

Transactions

OF THE

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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 1921.

At a meeting of the Banffshire Field Club held at Banff this evening, ex-Provost Alexander presiding, a very pleasant and interesting paper was read by Rev. Dr Bruce on the Icelandic sagas and their bearing on the population of the Moray Firth. Copies of the Icelandic sagas, Dr Bruce remarked, had been kindly presented to the Public Library some time ago by the Lords Commissioners of H.M. Treasury. The volumes were a possession of great value, and he had found intense pleasure in the perusal of them during the last autumn. For those who lived in the North-East the interest was very great. The sagas told of incursions of Norsemen, who conquered this part of Scotland, took possession of many villages and left people to govern them. These strong jarls would naturally be leaders and leave their mark upon the villages. Now the fisher peoples on the East and North-East coast seem to have a genius and character of their own. Their whole life was redolent of the old rovers. They smelt of the salt sea, and took a deep view of things, such as the old worshippers of Thor and Odin did. They did not care for agriculture, but rather spread the sail and ploughed the deep and lived their life on the ocean wave. The features of the Vikings were found amongst our fishermen and so were the names—Mair, Sclater, Bruce, Skakle, Gunn, Brodie, Raffan, &c., were all Norse names. So too were Wick, Thurso, Lerwick, Berwick, Culbeen, &c. He thought that possibly Malde was now Maud, that Thorfinn might be now Torphins, and perhaps also Turriff had its root here. Ospak and Hospack, called the "wisest of all men in the saga," was likely our Hosack. Sweynson would be our Swanson and perhaps our Simpson, which was the most prevalent name in Banffshire. The Iron Age from 700 to 950 A.D. was the Viking period. During it there were two great currents of emigration from Norway and Denmark. The first was southward to Holland, Saxony, and France. It went as far as Gibraltar and swept up the Irish Sea to Ireland, which it terribly plundered. The second incursion swept over to England and Scotland, on to Ireland and the Faroe Isles, to Greenland and perhaps Newfoundland, discovering America probably 300 years before Columbus did. The

Norsemen came to Aberdour, Gamrie, and Banff and fought many battles. Probably the moat round Banff Castle was as old as that time. The Norsemen were pagan worshippers of Odin; yet slowly but surely they were converted to Christianity and gave up their cruel rites. The sagas are mostly poetry, and record the victories of the Vikings with great gusto. Much legend found a place in that literature, also religious beliefs and myths. These fighting men loved deities like themselves and found them in the gigantic Thor and the cruel Odin. The saga of Frithioff had a beautiful love story in it, and after many adventures and losing of the lady, he found his bride, and the saga ends in wedding bells. There was much in these poems foreign to our tastes and temperaments, but also much that brought us into close touch with our kindred from Scandinavia, and had an abiding interest for us in the North-East. Our forefathers in Aberdeenshire and Banffshire would be strengthened for their hard duties in tilling a shallow soil, and in reaping the fruits of the Moray Firth by the iron in their blood which they inherited from the Norsemen.

At the close Dr Bruce was warmly thanked for his address.