

CHAPTER VIII.

LITERARY INFLUENCE: THE SAGAS OF
ICELAND AND IRELAND.

I.

THE most interesting branch of early Norse literature is the saga or prose story. Of these there are many varieties but the most distinctive are the following: (1) the *Íslendinga Sögur*, or stories relating to prominent Icelanders, (2) *Konunga Sögur*, or stories of Kings, chiefly of Norway; (3) *Fornaldar Sögur*, or stories about early times. All these are essentially Icelandic in origin; sagas having their origin in Norway are by no means unknown, but they are, as a rule, translated or derived from French and other foreign sources.¹ In their present form the sagas relating to the history of Iceland date for the most part from the thirteenth century, though some of them were probably committed to writing in the latter part of the twelfth.

The earliest Icelandic document of which we have any record is the original text of the Laws, said to have been written in the year 1181. Ari's *Íslendinga-Bók*, containing

¹ It has been stated (cf. E. Mogk: *Geschichte d. v. Norwegisch-Isländischen Literatur*. Strassburg, 1904, p. 830) that many of Saxo's stories came from Norway, where they had been collected by an Icelander in the twelfth century. There can be no doubt that stories of some kind relating to families and localities—especially stories which accounted, or professed to account for local names—were current in Norway down to this time. Such stories form the basis of many of the *Fornaldar Sögur*, but in all probability these had been familiar to Icelanders from the first settlement of the island, or at least during the tenth century. We have no evidence that they ever gained literary form in Norway. (Cf. Finnur Jónsson: *Old Norske Litteraturs Historie*, II., p. 791.)