

ICELANDIC IMPRESSIONS OF SCOTLAND AND THE SCOTS IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

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I. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to survey Icelandic impressions of Scotland from the early nineteenth century to the present, as revealed in written sources.¹ The study cannot claim to give a complete picture of the attitude of the Icelanders in general towards Scotland and the Scots as the examination of the written sources cannot be fully comprehensive although a systematic search has been carried out and certainly most of the important pieces of written work have been found, and the views of those who did not express them in writing cannot be examined. It is, however, probable that the attitudes of Icelanders in general were to a considerable extent determined by the written accounts investigated here.

The sources are of many kinds such as travelogues, memoirs, articles in newspapers and periodicals, and poetry in a few cases. It is certain that some valuable information about the subject could be found in sources that are not accessible to the author such as diaries and private letters. Generally speaking, the reliability of the sources is not to be doubted, but it is obvious that when people are writing about their impressions a long time, even several decades after the experiences, certain inaccuracies are hard to avoid.

Some of the people referred to in the article spent a relatively long time in Scotland and became very familiar with the country and the people. It is unfortunate, however, how little material can be obtained from the rather large group of Icelanders who have studied in Scotland in the last few decades. Many of the available sources are derived from people who made only a brief stop in Scotland on their way to a different destination in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; in most cases they were emigrants to North America and

students on their way to Copenhagen. These people had usually not been abroad before, which colours their descriptions of Scotland; they had, for example, no previous experience of large towns. There is a pattern in that accounts by people who came to Scotland since the First World War reveal more acquaintance with the outside world in general, but in other ways the comments of most Icelanders who visited Scotland in the period under review are basically on the same lines.

A study of this kind reveals to a certain extent the light in which the Icelanders saw the outside world as well as how they saw themselves. In this sense such a study can be classified as a branch of intellectual history. Moreover, as accounts by visitors throw light on the state of affairs in the countries they come to – *glögg er gests augað* (the visitor's eye is keen), as the Icelandic proverb has it – this article may also be regarded as a contribution to Scottish social and cultural history.

The main questions to which answers were sought in the sources are the following ones: What did the Icelanders in the period under review think of Scotland as a whole and individual parts of the country? What did they say about the Scottish people, their history and literature? How did they view life in Scotland and Scottish material and spiritual culture? How did they compare Scotland and the Scots with other countries and other nations, *inter alia* the Icelanders? Moreover, it is attempted to examine how the Icelanders' attitudes to the Scots compare with their views of other nations. In this respect the author was severely handicapped by the lack of studies addressing the latter subject. It is also attempted to examine how the Icelanders' attitudes to the Scots compare with the attitudes of other nations towards them.

The article is largely divided into chapters in accordance with the main questions cited above while some overlapping cannot be altogether avoided. The author, however, has chosen to devote a separate chapter to Scottish farming. In order to provide background information to the basic subject of the article, it begins with a brief survey of Scoto-Icelandic relations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

II. On Scoto-Icelandic relations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

The history of the relations between Iceland and the territory of present-day Scotland can be divided into three main periods. The first one covers the first centuries of settlement in Iceland, down to the thirteenth century. It is known that many settlers came to Iceland from present-day Scotland, and this was a period of extensive contacts of various kinds. From the thirteenth century down to the nineteenth the relations were limited, but after that a period of important connections can be spoken of. It is attempted here to give a concise account of the main lines of that history, which so far has only been researched to a limited extent.

Leith played an important role in the history of Icelandic trade during the Napoleonic wars, but it was only after trade with Iceland was opened up to non-Danish subjects in 1854 that contacts between the Icelanders and the Scots became fairly extensive. The first outsiders to make use of the trading permission were two Scotsmen, Henderson and Anderson, who in 1863 founded the trading firm Glasgow in Reykjavík. Later in the century the Scottish parties with whom the Icelanders had the most extensive commercial dealings were the merchant Slimon of Leith, who e.g. bought a great number of wethers from Iceland, and the Allan Line of Glasgow, which transported Icelandic emigrants to North America. Near the end of the century two Scotsmen, Copland and Berrie, founded the trading firm Edinborg in Reykjavík, and Copland temporarily played an important role in Icelandic business. The same applies to two wholesale companies in Leith in the early twentieth century, which were connected with the Scotsmen Hay and Mauritzen. When the Icelandic co-operative movement gained strength in the early twentieth century it directed its overseas trade to a considerable extent to Great Britain, apart from modelling its organization partly on its British counterpart. But although the British Head Office of the Icelandic co-operative movement was set up in Leith (incidentally, the Icelandic Consul General in Scotland, Sigursteinn Magnússon (b. 1899), Magnus Magnusson's father, was its director for several decades) the Icelanders have not carried on very extensive trade with Scotland as such in this century.

Apart from trade, relations with Scotland in the field of farming are of considerable importance in the history of Iceland. Ever since the founder and Headmaster of the first farming college in Iceland, Torfi Bjarnason (1838-1915), came first to Scotland, in 1866, Icelanders have thought that they had many things to learn from the Scots in this field; a number of those who have played a prominent role in Icelandic farming stayed in Scotland for a longer or shorter period. Various Icelanders have studied agricultural science in Scotland and others have worked on Scottish farms. There have also been connections between Iceland and Scotland in the field of forestry.

Cultural relations between the two nations have been considerable. Various Scotsmen have been active in the field of Icelandic studies; one can mention Walter Scott and William A. Craigie. This interest is fairly strong today as exemplified in the works of the historians John Simpson and Edward J. Cowan. Since the late eighteenth century, a number of Scotsmen have gone on expeditions to Iceland. The best known work by a Scotsman on Iceland is a travel book by the Rev. Ebenezer Henderson, who stayed in Iceland 1814-1815 and had some influence on the Icelandic Church. There were also some Scottish influences on the Icelandic temperance movement in its early days. A few Scottish writers have been popular in Iceland. Scottish literature has been known in Iceland primarily through the works of three of the big names in Scottish literature, Robert Burns, Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson. Pre-Burns literature is very little known in the country. On the other hand, two Scottish-born twentieth-century novelists, A.J. Cronin and Alistair McLean, have enjoyed much popularity there. Various well-known Icelandic poets have translated poetry by Burns; an Icelandic version of "Auld Lang Syne" is especially popular. It is safe to say that at least until recently Burns was among the best-known foreign poets in Iceland. Walter Scott soon became famous in Iceland. It has been demonstrated that he had considerable influence on Jón Thoroddsen (1818-1868), Iceland's most prominent novelist in the nineteenth century.² Scott's breakthrough in Iceland, however, among the population at large came with the translation of *Ivanhoe* in 1910. That novel was immensely popular in Iceland for decades. It is noteworthy, on the other hand, that none of Scott's Scottish historical novels has been translated into Icelandic. Robert Louis Stevenson is primarily known

in Iceland for *Treasure Island*, which was published there in a translation in 1906 and often since then. In Iceland the novel has a secure place among the classics of youth literature.

Since the eighteenth thirties various well-known Icelandic intellectuals and artists have lived in Edinburgh for a longer or shorter period. One might mention two librarians at the the Advocates' Library in the nineteenth century, Þorleifur Repp (1794-1857) and Jón Hjaltalín (1840-1908), the musician Sveinbjörn Sveinbjörnsson (1847-1926) who composed the tune to the Icelandic national anthem, and two staff members at the University of Edinburgh after the middle of this century, Páll S. Árdal (b. 1924) and Hermann Pálsson (b. 1921). Especially since the nineteen thirties many Icelanders have gone to Scotland to seek higher education; often several dozen have been studying there simultaneously. Most of these have been students at the University of Edinburgh and Heriot Watt University, but a considerable number have attended other institutions of higher education in Edinburgh as well as in St. Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee. There have also been various connections between the two nations in the fields of the performing arts and sports.

Since the end of the Second World War there have been regular passenger services by air between Iceland and Scotland, and for decades there have been, with intervals, scheduled sailings (in the last few years only in the summertime, to be sure). It can be asserted that in the course of time a great number of Scotsmen have visited Iceland, although no statistical evidence on that can be produced in this connection, and a considerable proportion of the Icelanders who have gone abroad in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have come to Scotland, most of these on their way to a different destination. There have been organized tours to Scotland from Iceland, and temporarily individual shopping expeditions to Scotland were in vogue there. Both in Iceland and Scotland there are societies dedicated to the fostering of relations between the two nations. *Edinborgarfélagid*† (The Edinburgh Society) in Reykjavík is the one with the largest membership. Since the middle of the nineteenth century there has been some migration of people between the two countries, in both directions. In Canada there has also been a considerable degree of intermarriage between people of Icelandic and Scottish extraction.

III. People, history and literature

Like people of other nationalities Icelandic writers have often generalized about the character of individual nations. This applies to those who write about Scotland. One can find many generalizations about the Scots – the whole nation or the inhabitants of individual regions. Sometimes the blood relationship with the Icelanders is referred to. It is especially those who stayed in Scotland for a considerable length of time who wrote about the characteristics of the Scots. Naturally they relate both their pleasant and unpleasant experiences, but the positive aspects are as a whole preponderant; the Scots tend to be well spoken of and, in reality, much in the same manner throughout the period under review. Only one of the writers in question is negative towards most things Scottish.³ Apart from the kinship with the Icelanders it is often mentioned that the Scots are honest, introverted, slow to form relationships but reliable as friends, hard-working, thrifty, likeable, and good-looking.

Individual writers make specific comments about the Scots which are worth referring to. Thus Torfi Bjarnason said that the enormous progress which had been made in Scotland could be attributed to the spirit of co-operation among the nation.⁴ Indriði Einarsson (1851-1939), an economist and well-known playwright, who stayed in Edinburgh in 1877-1878, said that he did not want to describe the Scots because Walter Scott had done it so well. But it pleased him to see that the Scotsmen whom he came to know in Edinburgh were more civilized and financially better off than those described by Scott.⁵ Jónas Jónsson (1885-1968), one of Iceland's leading politicians in the first half of the twentieth century, said that the Scots were one of the most intelligent nations in the world.⁶ References to the inhabitants of individual regions are as a whole in the same vein as those of the Scots generally. One can find remarkable descriptions of the Scots in the writings of Jón H. Þorbergsson (1882-1979), who played a leadership role in the development of Icelandic sheep husbandry. He worked as a farm-hand in Perthshire in 1908-1909 and later visited Scotland on two occasions. He spoke favourably of Scottish country people, characterizing them as pleasant and reliable.⁷ He also spoke kindly of the Shetlanders and the Orcadians and said that the inhabitants of the islands were more sociable than those of the mainland.⁸ The

Icelanders were without exception very impressed with the Shetlanders and Orcadians. One may wonder whether their Nordic ancestry had something to do with this. As regards the Highlanders, there is no doubt that in Iceland, as elsewhere, the kilt has played a considerable part in forming their image. One young Icelandic is said to have remarked when he heard a description of the attire of a Highland visitor to the country that he was certain that this was the Devil in disguise.⁹

From the point of view of Scottish social history the description of Jón H. Þorbergsson and Indrīdi Einarsson of life in Scotland may be regarded as the most valuable ones. Jón vividly described life in a valley near Blairgowrie. As a farm-hand he experienced both the brighter and the darker side of life there, but on the whole he liked the attitudes prevalent in the community. He was impressed with the piety of the people and the relations between the farmers and their employees, which he dealt with from the point of view of the farmers (he had become a successful farmer himself when he first wrote about Scotland). Jón also gave a lively description of the leisure activities of the Highlanders: dancing, hunting and curling.¹⁰ Indrīdi Einarsson's account of Edinburgh in the eighteen seventies is remarkable for the descriptions of culture and religion as well as of the life of the upper classes.¹¹ He and Jón H. Þorbergsson are among the few Icelanders to notice the pervading influence of the Kirk on life in Scotland. Indrīdi thought that the religiosity of many of the inhabitants of Edinburgh went to unreasonable lengths, e.g. that playing cards at home and going to the theatre was regarded by some as improper.¹²

Icelanders writing about Scottish affairs generally dealt at no length with Scottish history. Some, however, took much interest in Scottish medieval history because of its connection with Iceland; some regarded themselves as having a special emotional bond with Scotland for that reason. Not much else was written about specifically Scottish history other than the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the Icelanders have discussed the position of Scotland within the United Kingdom less than one might have expected. Torfi Bjarnason said that the union had been beneficial to Scotland because it had secured peace and opened up markets for the Scots in England.¹³ Some twentieth century writers, however, have discussed what they regard as the

adverse consequences of Scotland's relationship with England.

References to Scottish literature are limited to Burns and Scott, with the exception that Hermann Pálsson wrote about Gaelic literature. There are two accounts by Icelanders of pilgrimages to Burns Country,¹⁴ and in Icelandic writings on Burns emphasis is placed on his distinctiveness as a Scottish poet. Among those who refer fondly to Scott is Sigfús Blöndal (1874-1950), the editor of the great Icelandic-Danish dictionary; he said that on his way to Copenhagen in 1892 he visited the monument to Scott, *míns mikla vinar* (my great friend).¹⁵

IV. Farming

It is probable that more Icelanders have gone to Scotland to study farming than to any other country except Denmark and Norway. There are various reasons for this. The physical conditions of farming in general, and the climate in particular, in Scotland resemble those in Iceland more than such conditions in any other country where there is large-scale farming. This applies especially to the Highlands and Islands, as in Iceland animal husbandry – above all sheep and cattle rearing – is the mainstay of the farming. Moreover, the reputation which farming in Scotland has enjoyed since the eighteenth century no doubt encouraged some Icelanders to go there. The fact that communications between the two countries were relatively easy was also of importance in this respect.

It is not difficult to generalize about the writings by Icelanders on Scottish farming, although there is an interval of many decades between the oldest and the most recent available accounts of this type and although the reasons why these Icelanders went to Scotland were not always the same. They emphasized the similarities between farming conditions. They regarded Scotland as a good farming country, but at the same time they stressed how advanced Scottish farming was, bearing in mind the restrictions placed on it by nature. The writers pointed out various things in the field of farming which the Icelanders could learn from the Scots and saw little that they regarded as wrong with Scottish farming.

A few examples may be given. Þurleifur Repp, in a poem

published in 1846, expressed admiration of farming in Scotland in relation to the infertility of the soil there.¹⁶ Torfi Bjarnason made much of the favourable weather conditions in Scotland, e.g. how mild the winters are, but he emphasized how much change had been brought about by man since the mid eighteenth century; improvement is a basic theme of his writings. He said that Scottish farming was superior to that of any other nation, but that this could only partly be attributed to favourable natural conditions. In continuation of this Torfi discussed what the Icelanders could learn from the Scots in the field of farming.¹⁷ Einar Helgason (1867-1935), a horticulturist, went to Orkney and Shetland in 1909 in order to acquaint himself with the farming there. He wrote that he expected that the Icelanders could learn more there concerning crop farming than in the Nordic countries because of similarities in climate. He noted it would a good idea that young Icelanders went to work there because many things could be learned there in the field of farming, and that it would be advantageous for Icelandic farmers to get to know farming in other countries than Denmark and Norway.¹⁸ On his second visit to Scotland in 1914m Jón H. Þorbergsson travelled about the country for two months in order to study Scottish farming and subsequently wrote a book on the subject called *Frá Skotlandi* (From Scotland). In an appendix he enumerated various things which could be learned from the Scots in the field of farming,¹⁹ such as:

We should follow the example of the Scots in having strong farming societies in every parish [sic]. And we could learn many things from them in the field of animal husbandry. ... We could also learn from the Scots to obtain good shepherds' dogs.²⁰

Jón mentioned a couple of things in Scottish farming which he regarded a less than exemplary.²¹ But like Einar Helgason he, in the conclusion of the appendix, encouraged young Icelanders in the farming community to go to Scotland “and spend two years in the countryside in order to acquaint themselves with how people lived there” as this would be beneficial to them and others at home.

V. Edinburgh

References to Edinburgh in writings by Icelanders from the early

nineteenth century to the present are legion. Although the period under review spans several generations and differs as the background of the writers and their motives for coming to Edinburgh are, most of them share admiration of the city.

The most vivid descriptions are found in the works of those who had never been abroad before. It can be seen that some of the visitors had read much about Edinburgh before they came there and had high expectations of the city. Sigfús M. Johnsen (1886-1974), who went to Edinburgh for the first time in 1902 and who later became sheriff in the Westman Islands, wrote in his memoirs: "I had often heard about the very beautiful Edinburgh. For a long time I had looked forward to seeing the city, which is famous for magnificent historical relics."²³ Fridrik Fridriksson (1868-1961), a clergyman and youth leader, said that before he came to Edinburgh in 1893, he had tried to defend himself against too much admiration by recalling Horace's saying "nil admirari".²⁴ And the first impressions of the city were indeed very memorable. Laufey Valdimarsdóttir (1890-1945), a well-known feminist, who came there for the first time in 1910, describes this well. She was

filled with the Icelander's eagerness to see other countries and the culture of the world, which I then admired in my heart like a child. I remember when I came to Edinburgh for the first time and saw Princes Street, one of the most beautiful streets in the world, where the past and present meet, Nature and the air of the big city – where I saw for the first time the big houses of the city, the traffic and the restlessness, but the hills on the other side of the large park [Princes Street Gardens] were seen in an enchanting haze like the mountains at home.²⁵

The writers often comment on the "wonders of the city" which so impressed them such as the trams, the locomotives and the cluster of lights. Several mention that they could not help staring at the Scottish horses because of their size, being accustomed to the Icelandic ponies, and Sigfús M. Johnsen recalls that he was especially struck by the size of their hooves.²⁶

Many of the visitors refer to the beauty of Edinburgh and the

memorable atmosphere in the city. It should be borne in mind that almost all of them came there in the growing season. To take examples, Stephan G. Stephansson (1853-1927), a well-known Canadian-American-Icelandic poet, said that Edinburgh was the most beautiful place he had ever seen (he came to the city in 1873),²⁷ and the journalist Hildur Einarsdóttir (b. 1950) wrote in 1980 about a visit: “Edinburgh is in my opinion a very romantic city.”²⁸ Most of the writers in question mention individual parts of Edinburgh which impressed them. Here one can discern a definite pattern. Most commonly the visitors write about Princes Street, the buildings in the area and Princes Street Gardens, the castle, the view from various places in the city, and its site. A good example of the impressions of the city is found in an article by Hannes Þorsteinsson (1860-1935), later director of the National Archives of Iceland, who came there in the autumn of 1896 after having travelled widely on the continent and in England:

Although my companion and I had travelled widely and seen many beautiful cities we had not before seen as striking and impressive a sight as the one which met us when we ascended the Walter Scott monument and looked from there towards the castle and buildings on the other side of the valley which lies between Princes Street and the castle. It is such a grand and majestic sight that a more striking and more beautiful view hardly exists, and Edinburgh is as a whole one of the most beautiful cities in the world because of its site.²⁹

Another good example of impressions of the Princes Street area can be found in the memoirs of Friðrik Friðriksson. He wrote that it was as if “all the glory of the world opened up” in Princes Street. Friðrik admired

the multi-coloured beauty of the flowers, unlike which I had not seen anything like, the Scott Monument, the Castle, the National Gallery, but what fascinated me most was nevertheless the traffic in the streets. All this was so new, and my soul was filled with romantic bliss.³⁰

Magnús Stephensen (1762-1833), the prime leader of the

Icelandic Enlightenment at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was captured in 1807 on his way to Copenhagen by the British and brought to Leith. He wrote in his diary that there were “sheer palaces” (*tómar hallir*) in Edinburgh.³¹ Many other Icelandic writers, however, had their eyes open to the less attractive side of the Edinburgh area. This applies especially to Leith. Sigfús M. Johnsen’s description shows this well:

Even though everything was glamorous in Edinburgh we saw the shadier side of human life down in the port Leith. Everything had a different air there. ... Life in the streets was monotonous and poverty-stricken. ... Most of the children were dressed in rags, some almost naked, covered with dirt, skinny and sickly. One was deeply affected by seeing these undernourished and badly kept children. They were a testimony to a state of outright misery in their homes.³²

One can also find references to signs of poverty in Central Edinburgh. Thus the teacher Hallgrímur Jónasson (b. 1894), a well-known author, coming there during the Depression, contrasted the number of unemployed men he saw lying in Princes Street Gardens with the glamour of the surrounding area.³³

VI. Other parts of Scotland

In the works of Icelandic writers there are numerous descriptions of a stay in Glasgow. It is remarkable that a very large proportion of Icelandic visitors to Scotland apparently saw little of the country except Edinburgh, Glasgow and the Central Lowlands. Relatively few seem to have travelled about the Highlands and Islands or the Southern Uplands. Various accounts by Icelanders, however, can be found of other parts of Scotland than the two big cities, namely Shetland, Orkney, the Hebrides, Caithness, the Highlands proper, Ayrshire, and the Borders. There are also some descriptions which apply to the east coast in general.

Many accounts of Glasgow are written by people who came there as emigrants on their way to North America. Most of them stayed in emigrants’ camps where conditions were poor, and did not speak

English. Their impressions of Glasgow were naturally to a certain extent determined by these factors. It is remarkable that the emigrants said few positive words about the city. They often mentioned the poverty they saw there and remarked upon the widespread drunkenness they witnessed.

Visitors to Glasgow after the Second World War, students, journalists and others, tend on the other hand to describe Glasgow as any other big city. Some of them were impressed with its centre and mentioned various places which they thought of as beautiful. A succinct characterization of the city is found in an article by Hildur Einarsdóttir:

Glasgow is not a beautiful city, but it possesses certain magic, which in my opinion has two aspects. One the one hand there is its Victorian appearance, and here I especially had the city centre in mind. ... On the other hand it is the inhabitants of the city who make it charming.³⁴

Some comparisons between Glasgow and Edinburgh occur in the writings under review. A good example can be taken from Hallgrímur Jónasson: “Glasgow is not nearly as beautiful a city as Edinburgh, but it is a much larger industrial centre, and the inhabitants are said to be more jovial and easier to get acquainted with than those of Edinburgh”.³⁴

The Icelanders who wrote about Scotland outside the two big cities very often refer to the beauty of the scenery and what they regarded as good conditions for farming. One writer does not think highly of the scenery in Caithness and Sutherland,³⁶ but many refer to the beauty of the Highlands, and references in similar vein are found to Ayrshire and the Borders. The sight of the east coast from the sea seems to have been memorable for many a visitor. Magnús Stephensen described the east coast as follows:

It was very beautiful and glorious to look at, one fertile place after another, hills, ridges, mountains and plains, fields, forests, grasslands, all indescribably beautiful, cultivated up to the very top.³⁷

There are a few remarkable descriptions of the Scottish islands. There is not much that is informative on Orkney, to be sure, but more on Shetland; the historical connection with Iceland is often mentioned. The only Icelander to write at length about the Hebrides is Hermann Pálsson; in the early fifties he stayed for months at various places in the islands. His book *Söngvar frá Suðureyjum* (Songs from the Hebrides) contains material of various kinds related to the islands such as poetry and legends, which Hermann translated from Gaelic, accounts of Hebridean history and of contemporary life there as well as of the author's travels. Hermann is the only Icelandic writer on Scotland who deals at length with Gaelic culture. He is very impressed with the Hebrideans' way of life, but concerned about the dangers of outsiders spoiling their traditional culture. Hermann praises the nature of the Hebrides and singles out South Uist in that connection, as one of the most delightful areas he knows.³⁸

There are many instances of the Icelanders comparing Scotland with other countries and the Scots with other nations. In most cases the comparison is with Iceland and the Icelanders and throws light on how the visitors saw their country and their nation, which is interesting in its own right. The exceptions are comparisons between the Scots and the English and the French as well as between Edinburgh and Copenhagen.

Some of the Icelanders' comparisons are interesting for the reason that some of the physical characteristics of Scotland did not look unfamiliar to them. Rock formations in the two countries are not of the same kind, but climate and vegetation are not altogether dissimilar despite the difference due to Scotland's more southerly latitude. Some of the writers found the Highlands in general reminiscent of Iceland. The journalist and poet Ingólfur Kristjánsson (1919-1974) wrote in 1955: "Driving around the Scottish highlands one is reminded of Icelandic nature; only the vegetation is more extensive because in many places it covers the mountains right to the top, looking like a green carpeting."³⁹ There are many instances of writers who point out similarities between individual places in Iceland and Scotland. The Scottish localities are mostly in the Highlands and the islands as one would expect, but the sculptor Einar Jónsson (1874-1954) saw likeness between Arthur's Seat and Salisbury Crags in Edinburgh and

mountains in Iceland.⁴⁰ It is remarkable that some of the writers came to think of how poor Iceland was when they saw what they regarded as the riches of Scotland.

When comparing the two nations the writers on the whole paid more attention to the Nordic population element in the parts of Scotland most affected by Viking immigration than to the Celtic element in the Icelandic nation. To Sigfús M. Johnsen a regiment of Highland soldiers doing exercises at Edinburgh Castle looked very like many Icelanders.⁴¹ Einar Helgason stressed the physical similarities between the Icelanders and the Shetlanders. He also said:

I felt I experienced the same hospitality as in this country [Iceland], the same degree of poverty and comparable level of knowledge among the common people. Had the language been the same I would not have needed to stay there for long to feel as if I had gone to an unknown region in this country.⁴²

Einar said, moreover, that many Shetlanders and Orcadians had received him like a relative.⁴³ Jón H. Þorbergsson, on the other hand, wrote about the kinship of the Icelanders and the Scottish nation as a whole, which he saw as one of many arguments for strengthening the relationship between the two countries.⁴⁴

Comparisons between social structure and culture in Iceland and Scotland are interesting. Indridi Einarsson compared the class system of Iceland with that of Scotland and England. He thought that class differences were not so pronounced in Iceland and that there was more social mobility there.⁴⁵ In the cultural sphere, teacher and poet Þóroddur Guðmundsson (b. 1904) argued that legends from the Borders were reminiscent of Icelandic ones.⁴⁶

As noted in the chapter on farming, it has been seen that Scotland was held up as a model to the Icelanders. Especially before the First World War, several writers emphasized what the Icelanders could generally learn from the Scots. Sigurður Jónsson (1852-1926), one of the leaders of the Icelandic co-operative movement in that period, wrote: "And no doubt we could learn many things from the Scots; probably we turn too seldom to them." Sigurður, who in fact never

came to Scotland, was impressed with how the Scots had learned to make use of their land, learned how to live, as he put it.⁴⁷ Sigurður, as well as some other writers in this period, was of the opinion that Icelanders could learn various things from the Scottish co-operative movement. In the last few decades, however, there has not been much discussion about the Scottish co-operative movement in Iceland.

VII. Icelandic accounts of Scotland and parallels

When comparing the Icelanders' attitudes to the Scots with their views on other nations, one is hampered by the fact that very little research has been done in this field. Nevertheless, a few generalizations are in order. It is remarkable that some of the Icelandic writers did not regard the Scots as a separate nation, but generalized about the British or even called the Scots English. Even though some Icelanders referred to their blood relationship with the Scots, such references are not common except as regards inhabitants of the Scottish islands. In Icelandic travelogues, kinship with the Nordic nations is mentioned relatively frequently; this applies especially to the Norwegians and Faroese. References to kinship are also rather more frequent in the case of the Irish than that of the Scots. It may be argued that in this respect the Scots occupy an intermediate position because the Icelanders naturally described many other nations as distantly related to themselves or not related at all. It has been seen that many Icelandic accounts of Scotland are coloured by the fact that the authors came there on their first trip abroad and were therefore perhaps more impressed than otherwise would have been the case, but it is noteworthy that physical similarities between Scotland and Iceland are mentioned relatively more often than in related accounts of most other countries. Connected with this is the fact that the Icelanders who wrote about Scotland were, compared with those who wrote about other countries, often concerned with what could be learned from the Scots.

As one can expect, the pattern in the accounts of Scotland written by visitors from the South differs to a certain extent from that of the Icelanders. The Southerners were not unaccustomed to big cities, and although some who came in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were impressed with certain aspects of Scottish farming, their image of Scotland was not that of a fertile country to the same extent as among

the Icelanders. Icelandic descriptions of Scotland fit in with the general pattern in that emphasis is put on the beauty of Edinburgh and the Highlands. On the other hand, the Icelanders dwelt much less on Scotland's Gaelic heritage than did writers from other countries as a whole, and the Highlands do not loom nearly so large in Icelandic accounts as they do in travelogues of Scotland in general.

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7. Þorbergsson, Jón H. 1915 *Frá Skotlandi*. Reykjavík. p. 38f. See also Þorbergsson, Jón H. 1964. *Ævidagar*. Akureyri. pp. 53-71.
8. Þorbergsson, Jón H., 1964 p. 174.
9. Jónasson, Hallgrímur. 1946 *Frændlönd og heimahagar*. Reykjavík. p. 90.
10. Þorbergsson, Jón H. 1915 pp. 30-39, 116-121. Þorbergsson, Jón H. 1964 pp. 53-71.
11. Einarsson, Indriði. 1936 pp. 218-225.
12. Einarsson, Indriði. 1936 p. 220.
13. Bjarnason, Torfi. 1867 p. 20.
14. Stefánsson, Jón. 1949 *Úti í heimi. Endurminningar*. Reykjavík. p. 48ff. – Guðmundsson, Þóroddur. 1953 *Úr Vesturvegi. Ferðasaga frá Bretlandi og Írlandi*. Reykjavík. pp. 202-217.
15. Blöndal, Sigfús. 1948 *Endurminningar*. Reykjavík. p. 280.
16. Repp, Þorleifur. 1846 *Landa-Vísor. Fjölnir* 9. Copenhagen. p. 81.
17. Bjarnason, Torfi. 1867 pp. 3,19.

18. Helgason, Einar. 1910 Hjalmland og Orkneyjar. *Búnaðarrit* 24. Reykjavík. pp. 278, 305.
19. Þorbergsson, Jón H. 1915 pp. 116-124.
20. Þorbergsson, Jón H. 1915 p. 121.
Við ættum að taka það eftir Scotum, að hafa öflug búnaðrfelög í hverri sveit. Og margt gætum við af þeim lært í kvikfjárrækt ... Eins gætum við lært það af Skotum, að eignast góða fjárhunda.
21. Þorbergsson, Jón H. 1915 *loc. cit.*
22. Þorbergsson, Jón H. 1915 p. 124.
...og dvelja þar ein tvö ár upp til sveita, til að kynnst þar lifnaðarháttum.
23. Johnsen, Sigfús M. 1972 *Yfir fold og flæði*. Reykjavík. p. 120.
Ég hafði oft heyrt getið hinnar undurfögru Edinborgar. Lengi hafði ég hlakkað til að sjá hana, sem fræg er fyrir stórkostlegar sögulegar minjar.
24. Fridriksson, Friðrik. 1928 *Undirbúningsárin. Minningar frá æskuárum*. Reykjavík. p. 231.
25. Valdimarsdóttir, Laufey (ed. Ólöf Nordal) 1949 *Úr blöðum Laufeyjar Valdimarsdóttur*. Reykjavík. p. 27.
... full af óþreyju Íslendingins eftir að sjá önnur lönd og heimsmenninguna, sem ég dáði þá í hjarta mínu eins og barn. Ég minnst þess, þegar ég kom til Edinborgar og sá Princesstreet [sic], eina af fallegustu götunum í heimi, þar sem nútíð og fortíð mætast, náttúran og stórborgarbragurinn, – þar sem ég sá í fyrsta sinni stórhýsi borganna, umferð og eirðarleysi, en hæðirnar hinum megin við skemmtigardinn mikla sáust í blárrí móðu og seiddu hugann eins og fjöllin heima.
26. Johnsen, Sigfús M. 1972 p. 122.
27. Þorarinsson, Jón. 1969 *Sveinbjörn Sveinbjörnsson. Ævisaga*. Reykjavík. pp. 103f.
28. Einarisdóttir, Hildur. 1980 Heimsækið Skotland og kynnst vingjarnlegu Skotunum. *Líf* 3:1. Reykjavík. p. 68.
Edinborg er að mínu mati mjög rómantísk borg.
29. Þorsteinsson, Hannes. 1897 Ferðapistlar. *Þjóðólfur* January 22, Reykjavík. 1897.
Þótt við félagar hefðum víða farið og séð margar fagrar borgir, höfðum við þó eigi fyr séð jafn einkennilega og svipmikla sjón,

eins og bar fyrir augu okkar, er við gengum upp í minnisvarða Walter's Scotts og horfðum þaðan yfir til kastalans og bygginganna hinumegin dalsins, er liggur á milli Prinzgötu ("Princes Street") og kastalans. Er þar svo svipmikið og tignarlegt um að litast, að einkennilegra og fegri útsýni getur varla, enda er Edinborg yfir höfuð einhver hinn fegursti bær sakir legu sinnar.

30. Fridriksson, Fridrik. 1928. p. 231.
... að allri hinni marglitu blómafegurð, sem jeg enga hafði sjed slíka áður, Scott's minnismarkinu, kastalanum og málverka- og listasafninu, en hreyfst þó mest af umferðinni á götunum.
Alt þetta var svo nýtt og sál mín var full af "rómantík" og sælu.
31. Stephensen, Magnús. 1807 *Ferda-Dagbók 1807*. September 27. [MS.]
32. Johnsen, Sigfús M. 1972 p. 121.
Þótt allt væri með glæsibrag í Edinborg, sáum við skuggahlíðar mannlegs lífs niðri í hafnarborginni Leith. Þar var allt með öðrum blá ... Götulífið var fáskrúðugt og fátækt, fullkomin andstæða við götulífið í Princes Street ... Flest voru börnin klædd aumustu druslum, sum nærri nakin, ötuð óhreinindum, mögur og veikluleg. Manni rann til rifja að sjá þessi vesalings vannærðu og vanhirtu börn. Þau báru með sér, að á heimilum þeirra ríkti sárasta neyð.
33. Jónasson, Hallgrímur. 1946 p. 96f.
34. Einarasdóttir, Hildur. 1980 p. 52.
Glasgow er ekki fögur borg en hún hefur samt til að bera ákvedna töfra sem felast í tvennu að mínum dómi. Annars vegar er Viktoríanskt yfirbragð borgarinnar og þar á ég sérstaklega við miðhluta hennar ... Hins vegar er það fólkíð sjálft sem byggir borgina sem gerir hana töfrandi.
35. Jónasson, Hallgrímur. 1946 p. 64.
Glasgow er ekki líkt því eins fegur bær og höfuðborgin, en stórum meiri iðjustöð og íbúarnir sagðir glaðværandi og léttari til kynningar en Edinborgarbúar.
36. Bjarnason, Hákon. 1967 *Ferð til Skotlands og Bretlands 1966. Ársrit Skógræktarfélags Íslands*. Reykjavík. p.27.
37. Stephensen, Magnús. 1807 September 27.
Það var prýdi mesta og dýrdlegt til að síá; hvórr blómlegur staurinn við annann, hæðir og hálsar og fiöll og sléttlendi,

- akrar, skógar, graslendi, allt óutmálanlega prýdilegt, yrkt og ræktad upp á efstu toppa.
38. Pálsson, Hermann. 1955 *Söngvar frá Suðureyjum*. Akureyri. pp. 120, 126.
39. Kristjánsson, Ingólfur. 1955 *Sunnudagsferð um hálendi Skotlands*. *Vísir* July 21, Reykjavík. 1955.
þegar ekið er um hálendi Skotlands, minnir það mjög á íslenska náttúru; aðeins er gróðurinn meiri, því að fjöllin eru víðast hvar vafin gróðri, og líkjast grænu flosteppi upp á brúnir.
40. Jónsson, Einar. 1944 *Minningar*. Reykjavík. p. 153.
41. Johnsen, Sigfús M. 1972 p. 121.
42. Helgason, Einar. 1910 p. 291.
Mér fanst eg verða var við sömu gestrisnina og hér á landi, álíka mikla fátækt og svipada þekkingu hjá alþýðu. Hefði málið verið það sama og hér, hefði eg ekki þurft að vera þar lengi til að finnast eins og eg hefði farið í ókunnugt hérað hér á landi.
43. Helgason, Einar. 1910 p. 301.
44. Þorbergsson, Jón H. 1915 p. 126.
45. Einarsson, Indriði. 1936 p. 217f.
46. Guðmundsson, Þóroddur. 1953 p. 200.
47. Jónsson, Sigurður. 1913 *Ýmislegt frá útlöndum*. *Tímarit kaupfjelaga og samvinnufjelaga* 7. p. 175f.
Og eflaust gætum við margt af Skotum lært; leitum líklega oflítid til þeirra.