386): Cant. Tales, Persones T. Prologe l. 22 "Sir preest, quod he, artow a vicary, Or art a person?"; Paston Letters (1450) Sir John Bukk, parson of Stratford; Garstang Register, May 24 1592: Sir Wyllm Horne parson of Corwell in Oxfurthshyre, (Rector of Cornwell 1559-90.)
2. J.H. II pp 130-1; Islandica XIX pp 40sq, IX 43-4.
3. J.H. II pp 135-6.

account of the redoubtable Jón Arason, taken down from the lips of the bishop's grandson.<sup>1</sup> Jón Gizurason actually copied out Pálssaga, and as the original manuscript was subsequently lost, perhaps burnt with Bishop Odd's library, his copy proved the only means by which the most detailed history of that time was handed down to posterity.<sup>2</sup>

(d) The historical and literary foundations of Icelandic national life being now re-established on the old lines, chiefly by the inspiration of Bishop Odd and through the labours in various fields of his associates, the course was clear for the essential constructive work of the Reformation. The Bible and books of devotion were made available for all, so that a religious and moral regeneration was effected in the nation.

This was in particular the great achievement of Bishop Gudbrand Thorlaksson, who held the see of Hólar for the record period of 56 years (1570-1627). He was born in 1542, son of a priest, and was nominated as bishop by the king, who set aside the choice of the clergy. His strenuous and memorable episcopate justified the royal discernment. By his achievement the art of printing was glorified. He purchased the printing press at Hólar, and with the help of the son of Jón Matthiasson, the original printer (ob. AD 1567), he made it a real power-house of evangelism. He published a Lutheran hymn-book in 1589, designed to replace what he called the nonsensical poetry of the popular rimur. This collection so improved the rudimentary efforts of Bishops Olaf, Martein and Gisli that it lasted for 200 years. In 1594, assisted by Bishop Odd, he issued a tune-book for the hymns, called Grallarinn, and in 1598 published a Passional, a type of devotion suited to the Icelandic temperament and destined to become of great service in the country.

As the groundwork of these helps to worship, Gudbrand published in 1584 the Bible in Icelandic. He incorporated the vernacular New Testament of Odd Gottskalksson, and used after considerable revision Gisli's Jónsson's translation of the Prophets and I and II Maccabees, "written at Skálholt; begun Sep 23 1574, ended March 10 1575."<sup>3</sup> - a noble employment

1. B.S. Series II: Skálholt pubd 1907, Hólar 1914, Rvk.
2. Vigfusson: Sturlunga S. pp cxli sq.
3. E.H. p477-8, correcting F.J. III p376.

for long winter evenings. Gudbrand not only welded the whole version into a literary masterpiece, but he also assisted with the type, and designed and executed woodcuts, carrying the work through in a space of ten years. Finnur Jónsson praises his style as being "pure, simple and free from ornament: the words admirably adapted to the ideas they are designed to express." "This Bible, like Odd's New Testament in its degree, was long regarded as setting a standard on which every translation should be modelled.<sup>1</sup>

As has been truly pointed out: "The literature of the Reformation in Iceland was a battle for language. Was the Old Norse to survive, or was it to be merged like Norwegian in the Danish literary language?"<sup>2</sup> The Old Norse won. Owing to the definitive work of Odd Gottskalksson and Gudbrand the noble ancient language of Scandinavia, our original mother-tongue, which had been immortalised in the sagas, was preserved as the language of Iceland, with little change it remains the vernacular today.

By the aid of a royal grant and a tax of about 4/- on each church Gudbrand issued 1000 copies of his Bible, and then set himself the task of distributing them in the parishes at a nominal charge. In 1609 he published a revised edition of the New Testament for poor people. In addition to his magnum opus, during a space of over fifty years the bishop published Catechisms long and short, books of Prayers, Psalms, Meditations, Sermons and an Icelandic revised Kalendar. He did not confine himself to Lutheran productions, for he or Arngrim translated Savonarola's *Speculum Peccatoris* and St. Bernard's Hymn of the Cross. Furthermore this master printer made the first map of his country. The list of Gudbrand's publications fills four pages of Finnur Jónsson's great History, amounting to what may properly be styled the grand total of 85 works. "His memory will not die," wrote a contemporary, "while the country is inhabited, and Icelandic remains the language of its people."

To complement the sedulous toil he spent until well past the age of 80 in making his press a sword of the Spirit, this 'firebrand of God'<sup>3</sup> was indefatigable in seeing that his

1. F.J.III p376; F.H.p479. Rvk museum treasures a copy.
2. Sigurdur Nordal: Odd's NT., Introdn.
3. Cp. Arngrim Jónsson: *Miles eras Domini, multis versatus in armis, Gudbrande, et ratio nominis inde tui.*

clergy and people acquired and practised the discipline, devotion and good life he thus irradiated. Everyone had to learn the catechism, prayers and hymns if he wished to be confirmed and receive the sacrament. Gudmund was ably seconded in these scholarly pursuits and pastoral activities by his colleague, Odd Einarsson. Thus immersed they let Norwegian clergy in 1607 draw up for King Christian IV (1588-1648) a new Church Code, in which Icelandic ecclesiastical order and administration were further subordinated to the royal supremacy, paving the way for the proclamation of absolutism in 1661-2.

Nevertheless Gudbrand stands out in Iceland as the leading man of his generation or rather of two generations. It was chiefly due to his zealous and untiring labours that by the close of the first quarter of the xviiith century evangelical Christianity became a living force in the lives of the people.<sup>1</sup> As the chieftain-bishop Gizur in the xiith century may be called the founder of the Icelandic Church, so 500 years later Gudbrand emerges as its second founder. His work has remained to this day. As his fellow-labourer Arngrim predicted: His glory, recognised in his own age, will adorn years to come.<sup>2</sup>

Thus with few national recourses, deprived of all but the bare necessities of life, in face of inroads by volcanoes, earthquakes and pirates, these champions of Christ and the naked Gospel, by unremitting exertion and dogged perseverance, rebuilt on the old foundations the walls of their Zion.

1. Gj. pp 305-8; 331-4.
2. ille non modo suae aetatis sed et posteritatis ornamentum (Brev.Comm.)

CHAPTER TEN.FIGHTING AND FEARS.  
(1630-1720)(i) Pirates, Witches, Ghosts & Lepers.

Neither pirates nor witches would be expected to come into the purview of ecclesiastical interest, though lepers from the days of Christ Himself have been considered objects for compassionate care. However, in Iceland clergy were more directly involved in combatting piracy and witchcraft than leprosy.

(a) In 1579 a shipload of English marauders landed on the North-west coast and finding the few inhabitants unarmed and helpless they committed outrages which have marked piracy down the ages. They sacked churches, robbed houses and barns, ravished women, killed indiscriminately and seized the richest inhabitants for ransom. All this appears sordid and barbarous, and it cannot be pretended that it was British retaliation on the Icelanders for what their ancestors had inflicted on our northern coasts 1,000 years before, when Scandinavian pirates were dignified by the name of Vikings.

Icelanders were completely helpless, as the carrying of arms had been forbidden by the Danish State, though it failed to provide any military protection.<sup>1</sup> Suggestions to remedy this unpreparedness came to nothing, perhaps because no further raids occurred for a generation.

The same coastal district was raided in 1614 by Spaniards who carried off cattle, sheep and money. About the same time English pirates landed in the Westman Islands off the South coast. They sailed "under the command of one John, commonly called Gentleman from the softness of his manners". They committed every outrage except murder, taking particular delight in wanton indignities. "They seized the church bell and fastened it to the mast of their ship.... they terrified people by pointing muskets at their hearts with laughter and ridicule" However on their return, the church bell gave them away. King James had them punished and the church property was returned. Probably this wanton

1. Espolin: IV 55 pp 39sq.; Gj. p304.  
2. Espolin: Arb. V. 14, pp133, 156.

ill-treatment was largely due to disappointment of the pirates at the small results of their pains. Henry Hudson reported in 1610, as other voyagers might have done, that "the people are very poor and live miserably." 1

In the following year more Spanish buccaneers came in three ships, committing robbery and violence. On this occasion the Icelandic elements fought against them. One of their ships was wrecked and eighty Spaniards who got to land were attacked under Danish direction, and all of them were eventually slain.

At this stage Denmark woke up to the fact that Iceland was being neglected, so King Christian IV. sent over warships and two commissioners with wide powers to deal not only with the growing threats of buccaneers but with outstanding questions of church and state.<sup>2</sup> They put into action harsh laws of 1558-65, which remained at least on the statute book until 1838, prescribing hanging for men guilty of adultery and drowning for women. Capital punishment also was inflicted without mercy for theft, witchcraft and other crimes. This indicates that the Church failed to show any moral or social leadership; though it must be added that during the seventeenth century the same slackness prevailed in the rest of Europe.

In spite of Danish counter-measures the worst (and final) piratical raid was made by Algerians in 1627 on the East coast of Iceland from which they carried off 110 captives, some sheep and much church plate. Then they went on to the Westman Islands. "Arriving there with three ships and 300 men, the pirates overran the whole island of Heimaey with loud yells, massacring (most of) the terror-stricken and helpless inhabitants".<sup>3</sup> The rest they drove into a large Danish storehouse, which they set on fire with the people inside, after carrying off the young and strong. Then they rang the church bells, put on clerical vestments and fired the church. The chief prestur, Jón Thorsteinsson, (a versifier of the Psalms and the book of Genesis) was struck down before his family and friends, whom he had hidden in a cave. His wife and children together with his junior colleague Olaf Egilsson were put on board with about 400 captives and carried off to the Barbary Coasts where they were sold as slaves, as had

1. ap. Purchas: Pilgrimes, ap. Seaton: Lit. Relations... p8.

2. Björn of Skardsa: Snnals II p92.

3. Gj. p319-20.

happened there to St. Vincent of Paul twenty years earlier. Olaf was released two years later and wrote an account of the raid. Most of the captives soon died. Thirty-seven who survived seven years later sent a piteous appeal to the King of Denmark dated "Algiers 1635". A large ransom was raised, but only twenty-eight reached home, mental and physical wrecks.<sup>1</sup>

One minister acquired a reputation for going into action, as Algerian pirates approached his coastal parish near Kirkjubæur, by singing an incantation against them, - his Tyrkjásvoefa, after which (post hoc if not propter hoc) their ships collided with one another and all capsized.<sup>2</sup>

(b) The Icelandic mind has always had to face "terrors of the night," both physical and non-material, "Hekla, witches selling wind, family ghosts." Europe rather than Iceland regarded Hekla as the mouth of Hell. Icelanders faced volcanoes and earthquakes with comparative equanimity, but what disturbed their mental balance down the ages was their obsession with sorcery and the powers of darkness, which was a grim inheritance from their pagan days. Early settlers were careful to propitiate the autochthonous deities, known as As. Sorcerers share with ghosts the murky background of the sagas. We read how the witch Thorbjörg Katla - the 'kettle' by waving her wand brought over Hvalfjörð sudden squalls of the kind which still beset that enchanted region. Laxdale Saga (c36) tells of men reciting 'crooked verses' when their enemies put out to sea so that storms arose and drowned them. The famous outlaw, Grettir the Strong, owed his death in 1031 primarily to the spell of an aged sorceress, Thurid. For 'although the land was Christian, many sparks of heathendom remained. It was not illegal to conduct... pagan rites in private, but their public performance might lead to short outlawry.' Thurid found a jetsam tree-stump on which she cut runes and reddened them with her blood, muttering spells as she walked backwards against the sun. Then the log drifted against

1. F.J.III p80-83, 138; (with Captives' letter); Espólin: V, 49 p 35; E.H. p260.
2. A.G.van Hamel: Gods, Skalds and Magic, Art in Saga book of Viking Club 1935 pp 129-53.

the wind to Grettir's retreat on Drangey, and when he began to chop it up for firewood, his axe slipped and cut deep into his knee, so that he fell at last a victim to his enemies.<sup>1</sup>

Early missionaries had to face the machinations of spaemen, magician-prophets who regarded them as their rivals. As Thangbrand rode across a fissured lava-field, the earth opened up and swallowed his pony, as he just managed to throw himself free. In such a weird countryside, something uncanny might happen any moment. A spaeman's calling was held to qualify him 'to sit outside and waken trolls,<sup>2</sup> - dangerous ogres, which were perhaps emanations of the troubled earth. Certain place-names suggest this. Trölladyngiar - Ogres' Bowers, is the name of some clinker caves in the lava field near Ol-fusa, formed in AD 1000, while a critical meeting of the Althing was adopting Christianity, and neighbouring lava cones are called Tröllabörn - Giants' Children.<sup>3</sup> These natural dug-outs are now used for sheep-folds and storm-shelters. The eccentric Bishop Gudmund owed his early popularity to his incantations, which were held to keep trolls out of mischief and undo the work of sorcery.

Nevertheless in spite of the practical influence of bishops and clergy and the injunctions of Canon Law, sorcery was too deep seated in Icelandic nature to be cured outright. Priests and pastors were to be found among the sorcerers. Prof. van Hamel records how Sira Snorri of Husavik took zealous steps to keep his parishioners from ghostly commerce, with the result that they sent him a staff covered with verses. He looked at the writing and went blind; but with presence of mind at once he composed a counteracting verse and recovered his sight.<sup>4</sup>

Little harm was done to social life until foreign influence dominated legal administration, for in earlier days a personal settlement concluded the business. Latterly Church or State had to intervene. Gudmund, ...

1. Grettir's Saga c 78-9
2. E.J.Oswald: By Fell and Fjord pp 230-2.
3. E.H. pp 270-1
4. A.G.van Hamel: Gods, Skalds and Magic, Art in Saga-Book of the Viking Club 1935 pp 129-53.

prestur of Arnabaeli, lampooned his servant for losing his ponies. The boy subsequently fell and fractured his legs, and in consequence the minister was removed from office and ended his days as a labourer.

The most interesting and scholarly of these traffickers with the powers of darkness was Jón Gudmundsson (1574-1658), a poor persecuted farmer, friend and biographer of the elves, author of magic poetry, against whom his rural dean wrote a diatribe. This layer of ghosts, with his pastor-son, was outlawed at the instigation of the Governor in 1635, and would have been in hapless plight had he not been befriended by the magnanimous Bishop Brynjólf.<sup>1</sup>

The witchcraft which darkens the pages of Icelandic annals in the xviiith century was not so much a cloud of magic suddenly appearing as an epidemic of sadism in dealing with a chronic Icelandic proclivity. For Iceland is a tolerant country; the harshness of nature appears to mitigate human feelings, so that little or no official vindictiveness pursued such offences as might be included under witchcraft, or even breaches of faith and morals. But owing to foreign influence this period was marred by a visitation of capital punishment almost absent in the preceding century. "At every session of the Althing people flocked to witness the hangings, burnings decapitations, drownings, the floggings, brandings of offenders under the harsh (Danish) laws."<sup>2</sup> This must have left a deep and damaging mark on the social, intellectual and moral life of the whole people. Severe punishment against murder, adultery and incest was normal, but that age added superstitious vengeance against supposed witchcraft.

From 1625-90 about a score of people were burned at the stake for witchcraft. In this persecution pastors, some of them eminent and otherwise scholarly, co-operated with officials. A provost appeared as leading instigator, Páll Björnsson, a learned archdeacon, who fancied himself attacked by this or that private enemy, and in nearly all his writings dealt with the baleful influence of witchcraft.<sup>3</sup> The only redeeming feature on this dark page is the fact that the victims in Iceland, unlike those in the rest of Europe, included only one woman witch.

1. Islandica XV reprints his Natural History with introd.
2. Gj. pp 316-8.
3. Magnus Stephensen: Island in det 18de aarhundrede, pp165sq; J.H. II pp179-81.

Iceland cherishes a similar but more picturesque inheritance in its ghosts. Of the sagas it has been said: "Few literatures possess more impressive ghost stories."<sup>1</sup> Later and more historic records amply show people's preoccupation with buried men and women who "walked afterwards". We read of a midnight mass of the departed (kirkjugardrim risi) on All Souls' Eve celebrated by a ghost priest and attended by all those buried in the churchyard.<sup>2</sup> Individual ghosts were more provocative, and bodies had to be dug up and reburied, often after being cut up, to prevent their walking after.

Eminent priests are to be found among ghost-layers, notably Halfdan Narfason of Skagafjörð in the xvith century and Eirik Magnusson of Vogssos in the xviiith. Miss Oswald recalls a tale she heard of a girl called Solveig of Miklibaer, whose love was spurned by the prestur Odd Gislason in 1781, so that she died by her own hand, making a last request to be spared a suicide's burial (Dysjadur). But the bishop insisted, so she walked afterwards, and Sira Odd never again dared ride alone after dark. However one night he left his escort near home and soon the roof rattled and he was never seen again. He had left his own memorial in an altar-piece still in use at Miklibaer church.

But latter-day ghosts more often prove harmless. As Henry More, the Platonist, wrote ('Pre-existency of the Soul' 1647):-

Here wandring ghosts themselves have often shown  
As if it were the region of the dead,  
And men departed met with whom they've known  
In seemly sort shake hands, and ancient friendship own.<sup>3</sup>

1. W.A.Craigie: Icelandic Sagas p 34. See Laxdale S.. 76; Eyrbyggja S.; Hardar S. and especially the vivid tale of Glám in Grettir's S.
2. E.J.Oswald: By Fell and Fjörð pp 230-2.
3. ap Seaton: Lit. Relations, pp 17, 367.

(c) We pray for all sorts and conditions of men that they may be relieved of their afflictions of mind, body and estate. Pirates attacked the Icelander's estate, witchcraft delusions his mind, while many a body was ravaged by leprosy which took the form of elephantiasis. The scourge is supposed to have been introduced into Europe by the Romans and to have been reintroduced by Crusaders, who brought it back from the East. Seamen carried it to Norway, and to the Southern and Western coasts of Iceland, where it has remained much longer than elsewhere in Europe. At the Reformation the monastic revenues of Selja Island in Norway were devoted to founding a leper hospital at the neighbouring town of Bergen. In the 17th century in Iceland the malady, like tuberculosis and other diseases, found a congenial breeding ground in the poverty and illnourishment of the people, and above all in the fetid and filthy conditions of the dank, dark half-buried cabins in which they lived.

Andrew Boorde, an English writer, described in 1542 how Icelanders of his day have "no corn, and little bread or none.... they be beastly creatures, unmannered and untaught. They have no houses, but yet do lie in caves altogether like swine".<sup>1</sup>

Sir Thomas Browne gave professional help to some lepers from Iceland which led to correspondence in Latin about the conditions of the country with the pastor of Hitardal, whose letters have survived and show the characteristic curiosity of an Icelander about English personal traits and customs.<sup>2</sup>

Four small hospitals, one in each Quarter, were established in 1652, and granted the endowments of four Crown-farms, confiscated a century earlier from monasteries. In addition they received certain fines and an interesting fish-tax; half the catch of six-oared boats on the first fishing-day after Easter.<sup>3</sup>

At the beginning of the 19th century each of these hospitals under the direction of the Governor and the Bishop contained not more than eight inmates, though in 1770 there were 20 lepers living in one small district alone, the penin-

1. cp Seaton: Literary Relations of Eng & Scandinavia pl3.
2. Edm. Gosse: Sir Thomas Browne, pl46, who compiled for the Royal
3. F.J. III pp460-1. [Society in 1663 an "Account of Island alias Iceland."

sular of Seljarnarnes near Reykjavik, and the southern diocese had 99.<sup>1</sup> Most lepers therefore had to carry on their normal mode of life. Poignancy is added to the writings of the most arresting and helpful of Icelandic poets, the prestur Hallgrim Pétursson, by the fact that he was a leper.

It is satisfactory to record that about 30 years ago all lepers were segregated into one hospital where the disease could be properly tackled. No fresh cases have occurred, so that after the death of the dozen present patients the scourge should be merely an unhappy memory.<sup>2</sup>

1. Stephensen l.c. p342.
2. The names of Dr. Saemundur Bjarnhjéðinsson (1883-1936) and his wife Kristophine Jørgensen should be held in remembrance as chief workers in this self-sacrificing achievement.

X. (ii) Antiquarians.

In front of the altar at Hólar Church may be seen the tombstone of Bishop Gudbrand "Jesu Christi peccator", supported on the sanctuary walls by two portraits of that evangelical master-printer, one worked in wool by his illegitimate daughter.

(a) This doyen of Icelandic bishops was succeeded by his grandson Thorlak Skulason (1628-56), the picture of whose florid countenance also hangs at Hólar together with those of his three wives. Thorlak continued the biblical work of his predecessor, producing in 1644 a new edition of Gudbrand's Bible, the first to have the text divided into verses. He received royal support on condition that he adapted the Icelandic version to that of Denmark i.e. probably the Christian IV Bible, published in Copenhagen in 1633.<sup>1</sup> Thus Thorlak's edition became the authorised version of Iceland, and was reprinted in 1747 under the supervision of Bishop Harboe, and again in 1813, at the expense of the British and Foreign Bible Society. Unfortunately, in 1826 this pure and dignified version underwent the questionable process of a revision on up-to-date lines, and a fresh translation from original texts was made for the Bible Society in 1912.<sup>2</sup> An ordinal was published at Hólar in 1635 to conform with King Christian's Edict of 1607.

Bishop Thorlak continued also the antiquarian side of Icelandic post-Reformation scholarship, initiated under the leadership of Odd Einarsson, whose long tenure of the see of Skálholt overlapped his own. Odd's junior collaborators, Jón Gizurarson and Jón Egilsson, who specialised in Annals and Lives of Bishops, were encouraged in their historical researches by Bishop Thorlak. His most important personal achievement was the saving from decay of the Sturlunga Saga and the older Bishop's sagas, biographies of the first bishops, neglected and forgotten like the rest of the country's literature since the numbing ecclesiastical aggravations of the fifteenth century.

1: E.H. p485. ct F.J. III. p729. Rvk Museum has a copy.  
2. G.j. p421.

His work helped the men of his generation to envisage if not to recapture the robust and radiant spirit of early Icelandic churchmanship.

Many personal documents demonstrate the lively interchange of information existing after the Reformation between students, in particular ecclesiastics, in Iceland and scholars in England and other parts of Europe. Shakespeare reflects his country's interest in the 'prick-ear'd cur of Iceland' - a popular xvith century pet. Henry More, the Cambridge Platonist, portrays Icelandic ghosts. Bishop Gudbrand, the Bible-maker, found time to send a descriptive letter to the Rev. F. Branham of Harwich, which Hakluyt translated (IV, 196). We have noticed Sir Thos. Browne's correspondence with the prestur of Hitardal. From its inception in 1662 the Royal Society showed much interest in Iceland, sending to bishops and others many questionnaires as to conditions in the country. These perhaps stimulated the surveys made by Sira Arngrim Jónsson, and a succession of lesser antiquarians over two centuries.<sup>1</sup>

Much attention was paid during this period to the pedestrian work of copying old manuscripts, with the result that in addition to Palsaga being thus preserved, the priceless account of the Settlers called Landnámabók and the story of the coming of Christianity - Islendingabók would have been lost to posterity had they not been carefully copied by Jón Erlendsson in 1651. Jón Halldorsson (1665-1736) and Ketill Jorundsson (1638-70) prestur of Hvamm, also prominently assisted in this saving work.

Denmark secured the originals of these and most other ancient records collected and copied by ecclesiastics of the day, among the earliest of antiquarians. Many of the manuscripts perished in the great fire in Copenhagen in 1728.<sup>2</sup>

The Hólar printing press was claimed by Bishop Thorlak's son Thordur, Bishop of Skálholt (1674-97), who devoted it, except for one Harmony of the Gospels (Skálholte 1687) to the valuable work of reprinting Icelandic classics such as Landnámabók, Kristnisaga,

1. Seaton: Literary Relations...pp 33, 180-8.
2. Vigfusson: Sturlunga S. Prolegomena pp cxli sq.

Olaf's Saga Tryggvason and the Skædi (Islandingabók) of Ari the Learned.<sup>1</sup> Thordur also published a treatise on Iceland to counteract exaggerations of foreigners. Every generation seems to need some such antidote.

In spite of the rights of inheritance, it is satisfactory to record that the Press was bought by Björn, Bishop of Hólar, in 1704 and restored to its original seat, at which one more edition of the Bible was printed in 1728 and some other books down to 1799 when it was removed with the see itself to the south.<sup>2</sup>

In its long and chequered history by its means great and imperishable good has been effected.

(b) The outstanding collector and copyist of the seventeenth century was Brynjolf Sveinsson, Bishop of Skálholt 1639-74, whose life reflects much of the light and shade of Icelandic churchmanship.<sup>3</sup> A biography of him was written by his nephew Torfi Jónsson and is included in the second series of Biskupa Sögur. Owing to his scholarship, bearing and force of character he was regarded like the old chieftain-bishops, as a king in Iceland.

Descended on his mother's side from Jón Arason, the Catholic stalwart in the Reformation struggle, he had much of that fiery prelate's energy and incisiveness, at least in speech; and owing perhaps to this consanguinity his Lutheran churchmanship showed few signs of negative protestantism. "The mediaeval church" he used to say, "had indeed a scabbed head, but Luther took a curry-comb to it, and scraped off hair and scalp and all". Bishop Brynjolf liked to pray with his eyes on a crucifix, and, like his contemporary Archbishop Laud, he faithfully observed ecclesiastical rules and feasts and fasts, refusing even to start on a journey on the eve of Sunday. Today the Church in Iceland is more careful than is customary in

1. E.H. pp 110, 488-9.

2. E.H. pp 486-7.

3. F.J. pp 602 sq.; Vigfusson: Sturl.S.Proleg.pp xxii sq.

England of the observance of eves and vigils. On Saturday afternoon before Christmas and Easter shops close early, and churches are filled for services at five and six o'clock. Torfi records that in Brynjolf's coffin were placed a Greek New Testament and four gospels translated by Bishop Jón Arason. But as an inventory of Hólar after Bishop Jón's death mentions only a breviary,<sup>1</sup> Torfi probably meant this, which would suit Brynjolf's catholic proclivities.

In appearance the bishop was a big, stern, proud-looking man with a mop of red hair and a forked red beard. He made a great impression on the youth of his day, some of whom he adopted in the ancient Icelandic manner with a view to undertaking their education. When they wrote to him from Copenhagen in Icelandic he would remind them forcibly that he had sent them abroad to practise their Latin, not the vulgar tongue he heard round him all day. Scholars must use with one another a befitting scholarly language. To this day, as Henderson and Lord Dufferin testify, and one at least of the British Army chaplains can confirm, some presturs and farmers will help out the average Englishman's linguistic incapacity by conversing in Latin. Brynjolf was a great linguist and carried on extensive learned correspondence with scholars on the continent such as the famous Ole Worm, one of the earliest Danish archaeologists, and Thomas Bartolin, the historian, which helped to put Iceland once more on the map of Europe.<sup>2</sup>

The bishop marked his books with one capital L superimposed on a second-L (L) to indicate *Lupus loricatus* (brynjadur ulfur) mailclad wolf. He signed himself Brynjolfus R. as if it indicated Rex; but it probably signified Rufus. Vigfusson suggests that it stood for Ragnheid's son as the bishop had a great affection for his mother Ragnheid, great grand-daughter of Jón Arason.

However that may be, it brings us to the tragedy

1. H. Hermansson: *Guðspjallabók*, introd.
2. Christian (son of Ole) Worm edited *Ari's Islendingabók* published at Oxford 1696-1716.

in this fine old scholar's life. He had a well loved son and daughter, on whom he set his hopes. His son Halldor (b. Dec 8. 1642) became a merchant seaman and after some years in Norfolk where he became friendly with Sir Thos. Browne's household, he died at Yarmouth on Dec. 28th 1666. His father sent a Latin epitaph for his monument erected in 1723.<sup>1</sup> His only daughter Ragnheid (b. Sep. 8. 1641), remarkable for unusual beauty and intellectual powers, received tributes from many scholars associated with her father, notably a holograph of Hallgrim Pétursson's Passion Poems, dedicated to her in 1661 with ominous congruity. Ragnheid was regarded by her father as the apple of his eye, (Finmur Jonson's phrase is *instar ocelli*), and yet, with the unwisdom of the learned he appointed as her tutor his foster-son Dadi, an attractive scoundrel who seduced her. The bishop found himself unable to regard this outrage as a lover's uncontrolled passion, for he learnt that Dadi had violated his maidservant about the same time. The father was beside himself with horror and rage. He could not forgive Dadi but he would not prevent his ordination. He petitioned the Crown for letters of rehabilitation for his daughter; and no doubt to expedite the matter he sent almost all his valuable and treasured manuscripts to the Royal Library. But Ragnheid, who was 22 years old, died a few months later from shame and terror at her father's bitter grief.<sup>2</sup>

(c) Brynjolf's expiatory sacrifice of his library inaugurated the transfer of the historic Icelandic vellums to Denmark. Arni Magnusson (1663-1730) was the last of this notable line of antiquarians, the chief reaper of the harvest of manuscripts sedulously accumulated for more than a century under the leadership of Bishop Odd, Præstur Arngrim Jónsson, and the learned Bishop Brynjolf.

Arni was a son of the parsonage, and after studying

1. Seaton: *Lit. Relations* pp 180-1.
2. F.J. III pp643-4; G.Kampan: *Jómfrú Ragnheidur*, Cpn.1930; trans. Evelyn Ramsden: "The Virgin of Skálholt" London 1936.

at Copenhagen became secretary to the historian Thomas Bartolin, at whose suggestion he devoted forty years of his life to collecting old Icelandic manuscripts, which he carried off to Denmark. Their disappearance from the country of their origin is regrettable, especially after the patriotic labour devoted to their collection; but had they been left in Iceland they would probably have perished altogether; for in their latter days Arngrim and Brynjolf lost heart, and after them little antiquarian interest was shown. The people went through a period of calamities. Many lives were lost and much depression caused by volcanic outbursts in the 17th century, and as we shall see, in the following century national life was almost brought to an end. So the manuscripts, mostly neglected in damp and scattered farms, were saved from perishing and destruction.

The fire at Copenhagen destroyed many Icelandic vellums, but the Arna-Magnean Collection in the University Library there now houses 2,000 Icelandic manuscripts, and 6,000 Icelandic documents. 1 Thus was the work of Icelandic pioneer collectors completed; for the real credit for initiating and establishing this serviceable undertaking is due to native antiquarians.

The generalization has been made that "the Church in Iceland by becoming Lutheran slipped into a back-water of culture". This notion does not appear to be supported by the evidence. In the years which preceded the Reformation all interest in the national literature had been stifled. The Roman protagonist, Bishop Jón Arason, boasted in a poem that he knew no Latin, and even though this may have been one of his jokes, it shows no pride in scholarship. But when positive principles prevailed, the love of learning and literature inherent in Icelanders once more blossomed into the flowers and fruit of poetry and history. 2 "In no land was the number of talented and well educated leaders relatively so large". 3 The clergy had become the most influential class and nobly played

1. Gj. p315.

2. This sentence has caught the alliterative taint without which no poem or saga is considered passable in Iceland.

3. Gj. p313.

the part of Help in the slough of despond into which the nation had fallen. Leading ecclesiastics recovered the buried treasures of their country's incomparable ancient sagas, revived their people's pride in their national records, and by their industry and assiduous propaganda induced other nations to take an interest in the chronicles of their country, which has continued to this day. Interest in the history and literature of Iceland rightly precedes latterday curiosity in the country's unusual natural phenomena. For the achievements of the people are of more real concern and importance than the wonders of the land.

X. (iii) A Mystical Poet and a Preacher.

(Hallgrim Pétursson and Jón Víðalín.)

Bishop Brynjolf's influence, in accordance with the genius of the Icelfander, was personal rather than pastoral. He worked through individuals more than in national or social spheres. The most interesting and famous of the young men he discovered and trained was Hallgrim Pétursson (1614-74) whose compositions Vigfusson hails as "the flower of Icelandic poetry old and modern".

His father held the honourable but ill-paid job of bell-ringer at Hólar cathedral in the memorable days during which his cousin Bishop Gudbrand compiled the first Icelandic Bible. The lad gave up his schooling to go to sea with some German merchants and finally became a blacksmith's apprentice in Copenhagen where he was (as men say) accidentally discovered by Bishop Brynjolf. The bishop was always on the look out for promising young men. One of the leading priests of the day, Provost Jón Halldórsson, compiler of ecclesiastical biographies, recalls what a lasting impression it made on him when the great bishop coming out of a meeting of the Althing went up to a group of boys, after putting his hand on the head of Jón, then nine years old, said in the cryptic pithy Icelandic manner: "Age is upon me, but youth is upon thee". Jón Halldórsson (1665-1736) grew up to become a valuable prestur "imposing in presence, a fine preacher and an unusually learned man".<sup>1</sup>

In connection with the young blacksmith the story is told that the bishop passed his shop and heard him swearing with a surprising mastery of language. Recognising misdirected talent in this eloquence the bishop entered the shop and, finding Hallgrim and he were distantly related by marriage, offered to adopt the youth. The bishop sent Hallgrim, now eighteen years old, to the cathedral school in Copenhagen where he did well and passed out in 1635 as student. In that year the miserable

1. J.H. II p242. ut sup p 202.

group of Icelandic captives were ransomed from Algiers, and returned home. It was found that after seven years of exile they had almost entirely forgotten their Christian religion, so Bishop Brynjolf appointed Hallgrim to teach them. The youth fell in love with one of the captives, Gudrið Simonsdóttir, who was nearly old enough to be his mother. She was married, though she had not heard of her husband since they were parted by the slave-traders after their capture. Nevertheless Hallgrim took her to live with him, and they had a son. For some years they lived on next to nothing at Hvalsnes in the South-west, and in 1644 on the next vacancy in the poor parish there, Bishop Brynjolf ordained Hallgrim to take charge. In 1651 he moved to Saubaer on the lovely shores of Hvalfjörð, where he rebuilt the dilapidated ecclesiastical buildings and did other practical and personal church work. Occasionally travellers would look in. One mother in Israel later recorded how inspired she was when, as she passed that way as a young girl in a subordinate capacity, Hallgrim, whom she did not recognise as the poet, bade her be of good cheer, as great work lay before her.

His Passion Hymns, the great achievement of his life, were beaten out on the anvil of his many-sided personal experience. Sorrow and suffering made Hallgrim a poet. He was deeply moved by the loss of his daughter Steinunn, who was four years old when she died. After that he began to pour out his soul in his Passion Hymns, a "crucifix of song", which he dedicated in 1661 to Ragnheid, Bishop Brynjolf's daughter. Hallgrim's last years are hidden in the mists of his retreat. Poverty weighed him down and his health began to fail. Even at the beginning of the nineteenth century the income of Saubaer benefice was not more than £6 a year, with "a small farm capable only of affording pasture to a few sheep and cattle".<sup>2</sup>

In Hallgrim's last ten years leprosy attacked him,

1. Arne Möller: Hallgrim Pétursson.
2. E.H. p394. (who does not mention Hallgrim).

and increased with such malignity that in 1667 he had to give up work and appoint an assistant (adstodarprest), rara avis in Iceland. Then he went to live with his son at an adjacent farm, where he died on Oct. 27th 1674, as his grave at Saubaer shows.<sup>1</sup>

Hallgrim's reaction to Death is shown in his most famous poem "Allt eins og blómstrid Eina", which has stood the test of nearly 300 years' use at funerals in Iceland:-

All life is like the flower  
That grows upon the plain,  
And meets the morning hour  
In grace without a stain;  
But in a moment flying  
Time cuts its beauty down,  
And leaves and colours dying.  
Like human life, are flown.

x x x

No rank or shining raiment  
I find beneath the heav'n:  
The Soul as loan, not payment,  
Is to the body giv'n.  
From God came the concession;  
He claims my latest breath;  
And so, my Lord's possession  
I yield his herald, Death.<sup>2</sup>

The afflicted poet wrote out three original copies of his "Passiusalmar", one of which is treasured at the National Library in Reykjavik. The book was first printed at the Hólar press in 1666 and soon made its way throughout the country. These Passion Hymns met a heartfelt need of the people for comfort and inspiration in days of famine, isolation and penury. Hallgrim was a man of like passions with themselves who had suffered in body and mind, and had experienced the bitterness of deprivation and death, which had driven him to taste the pungent medicine of repentance. Bringing all his "sorrow, sin

1. His wife outlived him by four years and died (and was buried) at Saubaer in 1682 aged 84. See Halfdan Einarsson: H.P. Salmar og Kveldi.
2. Translation Watson Kirkconnell: "Icelandic Verse" p. 109-111.



Hallgrim wrote another book of religious poems - Gospel verses for Sundays and holy days, anticipating John Keble's "Christian Year". Though every Icelander loves a book he responds more readily to poetry than he does to prose. This accounts for the fact that after the Reformation not only the Psalms but many of the historical portions of the Bible were paraphrased in verse, notably by poets such as Bjarni Jónsson (ob.ADL650), Páll Vidalin (ob.ADL727) and others. Hallgrim's paraphrases of scripture in his "Christian Year" reach a high level and have been unfairly neglected. They widen the scope and outlook of his achievement and illustrate the fertility of his mystical thought. Some of them are in the vein of his contemporary George Herbert (1593-1633). Thus:-

Trinity III - St.Luke XV.

Son, silver, sheep when they  
all lost and wandering were,  
father, wife, herd straightway  
to seek and find did fare.

In mercy so God's Son  
bears rich and ready aid;  
by each repentant one  
God's angels glad are made.

A son, a silver coin  
of price, a sheep of Thine  
make me, my Lord divine.<sup>1</sup>

B. Jón Vidalin, Bishop of Skalholt 1698-1720, also endowed Icelandic literature with a religious classic - Húspostilla (Family Sermons) "the most notable theological book Iceland has ever produced".<sup>2</sup> He was furthermore an outstanding bishop, worthy to be rated alongside Guðbrand and Brynjólf for a solid and lasting contribution to his church and nation. He inherited his surname from

1. W.C.Green: Trans. from the Icelandic.

2. F. York Powell in Enc.Britt. s.v.Icelandic Lit.

his famous ancestor Arngrim Jónsson, and (as the homely old sagas would have put it) a lot more besides that.

All his life Jón Vidalin had difficult problems to face. He lost his father when he was eleven years old, and to support himself worked as a fisherman and afterwards served in the Danish Marines. Knowing what poverty meant, in later life he never turned the needy from his door unhelped.

Vidalin trained for the ministry in Denmark and nobly upheld the Icelander's devotion to learning and languages and readiness to impart his knowledge freely to others. It is clear from his writings that his scholarship was both profound and wide. At this time Danish theologians enjoyed contacts with England, and Vidalin shows acquaintanceship with English Church history, and clearly derived inspiration and edification from the "Whole Duty of Man" (published in 1659-60), which he translated into Icelandic. His sermons contain many quotations from Greek Philosophy, and reflect credit on the writer and their innumerable readers. As one of his contemporaries has recorded: "He knew many languages and was deeply versed in History, Philosophy and the Holy Scriptures".

Vidalin devoted much time and trouble to helping young people and training young pastors. In his comprehensive and well-documented account of this noble-hearted bishop Dr. Möller recalls the story of a young pastor of Skálholt who took his sermons to the bishop every Saturday for two years to receive his criticism and advice.<sup>1</sup>

When Vidalin became bishop the chief topic of conversation, especially at the Althing, was the grievous distress in the country, chiefly due to harsh conditions of trade and enforced labour, imposed by Denmark. Successive Deputies proved cruel and grasping administrators, against whose tyrannies bishops and clergy waged unequal war. In 1707 as the result of years of lowering conditions a plague of smallpox carried off 18,000 people - almost one third of the population. In Skálholt diocese 26 pastors

1. Arne Möller: Jón Vidalin pp58,304.

and almost all the theological students died. The bishop took drastic measures to meet this emergency, by grouping parishes, ordaining adolescents, augmenting stipends and establishing a pension fund for pastors' widows. To deal with his people's plight he called a synod which drew up a gravamen for the State Official to lay before the king.

But Vidalin was a preacher and writer rather than an economist. Gudbrand and Brynjolf had dealt chiefly with individuals, students and scholars. Jón Vidalin catered also for the masses cowering in their wretched homes. He saw that however sorely their bodies wanted food, their tragic need was sustenance for their despairing spirits. Hungry and thirsty, their souls fainted in them. Both Hallgrim in his poems and Vidalin by his sermons recalled the people to religion; one rather as a balm, the other as a goad. The Passion Hymns led those who were losing heart to find consolation and endurance in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The cottage sermons stirred them to a change of mind leading to a new life according to the will of God. Both books were individualist and reflective, eminently suitable for an independent and thoughtful people.

For 'cottage sermons' Vidalin's discourses are remarkably scholarly. It speaks well for the learning of Icelanders that even in the calamitous days that followed, they found in Master Jón's ennobling utterance an appeal to their heads as well as to their hearts.

Vidalin used the evangelical instrument of preaching as it had never been used before in his country. The other great media of Bible-reading and hymn-singing had been successfully adopted. Vidalin was an orthodox Lutheran of the great reformer's own type. Adhering to the written Bible word with a sincerity which left no room for peradventure or hesitation, he combined with the intellectualism of orthodoxy an ardent faith and an impassioned eloquence which gave him great power over his hearers. He sought

to stir the conscience of his people by preaching repentance and conversion rather than the gospel message of salvation through Christ. Raising his mighty voice like one crying in the wilderness, he summoned his people to repent, lighting up their secret sins with the burning torch of the Word of God. " 1

As his life drew near its close, he had his sermons printed in black letter in 1718, and like Hallgrim's Psalms, they went into almost every house in the land. Their popularity continued for a century and a half, so that twelve editions have been required. They brought into homely use the words of the Bible as given to the Icelandic Church after the Reformation by Odd and Gudbrand, so that its clear direct phraseology has passed into the current talk of every day.

For devotional purposes also Vidalin's Family Sermons have proved their value. Should age or illness, driving rain or snow, hurricane or long hours of darkness keep a household from making a long and hazardous journey to their parish church, they would assemble in the living-room, and, beginning with a hymn, or in Lent with one of Hallgrim's Passion Psalms, offer prayer, and then getting out a well-fingered volume, familiarly called 'Jón's Book' they would read one of Vidalin's sermons, concluding with another hymn and a kiss of peace.<sup>2</sup>

The words on the Memorial to Sir Robert Shirley, (1599-1654) who gave the only church built in England in the stormy days of Cromwell, may be applied to Hallgrim and Vidalin: "whose singular praise it was to have done the best things in the worst times, and hoped them in the most calamitous."

1. Gj. pp312-3.
2. E.H. p306; Baring Gould: Iceland, p151.

CHAPTER ELEVEN.STORM AND STRESS.  
(1720-1820.)(i) The Elements again.

The eighteenth century - the most sombre in the history of Iceland, was a time of almost unrelieved material disaster with a melancholy outcome from which the nation has only just begun to recover. Storm and stress serves as a description of the whole period in three spheres (i) elemental (ii) Political (iii) bodily and mental.

(a) The population at the beginning of the century was 50,444. In 1800 it was 47,086. The increase in the nineteenth century, in spite of the loss of about 20,000 by emigration to Canada and U.S.A., amounted to 31,400, so that it may be said the diminution of population between 1700 and 1800 in effect meant there were 35,000 fewer people in the country in 1800 than there would have been in tolerable conditions - a loss of about 40%.

It was a remarkable fact that the first census in Europe was taken in Iceland in 1700 - a hundred years before such a step was contemplated in Great Britain, when the House of Lords rejected the proposal chiefly on the ground that it was "tempting Providence" to bring on some national calamity. Such objectors might well have pointed to the experience of Iceland's population, the sequence though not the result of their census enterprise. The census was made from the full and accurate Parish Registers kept by pastors as the outcome of their regular visitations. Whatever charge can be made against Icelandic bishops and pastors, their systematic visitation of their people is exemplary. Such contacts did much to sustain the people in this century of plague, pestilence and famine, from which we pray in the Litany to be delivered, with no thought

of what such calamities demand in strength of character and depth of religion. In Iceland these 'visitations' were the result of a concentrated outbreak of storms and volcanic eruptions followed by earthquakes, devastating large tracts of the few inhabitable green valleys on the island. Except for the bishops and the holders of the half-dozen Crown benefices,<sup>1</sup> the clergy shared the life and the poverty of their people, following their precarious occupation of farming, and occupying parsonage houses no different from the labourers' cabins scattered along sparse river valleys and an ungracious sea-side.

(b) In this century many pastors had to endure the loss of church, home and family while exhorting their people to stoical endurance and Christian resignation, if not hope. This is apparent in the vivid account of the poignant experiences of his parish in the eruption of 1727 by Jón Thorlaksson, prestur of Sandfell in South-east Iceland:-

"In the year 1727, on the 7th of August, which was the tenth Sunday after Trinity, after the commencement of divine service in the church of Sandfell, as I stood before the altar, I was sensible of a gentle concussion under my feet, which I did not mind at first; but, during the delivery of the sermon, the rocking continued to increase so as to alarm the whole congregation; yet they remarked that the like had often happened before. One of them, a very aged man, repaired to a spring, a little below the house, where he prostrated himself on the ground, and was laughed at by the rest for his pains; but, on his return, I asked him what it was he wished to ascertain? to which he replied, "Be on your guard Sir; the earth is on fire!" Turning, at the same moment, towards the church-door, it appeared to me, and all who were present, as if the house contracted and drew itself together. I now left the church, necessarily

1. In 1736 there were four 'good livings' i.e. over £20 a year in Skálholt diocese: Breidabólstað, Óddi, Stadastrá, Hitardal and fifteen 'mediocre'. For Hólar we may add Grenjatúnarstað, £30. F.J.III p 502.

ruminating on what the old man had said; and as I came opposite to Mount Flaga, and looked up towards its summit, it appeared alternately to expand and be heaved up, and fall again to its former state. Nor was I mistaken in this, as the event shewed; for on the morning of the 8th, we not only felt frequent and violent earthquakes, but also heard dreadful reports, in no respect inferior to thunder. Everything that was standing in the house was thrown down by these shocks; and there was every reason to apprehend, that mountains as well as houses would be overturned in the catastrophe. What most augmented the terror of the people was, that nobody could divine in what place the disaster would originate, or where it would end.

"After nine o'clock three particularly loud reports were heard, which were almost instantaneously followed by several eruptions of water that gushed out, the last of which was the greatest, and completely carried away the horses and other animals that it overtook in its course. When these exundations were over, the ice-mountain itself ran down into the plain, just like melted metal poured out of a crucible; and, on settling, filled it to such a height, that I could not discover more of the well-known mountain Lomagnupr, than about the size of a bird. The water now rushed down the east side without intermission, and totally destroyed what little of the pasture-grounds remained. It was a most pitiable sight to behold the females crying, and my neighbours destitute both of counsel and courage; however, as I observed that the current directed its course towards my house, I removed my family up to the top of a high rock, on the side of the mountain, called Dalskardstorfa, where I caused a tent to be pitched, and all the church utensils, together with our food, clothes and other things that were most necessary, to be conveyed thither; drawing the conclusion that should the eruption break forth at some other place, this height would escape the longest, if it were the will of God, to whom we committed ourselves, and remained there.

"Things now assumed quite a different appearance.

The Yökul (glacier) itself exploded, and precipitated masses of ice, many of which were hurled out to sea; but the thickest remained on the plain, at a short distance from the foot of the mountain. The noise and reports continuing, the atmosphere was so completely filled with fire and ashes, that day could scarcely be distinguished from night, by reason of the darkness which followed, and which was barely rendered visible by the light of the fire that had broken through five or six cracks in the mountain. In this manner the parish of Þroefa was tormented for three days together; yet it is not easy to describe the disaster as it was in reality; for the surface of the ground was entirely covered with pumice-sand, and it was impossible to go out in the open-air with safety, on account of the red-hot stones that fell from the atmosphere. Any who did venture out had to cover their heads with buckets, and such other wooden utensils as could afford them such protection.

"On the 11th, it cleared up a little in the neighbourhood; but the ice-mountain still continued to send forth smoke and flames. The same day I rode, in company with three others, to see how matters stood with the parsonage, as it was most exposed; but we could only proceed with the utmost danger, as there was no other way except between the ice-mountain and the Yökul, which had been precipitated into the plain, where the water was so hot that the horses almost got unmanageable; and, just as we entertained the hope of getting through by this passage, I happened to look behind me, when I descried a fresh deluge of hot water directly above me, which had it reached us, must inevitably have swept us before it. Contriving, of a sudden, to get on the ice, I called to my companions to make the utmost expedition in following me; and, by this means, we reached Sandfell in safety. The whole of the farm together with the cottages of two tenants, had been destroyed; only the dwelling-houses remained, and a few spots of the tuns. The people stood crying

in the church. The cows which, contrary to all expectation, both here and elsewhere, had escaped the disaster, were lowing beside a few hay-stacks that had been damaged during the eruption. At the time the exundation of the Yökul broke forth, the half of the people, belonging to the parsonage, were in four newly constructed sheep-cotes, where two women and a boy took refuge on the roof of the highest; but they had hardly reached it when, being unable to resist the force of the thick mud that was borne against it, it was carried away by the deluge of hot-water, and, as far as the eye could reach, the three unfortunate persons were seen clinging to the roof. One of the women was afterwards found among the substances that had proceeded from the Yökul, but burnt, and as it were, parboiled; her body was so soft that it could scarcely be touched. Everything was in the most deplorable condition. The sheep were lost; some of which were washed up dead from the sea, in the third parish from the Groefa. The hay that was saved was found insufficient for the cows, so that a fifth part of them had to be killed; and most of the horses, which had not been swept into the ocean, were afterwards found completely mangled. The eastern part of the parish of Sida was also destroyed by the pumice and sand; and the inhabitants were, on that account, obliged to kill many of their cattle.

"The mountain continued to burn night and day, from the 8th of August, as already mentioned, till the beginning of summer, in the month of April the following year, at which time the stones were still so hot, that they could not be touched; and it did not cease to emit smoke till near the end of summer. Some of them had been completely calcined; some were black and full of holes; and others were so loose in their contexture, that one could blow through them. On the first day of summer 1728, I went in company with a person of quality to examine the cracks in the mountain, the most of which were so large that we could creep into them. I found here a quantity of saltpetre, and could have collected it,

but did not choose to stay long in the excessive heat. At one place, a heavy calcined stone lay across the aperture; and as it rested on a small basis, we easily dislodged it into the chasm, but could not observe the least sign of it having reached the bottom.

" These are the most remarkable particulars that have occurred to me with respect to this mountain; and thus God hath led me through fire and water, and brought me, through much trouble and adversity, to my eightieth year. To Him be the honour, the praise, and the glory for ever".<sup>1</sup>

(c) The disasters of the 18th century were unique in the history of the country, not by their occurrence but on account of their concentrated intensity. Annals down the ages record volcanic eruptions followed by floods and earthquakes, losses of farms and cattle. Floods changing the courses of rivers occur owing to the intense heat of the eruption melting a glacier or mountain ice-cap and precipitating it into the plain. The 14th and 17th centuries with recorded dates of ten or a dozen local disasters are typical of almost any century, indicating the constant warfare these few and scattered people have had to wage against the elements.

In 1693 Hekla's 17th recorded eruption occurred, spreading ashes all over the island and casting dust 1,000 miles east and south over the seas to Norway and Scotland. The Icelanders' small meadows or tuns and scantier cultivated patches became unproductive, and as the Danish trade monopoly impeded food imports, widespread famine developed, intensified by excessively severe winters, so that the country lived up to its name and became ice-bound.<sup>2</sup> Many died in 1702, including 120 in the district of Thingvellir alone. In 1706 violent earthquakes in the region of Olfus destroyed 24 farms with many cattle. In 1707 an epidemic of small-pox

1. E.H. pp208-212. -
2. Espolin: viii, 26.

carried off 18,000 of the underfed peasants, nearly one-third of the population.<sup>1</sup> At this period the suffering people were saved from despair by the bracing sermons of Bishop Jón Vidalin who had lost many of his clergy. His theme was based on Dr. Johnson's epigram, "it matters not how a man dies, but how he lives". Any natural feelings his hearers may have cherished that they were helpless in face of visitations of an angry Creator were transformed into stoical fortitude based on Christian repentance.

It was easy to see that a strong statesman-bishop of the ancient chieftain type would have withstood the despotic state officials and corrupt monopolists. Individual tyrants may be faced and slain, but bureaucratic vested interests are hydra-headed monsters too much for a modern St. George on his own. Bishop Vidalin used with effect the method at his disposal and sublimated his people's sufferings; so that

"still even here content can spread a charm,  
redress the clime and all its rage disarm".

In the years 1724-30 the north-east part of the island was inundated by a lava-flood after eruptions from Krabla, so that the district has hardened into a state resembling the arid mountains of the moon or the neighbourhood of the Dead Sea, the "seat of desolation," with boiling fetid mud pools locally regarded as lakes of hell.

Local farms were destroyed and their lands rendered unworkable. The church at Reykjahlid remained intact with the church-farm on a mound, an oasis in the lava desert. When making my way in 1941 over this wilderness to visit the troops in the east, I broke the long tiring journey at this little farm. I was given coffee and pancakes for which no payment would be accepted. This should be stated, as some summer tourists have given a different impression of Icelanders. Nevertheless in this region the inhospitable countryside has not produced an in-

1. Gj. pp320-322.

hospitable people.

Krabla had no sooner subsided than the historic tracts of the south-east seaboard were devastated in 1727-8 by an eruption of *Þraefajökull*, Iceland's highest mountain (7420 ft.), whose glaciers dip down into the sea. The local results have been tellingly described by the octagenarian pastor of Sandfell, whose calm courage and leadership speak well for the country churchmanship of Iceland in this testing epoch.

Four years later the outbreaks moved Westwards, and Rangarvellir - the fields by the Crooked River, often changing its course, had a dozen farmsteads destroyed and 40 damaged.

In 1755 the eruption of Katla, another fissure in the great southern volcanic massif, immediately destroyed thirteen farms and spread lava and ashes so thickly over the district that 50 other farms had to be abandoned. Severe winters followed (as often) leading once more to famine, of which 2,500 persons died in the diocese of Skálholt in 1757. Sheep disease broke out in 1761, reducing the flocks in two years from 491,934 to 112,054. Sheep and cattle were provided by the landlord and replaced if they died of old age; but many landlords, including the Bishop of Skálholt's steward, held that disease was the fault of the tenant and demanded payment from the helpless crofter.<sup>1</sup>

(d) The climax of this century of calamities was the eruption of Laki in *Skaptajökull* in 1783, followed by a widespread earthquake and severe frosts. The Rev. Ebenezer Henderson, visiting the district less than a generation afterwards, describes this national disaster in his Journal in a way which catches the

1. G.j. p325.

spirit of that day:-

"The eruption of 1783 not only appears to have been more tremendous in its phenomena than any recorded in the modern annals of Iceland, but it was followed by a train of consequences the most direful and melancholy, some of which continue to be felt to this day. Immense floods of red-hot lava were poured down from the hills with amazing velocity, and, spreading over the low-country, burnt up men, cattle, churches, houses, and everything they attacked in their progress. Not only was all vegetation, in the immediate neighbourhood of the volcano, destroyed by the ashes, brimstone, and pumice, which it emitted; but, being borne up to an inconceivable height in the atmosphere, they were scattered over the whole island, impregnating the air with noxious vapours, intercepting the genial rays of the sun, and empoisoning whatever could satisfy the hunger or quench the thirst of man and beast. Even in some of the more distant districts, the quantity of ashes that fell was so great, that they were gathered up by handfuls. Upwards of four hundred people were instantly deprived of a home; the fish were driven from the coasts, and the elements seemed to vie with each other which should commit the greatest depredations; famine and pestilence stalked abroad, and cut down their victims with ruthless cruelty; while death himself was glutted with the prey. In some houses there was scarcely a sound individual left to tend the afflicted, or any who possessed sufficient strength to inter the dead. The most miserably emaciated tottering skeletons were seen in every quarter. When the animals that died of hunger or disease were consumed, the wretched creatures had nothing to eat but raw hides, and old pieces of leather and ropes, which they boiled and devoured with avidity. The horses ate the flesh off one another, and for want of other sustenance had recourse to turf, wood and even excrementitious substances; while the sheep devoured each other's wool. In a word, the accumulation of miseries, originating in the volcanic eruption, was so dreadful, that, in the short space of two years, not fewer than

9,336 human beings, 28,000 horses, 11,461 head of cattle, and 190,488 sheep perished on the island."1

Seventy-eight farms were obliterated, 94 ruined and 372 badly damaged. Over 500 houses were wrecked and 1459 completely destroyed. Little was left of the historic cathedral and episcopal school at Skálholt.

The worst feature of this national disaster was the loss of a fifth of the population with possible reactions in the minds and spirits of those who remained.

Sudden and unexpected catastrophes may unnerve a whole nation and lead, as in the Far East, to an epidemic of bodily disease. The high mortality in Iceland during this period was due not to mental agony, but to the physical concomitants of tremendous volcanic eruptions. In many parts of the island people lived literally on the edge of a volcano, and they were braced to endurance by constant experience of hardships, close contact with the soil and their moral equipment. The terrible volcano of Laki bears in its name a resemblance to Loki, the Scandinavian spirit of evil "in the earth beneath". But the people did not collapse in fear of an unknown fate overhanging them. Their intolerable burden came not from within themselves, (the source of most burdens), nor from the inscrutable forces of Nature, but from the grinding tyrannies of the State. In spite of their inexplicable visitations they might have cried with David, "I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of the Lord; for very great are his mercies: but let me not fall into the hands of man".2

1: E.H. pp220-1. (? Some exaggeration in the figures.)  
2. 1 Chron. 21, 13.

XI. (ii) Church and State.

After the devastating eruption and earthquake of 1783/4, the miserable population, reduced to 40,000, was faced with extinction. The country had suffered from prolonged ravages from the Forces of Nature, and even more from the inefficiency, greed and callousness of the Danish administration, a corrupt trade monopoly, and rack-rent and villeinage in the system of land tenure.

The immediate economic result of the disaster of 1783/4 was the abolition of the trade monopoly, and the centralising of ecclesiastical and educational administration in Reykjavik.

(a) The tyranny of State officialdom and the harsh working of the trade monopoly may be illustrated by two instances out of a series of black records given in Stephensen's Account of the 18th century in Iceland. In 1699 a poor peasant convicted of offering a few fish for sale outside his district was flogged in the presence of the Amtmand or local Governor, Christian Muller. The following year three men were sentenced to imprisonment with the confiscation of their household goods because they had bought two ells of kersey from an English fisherman.<sup>1</sup>

Increasingly high fees were paid for the trade monopoly by Danish merchants, who added these state charges to their prices; and as Icelanders had little money, the merchants sold inferior goods and falsified weights and measures.<sup>2</sup> The introduction of absolute rule in 1661 led in Iceland to the dominance of a corrupt and lawless bureaucracy, in which bishops and clergy, now appointed and paid directly by the State, took their place as State officials, and whether they liked it or not, became involved in the grinding

1. Lovsamling for Island I, pp 406, 481.

2. Gj. pp 335-9.

system of exploiting the people.

In the earlier part of the century, as in 1699, protests initiated by the bishops were sent to the king, but though commissions were appointed, usually the only result was an increase in the number of officials. Nevertheless the Government showed growing disquietude about the affairs of a land that had become their dependency, to the extent of instituting a series of enquiries followed by reports on the state of the country.

In 1741 Ludvig Harboe, the learned and influential Bishop of Seeland, was appointed Visitor-General to investigate the state of religion and education. Undaunted by disasters he stayed four years in the country and by his presence and counsel instilled much needed staying power. It may be suggested that in our day a similar though unofficial visit from a learned and sympathetic bishop of a sister Church would do much to help the Church in Iceland to tackle unusual modern problems due to a strange concomitance of unparalleled commercial world-contacts and internal isolation. A noble tribute was paid to Harboe's achievement by Finnur Jónsson, Bishop of Skálholt 1754-85, in dedicating to him the ivth volume of his monumental *Historia Ecclesiastica Islandiae*, completed up to the year before Harboe came to the country. Bishop Harboe made a Report on the conditions of Iceland paying special regard to education, and in the spacious manner of the time not neglecting natural history;<sup>2</sup> but the only immediate practical outcome of his visit seems to have been the issue of a new edition of the Bible in 1747, reprinted from the admirable text of 1644, for which a tax of one riks-dollar (= 4/-) was levied on every parish. A thousand copies were printed and sold at 2½ dollars each. As this price was more than most people could afford, in 1750 a New Testament was published to sell at three marks a copy (= 2/-).<sup>3</sup>

1. J.H. II pp251-265.
2. Trans. into English published 1758.
3. E.H. pp489-491.

In 1772 the Icelanders, Eggert Olafsson and Bjarni Pálsson, commissioned in 1751 by a well-disposed king to report on the country, made such a comprehensive survey of its economic conditions and natural features that it evoked widespread interest in Northern Europe, and led to a series of visits from influential foreigners.<sup>1</sup> The earliest and most distinguished of these, Dr. (afterwards Abp.) Uno von Troil, chaplain to the King of Sweden, and Sir Joseph Banks, later President of the Royal Society took steps to make known their conclusions and the desperate plight of the people owing to the callous administration of the Danish Government.<sup>2</sup> Sir Joseph Banks (privately) reported that the bishops and the two State officials were the only men of any consequence in the country, and the settlement of the bishop and his retainers at Skálholt was the only attempt at a town.<sup>3</sup>

(b) The voice of protest that the Church should have raised was weakened by the implication of bishops and the richer clergy in the State system of land tenure. According to the Liber Villarium of 1695, the Bishop of Skálholt owned 304 farms; the Bp. of Hólar 345; 640 were allotted to parochial glebes, 45 to pensioned pastors, 16 to the poor and four to leper hospitals. The Crown held 718 farms confiscated from the monasteries; so that there were only 1847 free farms in the country, while the Crown and Church held 2112.

A farm was generally leased at one-twentieth of its taxable value. The rent was not lowered in spite of deterioration owing to natural causes, and if the land was so damaged that the rent could not be paid, a levy was made on the tenant's household goods. Sub-letting was extensively practised. Some pastors followed the demoralising example of officials and sub-let the

1. Reise igiennem Island, Sorøe 1772; epitome London 1805. Eggert (b.1726, ob.1768 - drowned) was also a patriotic and religious poet and reformer, Islandica XVI.
2. Von Troil: Letters on I., trans London 1780.
3. Islandica XVIII.

farms they leased to tenants who could barely make a pittance from their husbandry, and were required to render a service as well as rent. The severity of these exactions is amply illustrated in the accounts of Iceland in the xviiiith century. A farmer ordered to row a deputy across a fjörd refused to do it for nothing, and was brought before the Lawman, now not much more than a tool in the hands of the State, who sentenced him to be flogged twice. Individual bishops and pastors denounced the travesty of government exemplified by this kind of tyranny, and bitter struggles between clergy and officials were frequent: but the Church produced no outstanding champion of the people, so that indignation took the form of personal and local quarrels, in which any protest that reached Denmark was discounted by the fact that the State itself and even the Church were involved in the corrupt administration.

(c) The first step in practical opposition to the tyranny of officials and merchants and in restoring independence and self-reliance to the depressed Icelanders was taken in 1784 by the appointment of a native Administrator Skuli Magnusson (1711-94) to succeed the notorious Christians Müller and Dresse. He was a man of vision and action. With the co-operation of King Frederick V in 1752 he built mills at a hamlet on the south shores of Faxafjörd called Reykjavik, and bought an open sea fishing fleet. He imported foreigners to teach weaving and farming.<sup>1</sup> The monopolists' reaction was speedy and helpful. The merchants seeing their profits in danger refused to handle the goods; whereupon Magnusson sued them for past corruption, and the company was dissolved. But its successor deemed that it had brought its "goodwill", and attempted the same exploitation with some success, until they brought to dump on Iceland, flour condemned in Copenhagen, so full of worms and mildew that not even the omnivorous cattle would touch it. Magnusson encouraged the people to throw it into the sea, and had the company heavily fined.<sup>2</sup>

1. Lovsamling for Island I pp 107sq.
2. Gj pp340-2.

This vigorous resuscitation of the old Icelandic spirit together with the national disasters of 1783/4, led to the abolition of the trade monopoly in 1787.<sup>1</sup>

After Skálholt was destroyed, it was natural to establish in Reykjavik the new cathedral and school, for it was rapidly becoming the commercial and fishing centre of the country. But it became evident that there was more in the transference than convenience, when the ancient ecclesiastical and educational centre at Hólar in the North was also suppressed and its cathedral and school merged in the new Reykjavik establishments.

The leader in this centralising movement was the ambitious and versatile Magnus Stephensen (1762-1833), whose affinities are significantly advertised in the Danish way in which he spelt his name. He led the people, battered by a century of physical calamities, to look to continental culture rather than to national resources for the country's salvation. He maintained that pride in Icelandic literature and ideals was no more than futile nostalgia, so that men for a time ceased to find inspiration in the ancient historic centres of national life.

The destruction of Skálholt provided a reasonable excuse for abandonment of its time-honoured institutions; but even so, Skálholt school with forty students had as many as the congested establishment at Bessastadir ever contained.<sup>2</sup> And the suppression of Hólar with its 34 scholars did an injustice to the families in the North and East of the island, which Sir Richard Burton found in 1872 to be still a "prime grievance".<sup>3</sup>

This centralisation brought about also the lapse of the two episcopal theological colleges, so that training of candidates for the ministry was seriously handicapped until the University of Reykjavik was founded in 1911.

Impartial judgement on the merging of the two

1. This Measure freed trade only for all Danish citizens, & Icelanders were too poor for many years to take advantage of it. Free trade for all nations was not granted until 1854. 2. P.P. pp365 sq. The "Latin" i.e. Grammar school, set up in Rvk 1801-5, was moved to Bessastadir 1805-46, after which it returned to the capital. For bad conditions see E.H. p287. 3. Ultima Thule I pl55; II pp44-6. So in 1814 E.H. pl10; Hooker (1811) I, p352.

cathedrals is difficult for a student who has traced the moving story of their vicissitudes for 700 years. It is easy to see the expediency of the move, but for the people for whom the past means much, it must have been a grave loss to abandon the local and historical associations of St. Jón of Hólar and St. Thorlak of Skálholt. Moreover, there is more than sentiment in the pronouncement of Isleif, the first bishop and founder of the mother church of the country at Skálholt. "There shall always be a bishop's chair there, while Iceland is inhabited and Christianity endures." It is significant that Christianity was at its lowest ebb in Iceland when the bishop's chair was moved.

Centralisation generally raises more problems than it solves and tends to destroy the only spirit that can grapple with them.

### XI. (iii) Poverty, Apathy and Rationalism.

The centralising movement which was the outcome of the disasters culminating in 1783/4 took some time to alleviate the burden of poverty accumulated in that sombre period and aggravated rather than lessened the growing deadness of spirit accompanied by a loss of faith sometimes dignified by the term rationalism.

(a) For the relief of the sufferers of the earthquake, Denmark collected about £8,000, but only about a quarter of it reached the unfortunate victims. The rest went on expenses of a survey and on general administration. The removal of the trade monopoly only freed commerce for all citizens of Iceland-Denmark, and, as Icelanders were too poor to trade, Danish merchants, as before, charged what they liked. A plan was actually considered for removing the whole population of Iceland as a colony to the plains of Jutland; but at this time the North was comparatively immune from disaster, and Icelanders would rather starve in their own homeland than grow fat elsewhere. As Seneca says: *Nemo patriam amat quia magna, sed quia sua.*

However a generation later the whole country was in danger of starvation. For in the Napoleonic wars England stood at bay against the conqueror of the European continent, and unable as ever to brook an enemy on her flank, she destroyed the Danish fleet at the battle of Copenhagen 1801,<sup>2</sup> and afterwards blockaded the ports of Denmark, which would have cut off most of the food supply of Iceland. But Sir Joseph Banks, the Privy Councillor who visited Iceland in 1772, prevailed on the British Government to allow trade via Feith, and so matters were eased. This friendly gesture is set out in an Order

1. Gj. pp 343-4.

2. This victory was chiefly due to Nelson, second-in-command who (according to Southey) turned his blind eye to the Commander's signal to break off the action in view of losses. He showed then his instinct for vigorously engaging the enemy at his weakest point (the "Nelson touch"), his perseverance and his humanity after victory.

in Council dated February 7 1810, which declares that "His Majesty being moved by compassion for the sufferings of these defenceless people...orders that they be exempted from attack... and be regarded as Stranger Friends under the safe-guard of His Majesty's royal Peace, and in no case to be treated as alien enemies."<sup>1</sup>

The treaty of peace in 1814, though it ceded Norway to Sweden, left Iceland tied to Denmark, with which it had no original historic connection (as it had with Norway, especially since 1262). Nevertheless conditions slowly improved and population increased, so that in 1823 it again numbered 50,000 - the figure of 1703, though that was no larger than the total in the xith century, when Bishop Gizur had a tithe-census made.

The poverty of the clergy and the squalor in which they lived is emphasised in the accounts, both classics in their way, written by visitors of different temperaments and avocations. Sir W.J. Hooker (1809) and Rev. Ebenezer Henderson (1814-5). Stipends appear miserably small; the richest income being about 200 riks-dollars (£40). Most pastors received about 35 riks-dollars and the poorest of them about five. This income came from the State, being a partial reimbursement of the money which the Crown retained from confiscated Churchlands, for only in that sense can Icelandic clergy be said to be State-paid. In addition pastors had a glebe-house and farm rent-free with some fees, so that in this respect they were better off than their country parishioners. The prestur of Thingvellir in 1809 received £5 a year with glebe sufficient to pasture five cows and 28 sheep. His parsonage, like most country homes of the period, was a mere cabin, dark, damp and squalid, with a small window of membrane of a sheep's womb or stomach, and a roof of turves laid on drift wood or on ribs of a whale. The food would consist of dried fish or, once or twice in winter, of mutton, occasional sour rye-bread or imported biscuits, bread made from lichen or wild oats with rancid butter. This acidulous diet on occasions would be helped down with a delicious dessert of skyr or curds mixed with crowberries, the only native fruit.<sup>2</sup> At Middalur the prestur received £4

1. E.H. pp402-4.

2. von Troil: Letters on Iceland pp99-112. Earlier observers note the liking for eating "Candles" (i.e. whale-oil, a help against extreme cold) cp Andrew Boorde 1542 "When I eat candle ends I am at a feest. Talow and raw stockfish I do love to ete".

and worked as a blacksmith.<sup>1</sup> It is not surprising that to support their families clergy laboured as farmers or fishermen, as carpenters or blacksmiths, though there is nothing unapostolic in this.

It must have been helpful to their own lives and to those of their people that pastors shared in the incessant and precarious toil of wresting a subsistence from their ungracious and aggressive countryside or on their grim grey seas.

The clergy had two or three professional uplifts not readily open to the laity, which served to keep them human in an existence lived too close to the soil; - pastoral visitation, teaching and study. Study, though more advanced in clerics, has been the laudable practice of all Icelanders. Pastoral visitation was thorough and systematic. Mention has been made of the fact that the earliest census in Europe was made possible by the accuracy of details entered in the parish registers. Not only were 'characters' recorded as in a school report, but also religious and educational progress. Parents acted as teachers and clergy as catechists, so that, despite stress of poverty, traditional Icelandic scholarship was not discontinued.<sup>2</sup> Icelandic parish clergy may have neglected their priesthood and become too wayworn or callous to be arresting prophets, but they faithfully exercised their ministry as sedulous pastors. The Church though poor in itself did not neglect the evangelical duty of almsgiving. In pre-Reformation days paupers used to be supported by a fourth-part of the tithe, and on Church estates, the founders of which often stipulated that a poor relation should be a first charge on the endowment. Afterwards a *nidursetningur* ('one who is down') was kept by inhabitants of his native parish in turns.<sup>3</sup> Retired pastors and widows were supported by those who had the richer benefices and by a portion of the State reimbursements.<sup>4</sup>

1. Hooker: Journal I pp96, 129-30; E.H. p33; Burton: Ultima Thule I p 164.

2. E.H. p285, see reproduction of page on 234B.

3. E.H. pp122-3. Arngrim Jónsson states that inveterate beggars were castrated, Isl. Tractatus p437. Vagabond in Icelandic = *hláupingi*;? hence land-loper, later land-lubber, often a sailor.

4. A widow enjoyed for a year of grace the benefice income. F.J. III p337.

Personal sublimation of poverty is finely illustrated in two sketches of pastors given by Dr. Henderson in 1814. Sira Jón Jónsson, prestur of Audabrecka, (he writes) is the doctor, counsellor and leader of his people. "His house is literally a Bethesda," his parlour does duty as library and apothecary's shop. He zealously instructs his flock, especially the rising generation, whom he regards as the most important part of his ministerial charge. In his parish register he enters regularly the character and circumstances of his parishioners, who number 400. Crime, especially drunkenness, has decreased owing to the high price of spirituous liquors. "Our poverty," the prestur avers, "is the bulwark of our happiness."

A neighbouring pastor, Jón Thorlaksson, over 70 years of age, was found in August like most of his brethren, helping in the hayfield. He lived in one tiny room, 8 ft by 6 ft, with a door 4ft high and a window 2 ft square. His endowment amounted to about £6 a year. His book-shelves contained English, French and German works, and he had acquired merit by making an Icelandic version of Milton's Paradise Lost.<sup>1</sup> He embodied in a verse his reflections on his state:-

"Pale poverty hath dogged my steps  
 Since in this world my life did start;  
 For threescore years and ten our ways  
 Have seldom wandered far apart.  
 Whether in heaven I'll shake her clear  
 He only knows who joined us here.<sup>2</sup>

(b) Such men of God were exceptional in their resignation. Isolation and hard conditions drove many people to apathy. Those who depended for their living on the sale of cod, whale-oil or their homespun wadmal, found for more than a century that they had to barter their hard-won goods for a trifle. Injustice and

1. E.H. pp98-102.

2. Trans. Watson Kirkconnell: Icelandic Verse.

oppression hardened their outlook on life and made them less eager to face their native difficulties and disasters. The iron entered into their souls. As Milton reminds us: "Our torments may also in length of time become our elements." (P.L.274.)

In 1772 von Troil described the Icelanders he saw as "of a good honest disposition, but so serious and sullen that I hardly remember to have seen any one of them laugh."<sup>1</sup> A generation later the traveller Hooker considered that their amusements were "not of a kind to dispel the gloomy habit which continually hangs about them." He reports their amusements to be an occasional game of cards and the recounting of their past history.<sup>2</sup> But what actually was depressing in those days was not that, like Englishmen, they took their pleasures sadly, but that they found no joy in their work. When the worker is deprived of the fruits of his labours, even so skilful and hazardous a pursuit as fishing, or one so exhilarating as haymaking becomes drudgery, and the human spirit is abased.<sup>3</sup>

Thus unjust trade conditions reinforced the depression induced by calamities and isolation, but although individual pastors showed a sense of duty and devotion, the chief clergy evinced no real leadership. The general tendency of religion in the country at this time was quietist and fatalistic - passive resignation to the divine and human powers harshly regulating Icelandic affairs. The 'higher' clergy escaped from an unfeeling and materialistic economy and the devastating forces of the universe into a world of literary study, patient sermonizing and personal benevolence. A typical example of their apathy is illustrated in Finnur Jónsson's tombstone-like eulogy of Stein Jónsson, Bishop of Hólar 1711-39, at a time when a large part of his diocese had been ruined by six years of volcanic eruptions, and thousands had died of hunger:-

"Tall, bearded, strong, he was placid, affable,

1. Letters on Iceland, p27; similarly Sir Jos. Banks.
2. Journal I, p lxxxi. He might have added glima - (wrestling), pony-racing, and chess. An old law forbids gambling.
3. Today when the country is being over-commercialized the slave-driver is industrialism.

easy-going, humane, . . . popular, . . . never angry, scarcely ever moved, kindly to the wretched and needy. . . . With State officials he maintained good relations, for he never hurt or worried any one, and overlooked the delinquencies of others. He was a competent student and his writings breathe a spirit of singular piety and patience".<sup>1</sup> In his episcopate of 28 years he ordained 68 priests.

Subsequent bishops and richer clergy show a similar complacency, but with the exception of the historian Finnur Jónsson, Bishop of Skálholt 1754-85, less literary powers. Their hands were tied by their monetary dependence upon the Crown.

After his popular visit in 1772 Sir Joseph Banks considered that the prevailing apathy was due not only to the succession of disasters, but to the prolonged trade oppression and State profiteering; and on that account advocated the taking over by England of the administration of Iceland either by purchase or annexation. He thought that a platoon of soldiers would be sufficient, if force were needed, for the capture of the two bishops and the two State officials - the only men of any account in the island; he had reason to know that the unhappy people would welcome such a step.<sup>2</sup>

In the dark days at the end of the century, the only leader to strike a helpful note was Bishop Hannes Finnsson, son of the historian. In the earthquake of 1783 he was ill in bed at Skálholt, when the buildings collapsed over him; nevertheless he lived to succeed his father as bishop (1785-96) and in 1796 published a notable treatise 'On the decrease of population in Iceland', with the double motive of rousing Danish or other Governments to action, and by depicting the heroic endurance of his countrymen through difficult centuries, to kindle new hope in the hearts of his people.<sup>3</sup>

(c) Through contact with Europe brought about by

1. F. J. pp749-50. His publications through his press included three editions of Vidalin's Sermons, a Triumphal Psalter & Hymn Book, and an anthology of Lassenius, Tarrapress &
2. Ísländica XVIII pp28sq. 83-5. (Rachlow.
3. J. H.: H. F. Biskup i Skálholti, Rvk. 1936.

centralization, the apathy of many hardened into rationalism. Stolid Icelanders had survived a century of physical disaster, but the economic earthquake which followed almost made havoc of their faith. In his estimate of the country in 1809 Hooker makes a naive comment: "Many works on Divinity have appeared since the Reformation, but happily for Iceland metaphysics do not appear to have occupied the attention of Icelanders to a great degree".<sup>1</sup> Deprived thus of philosophy and with their religion at a low ebb, it is not surprising that intercourse with the complexities of commercialism drove them to free-thinking and secularism.

In spite of its independent spirit Iceland is a law-abiding country, and has always been free from open heresy and schism. In the first half of the xviii<sup>th</sup> century Bishop Finnur Jónsson records only two cases of marked Socinianism; a Unitarian tendency latent in Icelandic Lutheranism. But Icelanders are tolerant and Lutheranism is a liberal creed. Much Unitarianism existed unchecked, especially when bishops were infected. At the end of the century, when intercourse with the larger world increased, a wave of 'enlightenment' broke on the hard grey shores of Icelandic realism. On the crest of this movement rode the versatile continentalised leader Magnus Stephensen.<sup>2</sup> His abolition of the historic bishoprics, hard fact as it was, proved to be symbolic of his desire to remove or at least 'improve' the Faith for which they had stood for 800 years. Arising out of a State order issued in 1784 he produced with the help of a future bishop a revised hymn-book, as the old psalter called *Grallarinn* was considered 'mystical and therefore 'out-of-date'. His new book published in 1801 had the appeal of sentimental rhymes and ideas. The old 'psalms' were purged not only from obsolete and difficult words, but also from what were considered difficult doctrines, such as the Divinity of Christ and the Atonement, and the Person and work of the Holy Spirit; so that the result was a Socinian hymn-book.<sup>3</sup>

1.W.J.Hooker: Journal I. p lxxxi.

2.Gj pp 348-9.

3.E.H. 169-170.

The work met with strong opposition. Many country parishes refused to introduce it. Nevertheless clergy and people and the bishop (for by this time Iceland only had one), were influenced by this new theology. Many young men sent to the capital to school came back indifferent or sceptical. In those days began the tendency, still much in evidence, of emphasising the practical rather than the devotional side of Christianity. Hooker's report of the introduction of Pope's Universal Prayer into church worship can only refer to an isolated instance,<sup>1</sup> but the theme of a sermon preached at Holmar on Aug. 28 1814 - "Christ's life on earth, a life of benevolence and usefulness", is typical of Icelandic sermons from that day to this.

The wave of Stephensen's influence soon spent itself. For the strength of the Church lies not in such opportunist devices as his hymn-book, but in the steady witness of the homes and lives of its adherents. That the negative force of the time-spirit failed to quench this witness is shown by examples noted by many visitors. Some churches may have been neglected and used as store-houses, and services intermitted through lack of faith or congregations; but in 1814-5 Henderson found "the exercise of family worship attended to in almost every family from Michaelmas to Easter". Distances are so great in Iceland that two or three families, isolated in the desert, would meet at a house of prayer (baenhús) twice a year for Communion, and services or family prayers were held in cottage parlours.<sup>2</sup> Personal piety was marked. On setting out for a journey it was customary for men to remove their hats and ask for God's protection; and similarly when they set their ponies to ford a river. Fishermen putting out to sea would likewise pray for a blessing and guidance.<sup>3</sup> This custom still continues. Icelandic hymn-books provide a prayer for sailors to use called sjóferdasálm, and one for other travellers called ferdabaen. Moreover when it was realised that

1. Journal I, p279; E.H. p171.
2. E.H. pp95, 163, 285, 306, 375.
3. E.H. p 123; von Troil: Letters p89.

religion embraces the whole of life, Grace before meals becomes natural and is enjoined in the Short Catechism. "It is" (Henderson records) "Universally the custom in Icelandic families to give thanks to God with clasped hands before and after meals." When the opening Grace is finished, guests "turn to the master of the house (the mistress never sits at table, being engaged in serving) and says: Gif mér mat með Guds fridr, Let me now partake in the peace of God".<sup>1</sup>

There may be poverty there, but not apathy or lack of faith.

1. F.H. p100.

CHAPTER TWELVERE-ORGANISATION.  
(Nineteenth Century).(i) National Re-birth.

The auf klarung movement of Magnus Stephensen faded when Iceland lost contact with Denmark and the continent from 1800 to 1814, during the European War. The downfall of Napoleon led to a revival of ideals of independence, not least in the northern countries; and the grant of a constitution to Norway (to which Iceland was attached by origin and traditions rather than to Denmark) provided a spur to Iceland's aspirations to autonomy.<sup>1</sup>

The realistic impulse spent itself in a pessimism, which it found and increased in the national temperament, though it found there also its solvent in the people's romantic admiration of the past and its heroic achievements. At the approach of Iceland's millenium in 1874 it led to a threat of wholesale emigration, staved off by one of the church leaders.<sup>2</sup> But although it had little political influence it was responsible for the country's modern novels, bringing home to the people the complexity of the industrial world, and the fact that they should not drift on listlessly dreaming in a saga-mentality.

(a) If a date is to be given for the re-birth of national idealism, it may be found in the Revolution in France in July 1830. Just before that the Icelanders had been roused from apathy by Baldvin Einarsson, 1801-33, a student in Copenhagen who founded a patriotic magazine in which he demanded the restoration of the Althing. He died young, but the torch of his enthusiasm was taken up by a young prestur Tómas Saemundsson, who with able supporters established a periodical - Fjólñir,<sup>3</sup> the second of such rallying tracts for the times. After seven years of leadership his inspiring personality also burnt itself out (ob. AD 1841). But he handed on

1. Gj. pp 370 sq. Gj is exceptionally full on this period.

2. Gj. p 409; "Nordenfari" for Aug 23 1872

3. Fjólñir = wise, attribute of Odin.

the fiery cross of freedom to a successor, destined to lead the country along the thorny path of political agitation to the dizzy height of self-government. This was Jón Sigurdsson, an outstanding scholar and statesman, built on the lines of the great Snorri Sturluson. Jón Sigurdsson (1811-1879) was the founder of modern Iceland.<sup>1</sup> Step by step he won for his people almost all their ancient rights, teaching them for over thirty years by his periodical *Ný Félagsrit* in which he discussed problems of government, education, trade and finance. He harnessed the romantic idealism of the Tómas Saemundsson group to constructive politics and national responsibility. Tradition by itself may evaporate in romanticism; freedom without a background tends to be individualistic and irresponsible. It was the merit of the patriot Jón Sigurdsson to claim his country's liberty on the basis of historic tradition.

The chief problems concerning Iceland, forced on the consideration of Denmark by the persistence of Jón Sigurdsson, were constitutional and financial. Icelanders held the firm conviction that the only connection between their country and Denmark was the personal link of the Crown. They maintained that the Act of Union with Norway in 1262 - the *Gamli sáttmáli*, establishing the *Jónsbók* as the Code of Law for Iceland, though modified in respect to the Crown by the Kalmar Union of 1397, was still in force, as the king had renounced the absolute monarchy claimed in 1662.<sup>2</sup>

Under pressure of events and the influence of Sira Tómas' movement, the Althing, abolished in 1800, was re-established on March 8 1843, and met at Reykjavik in 1845. With few representatives and fewer powers, it was a mere shadow of its traditional self. This was a victory for the national idealists but so unsubstantial, that it was from the start regarded as a fulcrum.

The next stage in the struggle - to make the Althing properly representative and consultive, owed much to the work of patriotic pastors. For a century or more bishops had taken little part in championing the real grievance of their people against Danish

1. Gj pp 375sq.

2. Burton: *Ultima Thule*, I pl04.

aggression, as their economic dependence on the State made them, however unwillingly, state officials. In an equalitarian society such as Iceland the clergy always had considerable influence, and effected much, though Bishop Finur Jónsson sectionalizes his great history, produced under royal patronage, chiefly under the headings of kings and bishops, and Bishop Jón Helgason's account unduly emphasises episcopal achievements. But in the struggle for autonomy in the nineteenth century it is evident that pastors played a leading part.

In 1848 a liberal nationalist newspaper ("Thjóðólfur") was founded by Sira Sveinbjörn Hallgrímsson demanding a constitution for Iceland. This led to an informal meeting presided over by Pétur Pétursson, afterwards Bishop of Iceland (1866-89). In 1853 a similar meeting was called on the historic site of Thingvellir by Sira Hannes Stephensen. Probably it was due to this stirring of public opinion that the next year saw the end of a long-standing grievance - the Danish trade monopoly. Crown agents were abolished, and trade was made free to all, (April 15 1854).

(b) The restoration of the Althing and the establishment of Free Trade were indeed marked advances in the direction of autonomy, but most Icelanders regarded them as mere stages on the road to freedom, as neither the constitutional problem nor the financial grievance had been settled.

Somewhat rashly the Danish Government raised the question of finance on the doubtful ground that Iceland contributed nothing to its own support, but rather made a perpetual drain on Danish resources. The Icelanders admitted that the cost of administering the scanty medical and educational services and payment of the bishop and officials, costing about 60,000 dollars a year, came from the Danish treasury, but pointed out that the Icelandic estates which had supported the bishops and schools were sold in 1785 by the Crown on condition that the treasury met these charges.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore the moneys from sales of church estates had all

1. Most monastic estates were sold in 1674 for 24,162 riks-dollars, and the Crown claimed the proceeds.

been claimed by Denmark, in addition to fees for the trade monopoly, so that a substantial balance was actually due to Iceland.<sup>1</sup>

The bishop in 1809, as part return for the sale of the episcopal estates, received 1248 riks-dollars, with an augmentation of 600 dollars, making 1848 dollars a year. The Reykjavik prestur received 22. As a comparison it may be stated that the Lecturer in Theology was paid 600 dollars.<sup>2</sup> Holders of Crown Benefices and some other clergy were granted some reimbursement for parish glebes confiscated at the Reformation; but in all cases Icelandic ecclesiastical estates put into the Treasury more than was returned. Only in that sense was the Church state-supported.

The Danish Government realised the strength of Icelandic claims, and subsequently went far to meet them. But after comparatively generous financial offers by Denmark in 1867-71, it became clear that the economic question would not be settled until Iceland was given a real decision in her own affairs.

(c) The attitude of the country on the constitutional question was idealistic, going far back into the history and traditions of the nation. Thus the appointment of officials, judges and laws by an external power was regarded as a breach of time-honoured privilege. And though Danish efficient bureaucracy and the growing commercial prosperity of Reykjavik tempted some to compromise, idealistic poets eloquently supported their country's campaign by raising their voices against the nation selling its soul for a mess of pottage.

A leading schoolmaster, Steingrim Thorsteinsson (1831-1913) thus epitomises the rival appeals:-

The lion often hungers, and yet  
Though the swine be well fed and all that,  
Higher the desert is set  
Than the sty where the others grow fat.<sup>3</sup>

1. P.P. pp149-154; Hooker:Journal 1809 p xxxi; Burton: Ultima Thule I, pl64 (1875) Bp.= 3416r/d, but money had halved in value.
2. In 1809, 1 doll. = 6 mks= about 4/-, so Bishop received £369.
3. Trans Vilja 'lmur Stéfansson, in Icelandic Lyrics.

Bjarni Thorarensen (1786-1841) and Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807-45), poets of loftier genius, had already appealed to the national tradition and character, and to the glories of the history and nature of their country. Jónas, son of a parsonage, was a co-founder of "Fjölnir". He died young, an exile lonely and destitute, but his lyric poems mark him out as a pioneer of modern Icelandic literature. Thorarensen, magistrate and Amtman, a devout Christian with an intense love of the traditions and beauty of his native land, had been chiefly responsible for the fall of the Stephensen continentalizing movement. He conjures up the heroes of the past and bids people imitate the fortitude and heroism of their forefathers. He shows how the rugged grandeur of the country is to be preferred to the flat fields of Denmark. "Why should not Icelanders take heart. Let them fight again, as of old against fire and frost, against enervating foreign influence. Better die with honour than live in shame".<sup>1</sup>

One of the favourite heroic epithets in the sagas is skorundr, which contains in it the element of scour, an isolated rock in the sea, a beacon of unyielding strength. This national attribute is finely expressed by Thorarensen in the following poem:-

The skerry away in the fjörd  
 So deep in the sea's unrest  
 In silence endures for ever  
 The foam that beats on its breast.

Mean is the man who is weaker  
 Than senseless rock in the strife,  
 And yields to the clash of the billows,  
 The countering currents of life.<sup>2</sup>

These pioneers of the nineteenth century idealistic school were followed by a succession of able pastor-poets, of whom the most notable were Valdimar Briem, whose literary energies, after the achievement of independence, were devoted to composing the most inspiring of modern Icelandic hymns; and Sira Matthias Jochumsson, perhaps the greatest national poet of the century, famous for his Millennial National anthem.

1. Gj. pp 368-9.

2. Trans Miss F.J. Oswald. The poem echoes the counsel of Marcus Aurelius quoted at the beginning of Stéfan Stéfansson's valuable Handbook for Tourists:- "Stand firm like a rock, which stands unmoved though the waves batter against it, and they fall at last".

(d) The granting of a constitution to Iceland, the outcome of a prolonged, though not bitter struggle, aptly coincided with the advent of the country's millenium in 1874 - Iceland's thousand years. For some time before this the national prospects appeared so hopeless that thousands proposed to follow the hundreds who through poverty had begun to seek a home across the Atlantic, but this counsel of despair was over-ruled. (See page 262).

In June 1873 a public meeting about the constitutional question was held, significantly at Thingvellir and not in Reykjavik. From this self-appointed but representative assembly a petition was sent to the King asking for a constitution giving the Althing legislative power and control of the country's finance. This move was successful. On June 5 1874 Iceland was granted self-government. Icelanders were guaranteed freedom from forced labour (the bane of the previous century), freedom of the press (poets had been imprisoned), security of private property and sanctity of the home. The Lutheran Church was recognised as the State Church, though liberty of conscience was granted to all. There were some privileges withheld which the country regarded as necessary for its complete independence, but it was recognised that time was on its side and all would eventually be won.<sup>1</sup>

It was not, however, contemplated that final freedom would come when most of the continent of Europe was enslaved. Full independence was granted on December 1st 1918, the only union between Iceland and Denmark being at last recognised as the King. "Danebrog" was struck, and the hardly-won Icelandic national flag - a red cross on a blue ground, was hoisted, the symbol of a sovereign state. "We pray God," said the Minister, "to help us to carry our flag to honour... So let us hoist the flag!"<sup>2</sup> A treaty was signed, open to revision by either side after twenty-five years. But the occupation of Denmark by Germany in 1940 made communication impossible, and in 1941, on June 17, Jón Sigurdsson's birthday, the Althing decided not to renew the treaty but to elect a Regent and become a Republic. Icelandic flags were flying from every building; arctic terns darted over the sea and lake in the clear air, and the sun went not down that night.

1. Gj. pp410-1; Bayard Taylor: Egypt and Iceland pp 269sq.  
2. Gj. pp439-445, 446-448.

Such acquisition of freedom should be a good omen for the countries groaning under an oppressor, for, as Montesquieu reminds us, "Scandinavian liberty is the mother of the liberties of Europe."

The Millenium (874-1874) so aptly epitomises Iceland's dogged and persistent struggles for freedom and heralds its new birth, that it may well conclude this section.

The occasion was celebrated as a great national and religious festival. To present the country with its new constitution King Christian IX came over from Denmark himself - the first crowned monarch ever to land in the country.<sup>1</sup> Delegates from many foreign countries brought greetings which were read at a public festival at Thingvellir. A commemorative service was held in the national cathedral, at which Bishop Pétur Pétursson preached; but the climax of the service was a Psalm of Praise, specially written by Sira Matthias Jochumsson and since regarded as the National Anthem of Iceland. Its tune is solemn rather than festal or grandiose, almost a dirge, as befits the words and the country:

God of our land, our country's God,  
 We praise Thy hallowed, hallowed name.  
 The heavens have woven the sun and stars  
 To make Thee a crown of flame.  
 A day before Thee is a thousand years,  
 And a thousand years as a brief day lies,  
 A flower of the infinite, touched with tears,  
 That worships its God and dies.

Iceland's thousand years -  
 A flower of the infinite, touched with tears,  
 That worships its God and dies.<sup>2</sup>

- (Heimskringla VI, 86.)
1. Except *Kg Rörek*, vanished by *Kg Olaf Haraldsson*, who died in N. Iceland AD. 102.
  2. Trans. Watson Kirkconnell in *The North American Bk. of Icelandic Verse* pp 151-2. NY and Montreal 1930.

XII. (ii) Church Buildings.

Early Icelandic churches normally formed part of the farmstead constructed by chieftains or franklins, enclosed by a stone and turf wall with their houses and out-buildings together with the meadow or tūn, which as the most valuable part of the farm gave its name to the touns and towns of Britain.

(a) The first churches were built of timber, most of it brought from Norway, since trees in the country, though more abundant than in later centuries, did not produce sufficient wood for large buildings.<sup>1</sup> The Laxdale Saga recalls the importance of timber for a church planned by Thorkell, Gudrun's fourth husband (ob. AD 1026), and the disaster that befell it owing to stormy seas. Hungrvaka records St. Olaf's gift of timber for the first church at Thingvellir. Repairs to churches were often made with driftwood, a veritable godsend to the coasts of Iceland, and part of the endowment of some benefices, such as Hólar.

The use of stone was unusual, as the basalt found all over Iceland is porous. It is noted as remarkable that Bishop Audún of Hólar in the xivth century equipped his cathedral with stone pillars and a stone altar. Most church roofs until recently were made of turf, i.e. sods, which became useful well-drained grassplots, duly mown or if accessible, grazed. The wooden church at As, repaired with a 'thack' or turf, lasted from 984 until 1250. A distinction of the large and solid cathedral church at Hólar was its lead roof.<sup>2</sup>

Steeple in the wind-swept land were few. Skálholt cathedral was given a tower in the xiiiith century by the munificence of Bishop Pál, to form a memorial to its patron saint Thorlak rather than to house its bells, and to be used as a chapel where Pál kept his coffin

1. Lndbk I, 1, 14; 2; 2, 21 etc; Eyrbyggja S. 26, 33, 35; Njal's S. 32; Laxdale S. 74-6.
2. Jónssaga 9, 1.

in the usual Icelandic fashion. Hólar steeple fell down at Christmas 1392 in one of the storms that so frequently assail the much-vexed country.

Bells though usually small have always been popular. St. Olaf's foundation gift to Thingvellir included a bell. The bells of Hólar, the best in Iceland, were rung when Laurence's election to the episcopate was proclaimed in 1324, and when he rebuilt Möðruvellir monastic church he presented "apostle bells and singing maids".<sup>1</sup> Of all the monasteries Videy was richest in bells, which must have been inspiring as they rang out from the island over the waters of Faxafjörd.<sup>2</sup> The bells of Thingeyrar Abbey, according to the Annals (s.a. 1299), tolled of themselves at the passing of the saintly abbot Björn. And folk like to think the same about the great funeral bell of Hólar, Likaböng, which made the valleys ring again as the body of its fighting bishop Jón Arason was borne to its last resting place. Likaböng was broken in two in 1624 when a hurricane destroyed the cathedral, but happily was recast 250 years later.<sup>3</sup> King Christian IV in 1638 ordered parish church bells to be restored; so that in spite of the poverty of the country in post-Reformation days, even turf-built churches were given bells which were usually hung in a rack over the door. The pair at Vidimyri are dated 1630. Those at Grenjatharstadir 1663 and 1740.

Well-built timber churches may last for centuries, as is shown by the remarkable Stave-Kirks of Norway, which the earliest Icelandic churches would have resembled. But they are specially liable to catch fire, and in Iceland are also exposed to hurricanes and floods of molten lava, which is perhaps the chief reason why Icelandic churches are built as a rule on rising ground.

(b) A résumé of the history of Skálholt cathedral illustrates the vicissitudes to which most buildings have been subject down the ages. Soon after AD 1000, when the country adopted Christianity, a church was built by the chieftain, Gizur the White, at his homestead, and rebuilt

1. Larentius S. 52-61 út supr. p
2. F.J. I pl74, IV p93.
3. Sigfus Blöndal: Íslandske Kultur-billedur p 47; Hans Reynolds: Island pp 63-5. In Iceland during earthquakes church bells often ring of themselves (as e.g. in 1896)

by his son Bishop Isleif. Twice enlarged by his successors the reconstructed church was burnt down in the winter of 1309 (according to the Annals) "as swiftly as men eat and drink at a meal". The new building was given a steeple a hundred years later by Bishop Wilkin, but was destroyed by fire a few years before the Reformation. It was nobly renewed by Bishop Øgmund, whose cruciform cathedral, known as Kross-kirkja, survived until the middle of the xviiiith century, when it was replaced by a large wooden building which was overthrown by the earthquake of 1784.<sup>1</sup> After that the see was moved to Reykjavik, and a small and insignificant shanty, used but occasionally, took the place of the spacious cathedral which had been the mother-church of Iceland and the daily focus of its life. Few memorials of Skálholt's storied past remain, as much perished in the earthquake. The mediaeval altar-stone, of white marble blackened by use, together with a mediaeval chalice and a silver wafer-box are preserved in the National Museum. Many generations of worshippers used to point with reverence to the coffin-shrine of their own St. Thorlak, and with even greater pride to the altar frontlet, which was decorated by silver plates from the girdle of Thorgunna, the heroine of Eyrbyggja Saga. Sir Joseph Banks in 1770 was shown also Sharpshedon's halberd, which is praised in Njál's Saga. Such seeming incongruity is a testimonial to the Icelandic integration of life.

Hólar cathedral also had its great days and great men, some of them literally church-builders, such as Jón the Saint and Audun the Red. On October 2nd 1801 it was decreed that the see of Hólar should share the fate of Skálholt,<sup>2</sup> but its 18th century church remains; tho' it illustrates the poverty of Post-Reformation architecture, it shows enterprise in the use of local stone. Its memorials of the past are unusually numerous and interesting for Iceland, where so much has been destroyed or carried out of the country. The tomb of the Bible-maker Bishop Gudbrand may be seen beneath the floor. Reference has been made to the mediaeval crucifixes, stone altar and pre-reformation altar-cloth, and quaint xvith century portraits. The gold chalice, said to have been given by the Pope to the first

1. For drawings of Skálholt church, town and bishopstead (made 1772) See Islandica XVIII Plates 7 and 8.
2. P.P. p205.

bishop was carried off to Copenhagen in the xvith century spoliation and replaced by one of silver-gilt. Hólar has a branch candlestick dated 1679, and a stone font dated 1674.<sup>1</sup>

The ancient parishes of Breidabolstad and Kirkjubaer own mediaeval chalices, of such unusually fine workmanship that they were thought to have been wrought by elves.<sup>2</sup> The stone church at Bessastadir, which appears to float on the sea on its wind-swept peninsula near Reykjavik, preserves a battered effigy of the crusader type, which one could wish might represent the great historian-statesman Snorri Sturluson, owner of that estate in the xiiith century. Some alabaster reredoses preserved in museums show signs of English workmanship.<sup>3</sup> A few runic sepulchral inscriptions, roughly incised on basaltic pillars, survive at Borg, Kirkjubaer, Grenjatherstadir and (in particular) at Hall Bjarnareyri, near Helgafell.<sup>4</sup> Iceland's memorials are not written on stones but on vellum and parchment setting forth in undying sagas the heroism of her ancient people.

(c) Reykjavik, which succeeded to the honours but hardly to the glory of the dispossessed historic sees, was not much more than a village up to the beginning of the present century; so that the national cathedral of Iceland (Dómkirkjan) is a small stone building, whose only pretension to ecclesiastical dignity is its simple solidity. In front of the altar stands a finely carved white marble font of Italian design, the work and gift of the great sculptor Thorvaldson, whose father was an Icelander (ob. AD 1844).<sup>5</sup> The Lutheran Free-church is a well-built, well-fitted corrugated iron-building with a slender spire, happily placed by the lake-side. The small Roman catholic cathedral in Reykjavik, constructed of grey reinforced concrete in Early English style complete with tower and deep-toned bells is the most striking place of worship in the country. The building

1. Baring Gould: Iceland; pp 236-7.
2. W.G. Collingwood and J. Stefanson: Pilgrimage to Sagasteads pp 26-7. E.J. Oswald: By Fell and Fjörd, p153.
3. Archaeological Journal, lxxvii 1920, pp 192-7.
4. E.H. p328 who reproduces the last inscription.
5. Born Cpn. Nov. 19 1770, son of a carver of ships' figure-heads, and a Jutland peasant woman, godson of Thorvald Gottskalksson, pastor of Miklabaer: See Eugene Plon: Thorvaldsen, Life & Works, Trans. Mrs Cashel Hoey, London 1874.

is narrow, giving the interior a sense of height, and stands out well on its hill-top site. This effective use of modern material should be considered for church-building in England after the war, particularly in new housing-districts. A fine concrete church on more ordinary lines was completed in 1941 at Akureyri, the northern capital, where one of the consecrating bishops is in charge. It has twin spires and is well placed on a height over the beautiful Eyjarfjörd. Reykjavik has only two Lutheran places of worship for 40,000 people, of whom 98% are Lutheran. It is proposed after the war to build two large new churches, defraying the cost by a state grant and lottery subscriptions, by which expedient the cost of the impressive university building was met.

The oldest church in Iceland goes back to the first half of the xviith century; a small wood and turf structure at Vidimyri on the wild mountain road from Blonduos to Akureyri. Its sides are so banked with grass sods that sheep and even ponies can walk up and graze on its roof. The west front is made of deal planks painted white, with a pent-house over the door holding the two old bells already mentioned. The gable apex is fashioned into horns like the helmet of a viking. The interior walls and rafters are as rough as the outside suggests, but its sequestered situation has preserved a finely-made double screen and a worn mediaeval pulpit. The crude picture over the altar illustrates its inscription: Quotiescunque commeditis.... ii Cor xi. Its date 1616 shows that post-Reformation Icelandic churchmanship had no fear or ignorance of Latin.

These turf and timber churches that replaced the mediaeval wooden buildings of Iceland's more spacious days were very small. Mossfell Church measured only thirteen feet by nine, standing up on its rocky mound over the valley like Noah's Ark. Its successor perched high on the mountain-side with its red roof, white walls and neat bell-cote resembles at a distance a child's toy in a miniature Swiss landscape.

1. E.H. p54; Baring Gould? Iceland p46.

Most modern country churches are similar small homely erections of corrugated iron or concrete. The fact that they are painted white inside shows up the woodwork to the best advantage, and gives good effect to the brass candelabrum which is often their most prominent feature. Personality counts for much in Icelandic Christianity, and it is a custom to have portraits of notable pastors on the chancel walls. Altars retain their accustomed position and fittings, with one or more candlesticks and generally a cross. The pulpit is not allowed to obscure the altar, and any obstructive tendency of the organ is avoided by its being placed on a gallery at the back of the nave. The font stands by the altar - a shallow basin on a wooden pedestal. It is rarely used, for almost all baptisms are taken in houses. Interesting souvenirs of xviith practice remain in engraved brass baptismal bowls, which hang by chains on some chancel walls. Perhaps the best specimen of these is a bowl at Munkathvera (once monastic) church, having a hart finely carved in high relief on a background of oak-leaves, illustrating Ps 42, l. 1

Earthquakes, hurricanes, fire and floods have left little remains of ancient churches and their furniture, so that only seven old stone structures still exist and a few time-worn memorials and fittings. The strength and glory of Icelandic churchmanship lies not in its buildings and appurtenancies, but in the stalwart character of the people. After a hasty view during a month's summer holiday, visitors have expressed disappointment at the poor ecclesiastical show the country can produce. But those of us who endured long hard dark winter months in Iceland and have enjoyed the use of its places of worship, constantly marvelled that any traces of churches and churchmanship have survived at all.

1. Baring Gould, p 132.

### XII.(iii) Church Order, Organisation and Worship.

The Reformation in Iceland made a break in what ecclesiastically has become known as Apostolic Succession. Priests ordained under the Roman obedience and converted to Lutheranism were originally commissioned as Superintendents by the learned Dr. Palladius, appointed by Luther's co-adjutor Bugenhagen, Primate of Denmark. But neither the title nor the office of Superintendent found favour in Iceland, and subsequently such men were consecrated as bishops. The matter was regularised; and only on the theory that the Church depends on the bishop rather than the bishop on the Church can it be considered questionable.

Following old tradition in the first phase of the Reformation Gissur Einarsson was elected by the Althing in 1539 to succeed Øgmund Pálsson as Bishop of Skálholt; and in 1540 he received the royal sanction, being consecrated two years later by Palladius in accordance with the new Order. Similarly Olaf Hjaltason duly succeeded at Hólar in 1551 after the doubtful execution of his predecessor. Thus the old office and title of bishop never fell into abeyance in Iceland, and have won the recognition and respect of all knowledgeable men to this day. The title of priest (prestur) has also been retained.<sup>1</sup>

In grappling with the moral, economic and physical difficulties and dangers which followed the Reformation in rapid succession down to the middle of the 19th century, bishops in Iceland had no inclination or occasion to question their status in the Church universal, especially as their position was paralleled in the sister Churches of Norway and Denmark. Only in Sweden was outward ecclesiastical continuity broken. But in the years 1865-7 some English clergymen raised the question, and the historian Pétur Pétursson, then bishop-elect expressed his willingness to have an English bishop assisting at his consecration.<sup>2</sup> This met with the approval of King Christian IX, but the Primate, Dr. Martensen, strongly objected, so that the matter dropped.

In order to satisfy the scruples of the doubtful,

1. Presta-tal (Lists of priests in each parish from earliest years) Svein Nielsson. Cpn. 1869.
2. See Church Chronicle, Aug. 1 1866; The Scotsman, June 12, 1867. Helga Thordarson, Bp of Iceland (1846-66) favoured it.

it would be a help in the promotion of reunion if Apostolic Succession could be technically restored to the Church in Iceland by the concurrence of a Swedish or English bishop in the next consecration. But if this is done, it should be made plain to those who follow Luther and St. Augustine in this matter that such a theory is of practical more than doctrinal value, being of the bene esse rather than the esse of the Church, and that such a step would cast no slur on the ministry of post-Reformation Icelandic bishops and pastors who have been "ordained in accordance with the Apostolic rule, with prayer and laying on of hands, and who have celebrated the sacraments according to the command of our Lord." 1

Like its sister-church of Sweden, Iceland after the Reformation found little and finally no use for the order of Deacon. Parishes had scanty populations and very small endowments, and at times of famine and disaster could hardly fill the ranks of the ministry, so that it became the custom to ordain men direct to a parochial charge without even a per saltem diaconate. After the Reformation pastors of five of the largest parishes had unordained assistants, styled deacons, who helped with preaching and confirmation classes. This system has now lapsed. The last deacon of that type was Provost Svein Nielsson, who assisted at Grenjathastadir 1827-35.<sup>2</sup> The lapsing of the order of deacon and its post-Reformation substitute is unfortunate. Icelandic pastors suffer from the isolation and loneliness of their life, which makes heavy demands on their spiritual and intellectual background. Some of the consequent secularity and abandonment of orders would be prevented by a revival of the diaconate.

Confirmation in Iceland is administered, as in the Eastern Orthodox Church, by prayer and laying on of hands, not of the bishop but of the presbyter. It is perhaps significant that the prestur begins the service in his vestments, but removes them for the laying on of hands. Almost everyone in Iceland is confirmed as a matter

1. Cp A.C. Headlam: Doctrine of the Church and Christian Reunion pp 261-9, 293-4.
2. Grandfather of the present Dómprofastur, Fridrek Hallgrímsson, to whom I am indebted for brotherly encouragement and information.

of course as a completion of baptism after unusually careful preparation; nevertheless many rarely receive the sacrament of Holy Communion afterwards, appearing to treat Confirmation as a ticket of exemption from Church worship until they reach middle age.

(b) The bishop is elected (according to the law of June 27, 1921) by the clergy and theological professors from three candidates they nominate.<sup>1</sup> Any candidate receiving 3/5 of the votes is elected; otherwise the Government appoints one of the candidates. Up to 1909 the bishop-elect was consecrated in Denmark. Since then two consecrating bishops (vigslubiskúpar) have been retained in Iceland for that purpose. These bishops have no other episcopal rights or powers, serving generally as cathedral or rural provosts, one in the south and the other in the north.

Pastors are elected in secret ballot by all parishioners of full age, and then appointed by the Government. If half of those entitled to vote do so, the applicant who obtains a majority of votes is elected. Failing this the Government appoints one of the applicants on the bishop's recommendation. Since June 17, 1941, Denmark has had nothing to do with the government of the country, which is vested in the historic Althing under a Regent. The Church had ably helped the long and worthy struggle for independence and deserved to be among the first institutions to share its benefits.

There are 21 provosties or deaneries. The provost is elected by the clergy of the deanery and receives an honorarium of about fl2 - two principles in advance of the present English system. In accordance with the traditional historic custom deaneries form a very real part of the Icelandic Church organisation, and thus the parishes are given a proper interest in central ecclesiastical matters, and the evils of bureaucracy are obviated.

1. Jón Helgason, Bp 1917-38 (ob. AD 1942); Sigurdur Sigurdsson Bp 1938 -

There were in 1939 276 parishes in Iceland, but as two or three are usually served by one pastor, the number of resultant parishes is 111, and the total of clergy 109. Their annual stipend ranges from 2500 to 3000 kronur (i.e. about £92-112), together with marriage and funeral fees and a small house and glebe, the farming of which occupies most of their time.

A general parochial meeting is held once a year, which elects a council of from three to five members every six years, serving to help their pastor to maintain order, morality and seemly worship. It superintends also the religious instruction of the young, which finds no place in the otherwise admirable State Schools. As is well known, Icelanders like other Scandinavians, are distinguished for their devotion to learning, for high intelligence and width of scholarship.<sup>1</sup> Down to the middle of the sixteenth century this achievement was largely due to the Church, for all instruction used to be given by parents and pastors in the homes and in the cathedral schools. It has been noted that the parish registers kept by the clergy as a result of their visitations form a remarkable feature of Icelandic Church life, and are so full and thorough that they are used for all civil and official purposes.<sup>2</sup> It would not be hard to prove that the fact that 98% of the population remain members of the National Church is largely due to the tradition of pastoral visitation of their vast and scattered parishes, carried on by the bishops and clergy of Iceland.

There are two methods of church maintenance:  
 1. State-owned churches which have recently come under congregational management through a committee appointed to collect the customary dues; 2. farmer-owned churches, for which the owner is responsible and is empowered to collect 1.50 kronur (about 1/2) annually from parishioners.

The population of Iceland is 120,262, of whom more than 98% are Lutheran. According to the census of 1930 there were 782 "secularists", who contract out of paying church rates by paying a tax for the university.

1. So much so that mistakes in history and ancient literature in the script of the "Midnight Sun" (a paper I edited for the Forces in 1940-1) would be corrected by any of the composers.

2. Gregersen: L'Islande - Son Statut....pp 416-20.

Roman Catholics number about 300, served by a bishop, four (Dutch) priests and 38 sisters. Almost all of that persuasion in Iceland are foreigners. Their mission began in 1859, but freedom of worship was not granted until 1874, and the work only began vigorously in 1895. In addition to their striking concrete cathedral the community own two small churches, two schools, a convent (Carmelite) and three efficient hospitals.<sup>1</sup>

Some 9500 Lutherans belong to the Free Church (Frikirkjan) who own and entirely support two places of worship, and so are relieved from subscribing to the State Church. These two congregations have self-government and choose their own ministers, though they are ordained by the bishop, and are subject to his jurisdiction, being members of the Synod. The Free Church has the same ritual and ceremonial as the National Church, and except for the matter of congregational autonomy remains part of it, as do the Salvation Army, the 'Liberal' congregation, Christian Scientists, and other small communities who sometimes worship separately.<sup>2</sup> Thus in a measure the problem of unity without uniformity is solved.

A college for ordinands was established at Reykjavik in 1847 which was merged in the University of Iceland at its foundation in 1911. The theological faculty at the university, which has a beautiful chapel, is comparatively large and influential. Out of its 200 students recently, twenty were studying theology. Not all of them proceed to ordination, but any who obtain the degree or diploma may act as Lay Readers and preach in church at the request of a pastor. They are entitled to attend the Synod, and to add 'Cand.Theol.' before or after their names.<sup>3</sup>

1. Bp. M. Meulenberg (1929-41) succeeded by Bp. Johannes Gunnarsson in 1943. Sisters = 33 of St. Joseph's Order, 5 Franciscans; 3 nuns.
2. e.g. Theosophists (who have a temple) and Adventists. There are some Fundamentalists, few but vociferous. The number of adherents of all of these half-religions is diminishing. A society of Physical Research was founded in 1905.
3. e.g. in the telephone directory, (where entries are made under Christian and not surnames), and on tombstones as: 'Jón Jónsson, Cand.Theol., Bankafehirdir' (cashier).

(c) The ancient custom is maintained (as it is in the East) of beginning the day at 6 o'clock on what we should call the previous evening. Thus Christmas and Easter commemorations begin on the Eves of the festivals, for which there is much to be said. Shops are shut at 4 o'clock, and town churches are crowded for services at 5 and 6 o'clock. On Sundays, in town, services are held in the afternoon and entertainments at night, which is perhaps the reason why many English visitors feel that there is no atmosphere of Sunday in Iceland; though some of them help to contribute to that feeling.<sup>1</sup> A more serious reason is the fewness of services in country churches, due to grouping of parishes and consequent non-residence of pastors, with difficulties of distance increased by adverse weather conditions.

The principal Sunday service retains its pre-Reformation name of Hámessu, though it usually breaks off in the middle in the manner of Table-Prayers or Ante-Communion. The Nicene Creed is never used, and the Apostles' Creed used only at Baptism and Confirmation. Otherwise the service follows the ancient liturgy,—psalm, kyries, gloria and responses leading up to the sermon, the climax of a Lutheran service.<sup>2</sup> This service is completed with the reception of the sacrament only occasionally, though much is made of Easter Communion with services leading up to it on Palm Sunday and Holy Friday.<sup>3</sup>

The Iceland Psalm- or Hymn-Book was revised in 1871 and a new book issued in 1886. The collection now contains 870 hymns, though the grand solemn hymns of Luther maintain their popularity. The Free Church has added a modern supplement and the Ministry of Church Affairs has just completed a further revision.

Though fonts are given a prominent place in churches, baptism, contrary to post-Reformation injunctions,<sup>4</sup> is administered almost invariably in the homes of the

1. Hooker: Tour (1811) II p326, and many since.
2. For description of services see Hooker: Tour (1811) I pp173-8; E.H. pp50-1, 119, 342; Baring Gould:
3. Garstang in N.Lancs 20 years ago had some old parishioners who liked to make their communions 'three times a year' on Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter Day, as was their custom there in the 18th century, (cp Diary of Thos. Parkinson, Curate 1700-29).
4. e.g. of Bp. Odd Einarsson at the Synod of Thingvellir in 1590. F.J.III p336.

parents. Marriage services are held in the pastor's house, generally in his study where a table is furnished for the occasion with lighted candles and perhaps a cross. None but witnesses can be present. Strangely enough, in at least one parsonage a separate room, as in Norway, has been provided and equipped as a chapel for such purposes. These domestic services probably owe their origin less to low church predilections than to the low temperature of the churches during most of the year. For shades of churchmanship are largely conditioned by climate and environment.

A great feature is made of funerals, which are apparently the best attended of all services. Part of Hallgrim Pétursson's famous funeral hymn is sung; a special sermon is preached and often broadcast from the local Radio Station. Icelanders have been taught to regard death as the 'herald of the Lord', and those who answer his summons are given a great send-off.

The British Forces who occupied Iceland in the World War owe a debt of gratitude to the bishop and clergy of that country, who from the start in face of misunderstanding put their places of worship at our disposal. We were strangers and they took us in. The opportunity granted us was deeply appreciated. This brotherly hospitality enabled us to realise some of the difficulties of organisation and worship in a country whose circumstances are unusually forbidding. We realised how the people's faith and worship could not escape being coloured outwardly by their environment. But though in expression we differed in emphasis, we recognised that in fundamentals we were closely akin. We found parish churches which in their form and arrangements greatly resembled our own, and in the faith and worship they represented proved able to help men of varying shades of belief and devotion. Normally we worshipped separately; but some Icelanders came to our services, and some of us went to theirs.<sup>1</sup> And occasionally we held a united service, as when one Christmas morning the Dean (Dómprofastur) preached to a great congregation of troops and nurses of the united nations. One picture remains that recalls the "first

1. Si fueris Romae, Romano vivite more;  
si fueris alibi, vivito sicut ibi.

St. Ambrose.

fine, careless rapture" of early Christian worship. At a small town on the western coast (where a great whale had just been cast up,) a troops' Confirmation had been arranged in the parish church, which the pastor and some of his people wished to attend. Scots bishop, Icelandic prestur, and English chaplain stood in the chancel; and when a hymn was announced from the Army Prayer Book, the prestur announced a similar hymn from his psalm-book. Sometimes Icelanders sang a translation of the English words, but sometimes they sang a different hymn, which fitted the tune we were using. Thus in spirit the curse of Babel was annulled. Solvitur orando.

The Icelandic Church right down the ages has fought a good fight against grim adverse forces within and without its borders. Today it has emerged secure in itself after centuries of struggle against its aggressive environment and against acquisitive civil and ecclesiastical external powers. But at the moment this small Christian community stands almost alone and not without scars of conflict. Its present enemies are isolation and secularity. The times are full of anxiety; but a Church which has shown so great a power of survival through such appalling vicissitudes cannot ultimately fall out of what its noble bishop Gizur Isleifsson called 'God's battle'.

So may Iceland cease to be last among lands.<sup>1</sup>

1.

nec sit terris  
ultima Thule.

Seneca, Medea II, 371.

## NOTE on ICELANDIC COLONIES in AMERICA.

(see Gj. pp 458-471)

Pastors have played a leading part in the large and flourishing colonies of Icelanders, which have established themselves in USA and Canada.

The movement began in 1872, when freedom for which the country had striven so long, seemed unattainable at home. Three hundred left Iceland for North Dakota, where the settlement was organised by Sira Pall Thorlaksson (ob. AD 1880). In 1873 150 went to Canada, making a home not without difficulty along the shores of Lake Winnipeg, where the virile colony now numbers about 7000.

Many individual Icelanders have attained high positions in the service of their adopted countries, but the settlements as a whole have shown their motherland's love of independence, maintaining separate newspapers, schools and Lutheran Synods. In 1905 an Icelandic Synod was founded at Winnipeg, with 37 congregations, which had increased to 58 by 1919.

To help higher education, the learned and able pastor Jón Bjarnason inaugurated at Winnipeg a scheme for an Icelandic college, which was founded in his memory in 1914, the year in which he died; though recently it has been incorporated in the university.

The doggedness of character which has distinguished Icelanders down the ages, together with their traditional love of learning and native integrity, have made good in the new world overseas, and should make men eager to look unto the rock from which they were hewn.

CHRONOLOGY.

- 870 First settlers find traces of Columban Christianity.
- 870-930 Period of Settlement (Landnámstid).
- 930 Commonwealth of Iceland inaugurated.  
Al-thing established at Thingvellir.
- 930-1030 Saga-age (Sögn-öld).
- 981-5 Missionary visit of Thorvald Kodransson and Bp. Fridrek.
- 996-9 Olaf Tryggvason, King of Norway, sends Stefnir Thorgilsson and then Thangbrand as missionaries.
- 1000 June 24 Christianity officially adopted.
- 1016 King Olaf "the Stout" (afterwards St. Olaf) gets remaining heathen customs abolished.
- 1024 King Olaf attempts to annex Iceland.
- 1030-1118 Peace Period (Fridaröld).
- 1056 May 26 Isleif son of Gizur the White consecrated Whit Sunday. first bp. (ob 1080).
- 1082-1118 Gizur, son of Isleif, Bp. of Skálholt.
- 1096 Tithe system introduced.
- 1100 Bp. Gizur's census: 4,500 landowners = c50,000
- 1102 Northern bishopric of Hólar founded,
- 1102-1121 Jón Ogmundson its first bp, afterwards Saint.
- 1122-1133 Code of Church Law compiled by Bps. Ketil and Thorlak.

- 1133 Monastery founded at Thingeyrar (Benedictine)  
First nunnery, Kirkjubaer 1186
- 1133 Death of Priest Saemund the Wise, founder of the  
school at Oddi.
- 1148 Nov.9. Death of Priest Ari the Wise, father of Icelandic  
history.
- 1152 Bishops in Iceland put under new archdiocese  
of Nidaros in Norway. Abp. Eystein Erlendsson.  
(1157-88)
- 1198 Bp. Thorlak Thorhallsson and (1200) Bp. Jón  
Ogmundson canonised by the Al-thing.
- 1200-1264 Civil War of Sturlunga clans.
- 1202-1237 Bp. Gudmund Arason's buccaneering campaign.
- 1238 Two Norwegians appointed bishops in Iceland.
- 1241 Sept 14 Snorri Sturluson, historian, assassinated.
- 1262-4 End of the Commonwealth. Norwegian rule accepted.
- 1269-98 Arni Thorlaksson of Skálholt, vigorous administrator,  
compiled second code of Church Law, passed by  
Al-thing 1275.
- 1271-3 Codes of Law - Jarnsida and Jónsbok promulgated.  
1281
- 1295 Norway and Iceland join the Scottish-French  
alliance.
- 1323-30 Lárentíus Kalfsson, Bishop of Hólar, saintly  
teacher.

- 1300,-8,-11,  
-13,-39,-70,  
-90,-91. Devastating earthquakes.
- 1380 Iceland with Norway passes under Danish rule.
- 1397 The Kalmar Union with Sweden.
- 1392-1430 "New" Annals, last contemporary accounts till c.1600.
- 1394-1405 Vilchin (Danish) Bp. of Hólar, benefactor.
- 1402-4 Great Plague. (and 1494).
- 1491-1518 Stéfan Jónsson, Bp. of Skálholt, good administrator.
- 1518-41 Ogmund Pálsson, Bp. of Skálholt.
- 1534-50 Jón Arason, Bp. of Hólar.
- 1539 Sack of monastery on Videy.
- 1540 NT published in Icelandic by Odd Gottskalksson. (1515-56).
- 1539 Gissur Einarsson appointed Superintendent; in 1542, Bishop of Skálholt; ob. 1548.
- 1541 New Church ordinance adopted for Skálholt Diocese; Hólar 1551.
- 1550 Nov 7. Bp. Jón Arason and his two sons beheaded.
- 1567-1648 Arngrim Jónsson revives interest in old Icelandic history.
- 1584 First Bible in Icelandic published by Bp. Gudbrand Thorlaksson, Bp. of Hólar for 56 years (1571-1627).
- 1618-19, 1625, 1636, 1660 Volcanic eruptions cause great destruction and loss of life. Earthquakes: 1614, -33, -57, -61.
1607. New Church code imposed by Kg. Christian IV.

- 1614-27 Raids of Spanish, English and Algerian pirates.
- 1625-90 Witchcraft burnings.
- 1639-75 Brynjolf Sveinsson, Bp. of Skálholt, collector and copyist of old MSS. (b. 1605)
- 1661 King of Denmark proclaimed absolute monarch.
- 1674 Death of Hallgrim Pétursson, author of "Passion hymns" (b. 1614).
- 1698-1720 Jón Vidalin, Bp. of Skálholt, author of family sermons.,
- 1703 Population = 50,444.
- 1707 18,000 die of smallpox, following earthquakes in 1706.
- 1726-57 Great eruptions and earthquakes destroy many farms and cattle. Thousands die of hunger.
- 1754-85 Finmur Jónsson, Bp. of Skálholt, historian of the Icelandic Church. (b. 1704)
- 1783 Devastating eruption of Laki.  
Earthquake destroys Skálholt Church and ruins 38 farms.
- 1784 Earthquake in south wrecks 133 farms and ruins 1,700 houses. Over 9,000 people die and much cattle.
- 1785-1801 Bishoprics of Skálholt and Hólar (and their schools) abolished and merged in one Bishopric of Iceland with cathedral at Reykjavik 2 Oct. 1801.
- 1798 Al-thing meets for last time at Thingvellir.

- 1800 Population 47,086.
- 1811 June 17. Birth of Jón Sigurdsson, patriot.(ob.1879)
1843. Al-thing re-established,meets at Reykjavik.
- 1847 Theological college established at Revk.
- 1854 Apr.15. Danish trade monopoly abolished.
- 1874 Aug 1. King Christian IX grants constitution to Iceland.
- 1890 Population 70, 927.
1901. Population 78, 489.
- 1911.June 17. University of Reykjavik founded.
- 1918 Dec 1. Home rule of Iceland under King of Denmark acknowledged.
- 1920 Population = 94,696. 1937= 118,000 (Rvk = 17,976).
- 1940 Population = 120,264. (Rvk = 40,000)
- 1941 June 17 Independence of Iceland proclaimed and Regent elected.

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St. P. 234

Farm	Name	Occupation	Age	Confirmed	Able to read.	Conduct	General Abilities
Hladir in Thelambrk.	Markus Markisson	Householder	63	Yes	Able to read.	Trustworthy Pious	Ready to render service. Clean.
	Bergthóra Arnadóttir	His wife	64	Yes	Able to read.	Pious Peaceable	Ready to render service and industrious
	Arni Markisson	Their son	23	Yes	Able to read.	Well-behaved	Good general knowledge. Intelligent.

Thorgerður Markaðóttir	Their daughter	27	Yes	Able to read.	Mediocre	Slow to understand.
Thorbjörg Benediktsdóttir	Foster- child	13	No	Able to read.	Well-behaved	Can read prayers
Helga Ólafsdóttir	A pauper	30	Yes	Able to read.	Peaceable	Dull and ignorant.

Books in the house: Vidalin's Sermons, Choral Book, 2 books by Jon Arndt's, Sermons by

Gerhardi, 2 vol Hallgrím's Passion-Hymns, Fons Vitae 1598 (in Icelandic translation), Hymn Book, the New Testament and several other books.