

REPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS.

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REPORT

PRESENTED TO THE

**Cambridge Antiquarian Society.**

AT ITS FORTIETH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,

MAY 24, 1880.

WITH AN ABSTRACT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SOCIETY  
(INCLUDING THE ANNUAL REPORT XL),  
1879—1880.

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ALSO

**Communications**  
MADE TO THE SOCIETY.

No. XXII.

BEING THE FOURTH AND CONCLUDING NUMBER  
OF THE FOURTH VOLUME.

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COMMUNICATIONS,

BEING

PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE MEETINGS

OF THE

Cambridge Antiquarian Society.

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[May 10, 1880.]

THE Icelanders of the thirteenth century took great interest in collecting, and bringing together into connected narratives the widespread accounts of the life of Archbishop Thomas of Canterbury. His fame reached Iceland in a remarkably short period, considering the means of communication which in those early times were at the disposal of the Icelanders. As early as about 1190 an Icelandic chief, living in the West-firth quarter of Iceland, made a vow to the Saint under the following circumstances :

“It so fell in Dýra-firth when Raven (i.e. Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson) was there, that a walrus came upon the shore; whereupon people set off to catch it, but the whale plunged into the sea and sank (to the bottom), the wounds having penetrated into the hollow of the body. Then people went in ships to the spot, and made grápnels, trying to drag the whale ashore, but without avail. Then Raven made a vow to the holy bishop Thomas, promising him, in order that the whale might be secured; the teeth of the whale in the head of him (i.e. the skull of the beast with the tusks in), if they should succeed in getting the whale ashore. No sooner was the vow made, than

they found no difficulty in bringing the whale to land. Next to this Raven went away (from the country), and with his crew brought his ship into harbour in Norway. That winter Raven spent in Norway. In the spring he went to England and visited the holy Thomas Archbishop of Canterbury, and brought Saint Thomas the teeth, and there he spent his wealth towards a temple, and commended himself to their prayers." (*Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar, Sturlunga*, Clar. Press. Ed. II. p. 277.)

At a comparatively short period after the death of the Archbishop, Iceland possessed a connected narrative of the details of his eventful life, told with a *verve* and point which one would look for in vain in the Latin lives of the Saint. From Iceland we learn that the Archbishop had a biographer who has hitherto been unknown as such in the history of English literature; this was Robert of Crickdale, who was Prior of St Fridesswiths about the time of the Passion of Saint Thomas, whose 'saga' is about to appear in print completed in the *Rerum Britannicarum mediæ ævi scriptores*. Miracles wrought by Thomas came to Iceland, apparently in some cases, by word of mouth, and many of those which the Icelandic saga contains are not included in the authorised Latin collections of Thomas' miracles. The life of Archbishop Thomas had a peculiar charm for the Icelanders, especially his haughty and defiant attitude towards the King, as well as his utter incapacity for diplomatic dexterity and skilful compromise. No other saint of so late a date had had so many churches dedicated to him in Iceland as St Thomas, and no other saint's life had, apparently, been the source of so much lively discussion. Now one further proof of the devotion of which he was the object in Iceland was supplied by the subject of this communication: the *littera fraternitatis concessa Wytfrido Juariv filio de Insula de Ysland*, which was discovered some years ago in the Archives of the Cathedral of Canterbury by Mr Sheppard, the librarian

of the Chapter library. It was first published in Vol. x. of the *Archæologia Cantiana*, by Canon J. C. Robertson. The littera in Mr Sheppard's reading ran as follows :

“Littera fraternitatis Concessa Wytrfido Juarii filio de Insula de Ysland.

“Omnibz Xpi fidelibus ad quos p'sentes Pre pervenerint, Joh'es Sancte Cant' Eccl'ie Prior et ejusdem loci Cap'lum sal'm in D'no sempiternam. Cum non decet devocionis odoriferam famam sub modio occultari, que cotidie in martire glorioso sancto Thoma, eciam in ultimis terre finibus, miraculorum fama clarius et crebrius elucescit, mentesque hominum ad superne claritatis aciem alicit et invitat; ad communem omnium hominum noticiam eo fervenciori desiderio cupimus pervenire, quo nonnullos credimus ea occasione ad majoris devocionis gratiam incitari, et ut ipsius patroni nostri beata meritâ persequamur, et in ejus meritis confitentibus subsidium pietatis divine, quantum ad nos attinet, caritative imperciamur. Hinc est quod nos Prior et Cap'lum p'fate ecclesie, dicti martiris ministri humiles et devoti, ob devocionem et precum instanciam, quibus penes nos vir venerabilis Wytrfridus filius Juarii de Insula de Ysland pro se, matre, uxore, et liberis suis, institit, et ob favorem quo dictam ecclesiam nostram et martirem gloriosum devotissime reveretur, ex cujus propagacionis linea se asserit descendisse, caritatis intuitu sibi, suisque matri, uxori, et liberis quos nunc procreavit aut in posterum procreabit, omnium devocionum participacionem que in dicta sancta ecclesia Cantuar. die ac nocte in conspectu Altissimi exercentur aut fient inperpetuum, tam in vita, quam in morte elargimur; teque Wytrfridum in domo nostra capitulari una nobiscum presentem unanimiter, Margaretam matrem tuam, Gutredam uxorem tuam, Juarium, Edmundum, Ellendrum, Thurlacum, Ceciliam, Ulfridam, Margaritam, Ingeridam, tuos liberos, licet absentes, ad nostrarum oracionum suffragia et alia pietatis opera, ac in fratres et sorores nostras, tenore presencium, specialiter acceptamus. In cujus rei testimo' sigil' n'rum co'e p'sentibz est appensum. Dat' Cantuar' in domo n'ra capitulari vir° die mens. Octobr. secundum cursum et computacionem eccl'ie Anglicane, Anno D'ni Millesimo quadringentesimo quintodecimo” (Canterbury Cathedral Register, R. 19, fol. 83).

With regard to the name of the vir venerabilis *Wytrfridus filius Juarii de Insula de Ysland*, it may be stated at once that *Wytrfridus* was originally spelt, no doubt, *Wycfridus* or *Wychfridus*, and *Juarii* represents *Iuarii* or *Ivarii*. The name is undoubtedly that borne by the well known *Vigfús Ivarsson*, whose surname *Hólmr* here reappears in the Latin '*de Insula*,' *hólmr* in Icelandic = *holme* in English, meaning *island*. The spelling

*Wytfridus* or *Wycfridus* drew its origin from *Wichfrid(us)*, as the name of this same person, in all probability, was spelt in a letter of indulgence for one hundred persons in Norway issued A.D. 1402 by "*Frater Augustinus de Undinis; ordinis S. Benedicti, Apostolicae Sedis Nuntius,*" at the court of Queen Margaret of Denmark (*Diplomat. Norweg.* v. No. 415): There can hardly be a doubt as to *Vigfús Ivarsson Hólmr* having brought this evidence of his devotion as a credential to the Chapter of Canterbury. Copying the name from this letter of indulgence the Secretary to the Chapter probably meant to give it the form of *Wycfridus*, which may really be the true spelling of the name in the written document, *c* and *t* being identical in shape. This identification of *Vigfús* is borne out absolutely by the other names which occur in the letter. This *Vigfús* was of a Norway-Icelandic family, members of which frequently occupied prominent positions in the political history of Iceland from 1307—cir. 1432. From the above-mentioned 'letter of indulgence' it would seem that the great bulk of 'Vigfus's' family was domiciled in Norway. The *Holms* we find, when appearing for the first time on the scene in Iceland, as allied by marriage to the two most noble and influential families of Southern Iceland: the men of *Oddi*, or descendants of *Sæmund Sigfússon the Learned*, the reputed collector of the lays of the *Older Edda*, and the men of *Hawkale*, the descendants of *Isleif Gizurarson*, the first bishop of *Skálaholt*<sup>1</sup>. The records of this family are in a very dislocated state, and too

<sup>1</sup> *Isleifr, first Bishop of Skálaholt.*

Teitr.	<i>Sæmund the Learned.</i>
Hallr.	Loptr.
Gizur.	Jon, his daughter :
Þorvaldr.	Solveig.
Teitr.	Þorlákr, his daughter :
Klængr, whose second wife was . . .	Þorgerðr, their daughter :
Asta m. Ivarr Jonsson Hólmr, governor of Iceland in 1307.	

fragmentary to allow of anything like a clearly traced account of the house. But a summary of them, such as they are, would not unfitly find a place here. The first mention made of the family in Icelandic records occurs A.D. 1307; when it is stated that *Ivar Jónsson Hólmr* came out the bearer of royal mandates by which one-half of the royal tax was conceded to the king's bailiffs<sup>1</sup>. The same person appears again A.D. 1312 as Herra Ivar<sup>2</sup>, having been knighted in the interval. From this time no mention is made of any member of the family till 1345, when an *Ivar Vigfússon Hólmr* appears upon the scene apparently as a royal commissary<sup>3</sup>; he is mentioned again in A.D. 1351 as being entrusted with high official functions, and in 1354 (or, according to others, in 1352), when the annals state that he came out to Iceland with the startling news that he had farmed the revenue of the whole country for three years; being at the same time appointed to the high post of royal commissary<sup>4</sup>. In 1358 this *Ivar Vigfússon* acts on behalf of the laity of Iceland as their commissioner in certain disputes, which at the time greatly strained the friendly relations between the Church and the commonalty<sup>5</sup>. In 1365 he appears at the Althing as royal commissary summoning to the king's presence certain leading men from among the laity<sup>6</sup>. This same year he had commission for the papal Nuncio, *Guido de Cruce*, to collect the papal revenues of Iceland<sup>7</sup>. Whether he still held that commission in 1369, as the Annals assert<sup>8</sup>, seems doubtful. He died in 1371<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Islenzkir Annálar*, 1307, cfr Jón Sigurðsson in *Lögsögumanna tal og Lögmannna*, Safn til Sögu Íslands, II. 55.

<sup>2</sup> *Isl. Ann.* 1312; Laurentius Saga in *Biskupa sögur*, I. 825 (886).

<sup>3</sup> Espólin, *Arbækr* I. 79.

<sup>4</sup> *Isl. Ann.* 1351, 1352, 1353, 1354; Espólin, *Arb.* I. 82, 84; *Hist. Eccl. Isl.* I. 426.

<sup>5</sup> *Hist. Eccl. Isl.* I. 528.

<sup>6</sup> *Hist. Eccl. Isl.* II. 213.

<sup>7</sup> *Diplomat. Norweg.* III. No. 339.

<sup>8</sup> *Isl. Ann.* 1369.

<sup>9</sup> *Isl. Ann.* 1371; *Hist. Eccl. Isl.* I. 426; Espólin, I. 99.



In 1389, eighteen years after the death of Ivar Vigfússon, we find the pilgrim to Canterbury, *Vigfús Ivarsson Holmr*, mentioned for the first time, and then as governor of the country<sup>1</sup>. It seems most likely that he was a son of the preceding. In 1393 he is mentioned in connection with an important constitutional incident, as being commissioned by Queen Margaret of Denmark to attempt the enforcement of new taxes by the consent of the Althing, and his popularity is attested to by the resolution of the diet declaring that they would, *for the sake of Vigfús*, give a certain amount once for all, but it should not be called a scat nor be ever demanded again<sup>2</sup>. He appears as arbitrator in a blood suit in 1394<sup>3</sup>. In 1397 (April 27) a still existing charter (*Arna Magnæan Coll.* Fasc. 5, 20) bears witness to his having declared his wife, *Guðrós Ingimundar dóttir*, to be possessed in her own right of property in Iceland and Norway, amounting in value to 'five hundred hundreds'; consequently he was married before this date, and the statement of the annals that he brought his wife with him, apparently for the first time, to Iceland in 1403, then presumably just married, since she is made to have been only 15 years of age, may go for what it is worth. In 1402 we find him at *Roskild*, as has been alluded to before. In 1405 and 1408 we find him as occupying a lordly position at two of those great nuptial and ecclesiastical banquets which form such striking features of those times<sup>4</sup>. In 1409 (July 2) we find him at the *Althing*, and on the 7th of the same month at an island called *Therney*, as governor of the country, vindicating certain commercial prerogatives vested in the crown<sup>5</sup>. Again in 1413 he figures as one of the signatories to a deed issued by the

<sup>1</sup> *Isl. Ann.* 1390; *Hist. Eccl. Isl.* i. 441; Espólin, i. 110.

<sup>2</sup> *Isl. Ann.* 1393.

<sup>3</sup> *Isl. Ann.* 1394; *Hist. Eccl. Isl.* i. c.; Espólin, i. 119; Jón Sigurðsson, l.c. 75, 76.

<sup>4</sup> *Isl. Ann.* 1405, 1408; Espólin, ii. 3, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Jón Sigurðsson, l.c. 170, 171.

Bishop of *Skálaholt*, which conferred certain privileges on the monastery of *Videy*<sup>1</sup>. This same year, in the capacity of governor, he enforces upon a certain English trader, named *Richard*, some restrictive measures regarding his choice of harbour, apparently in favour of the Bishop of *Skálaholt*<sup>2</sup>. The event which stands in immediate connection with his journey to Canterbury will be mentioned presently.

For establishing the authenticity of the present document it is sufficient to mention Vigfus' immediate family connections. We have seen that in all probability he was the son of *Ivar Vigfússon*, and bore, according to unvarying custom, his grandfather's name. His mother was called *Margaret*; she was the daughter of *Össur*, and is supposed by Icelandic genealogists to have been of Norwegian descent. The name of his wife was *Guðröðr*, daughter of *Ingimund*. Of their children only three are mentioned in Icelandic records: *Ivar*, who married *Sophia*, daughter of the greatest North country nobleman of the time, *Lopt the Mighty of Möðruvellir* (Maddervales); *Margret*<sup>3</sup>, who married *Thorvald*, one of *Lopt's* many sons; and *Erlendr*. Of these *Ivar*<sup>4</sup>, as the story goes, was slain by the attendants of the luckless and turbulent bishop *Jón Gerreksson*, whose episcopal career terminated in a sack sunk down a river. But *Margaret* became the mother of a family which still flourishes in various branches in Iceland.

<sup>1</sup> Espólin, II. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Isl. Ann.* 1413.

<sup>3</sup> Legend surrounds the marriage of *Margaret* with a halo of romance. Having refused to give her hand to one of the attendants of the episcopal brigand *Jón Gerreksson*, the disappointed wooer visited the family residence with sword and fire. *Margaret*, escaping from the burning house, travelled in the guise of a tramp on a bare-backed three-yearling of a pony north to *Eyja fjord*, and promised to marry him who should avenge her and her family's wrongs—and *Thorvald* found the price worth the cost. Espólin, I. 30.

<sup>4</sup> That *Ivar*, who if the story be true must have died young, was a man of great promise may be inferred from his signature to the oath of allegiance to King Eric of Pomerania, June 14th, 1431, standing first among the signatures of the leading men who framed the deed. *Jón Sigurðsson*, l.c. 176.

In 1415 king Eric of Pomerania invested the then bishop of *Skálholt*, *Arni Olafsson*, with the governorship of the country. On learning this, *Vigfús Ivarsson Hólmr*, in the summer of the same year, betook himself on board one of six English traders, then lying in the harbour of *Hafnarfjord*, and sailed with sixty 'lasts' of fish and a great quantity of precious things away to England. In the following October we find him, as the *littera fraternitatis* testifies, on his pious errand at Canterbury. We are left entirely in the dark as to how *Vigfús* succeeded in substantiating his claim to blood-relationship with the great Cantuarian Saint. It is only fair to suppose that he commanded on the occasion some logic at least as convincing as that of his substantial offerings.

We have seen that the names of *Vigfús'* mother, wife, and three children mentioned in Icelandic annals: *Margret*, *Guðrís*, *Ivar*, *Erlendr*, at the time pronounced and spelt as now, *Ellendr*, are in absolute agreement with those of the Canterbury document: *Margareta*, *Gutreda*, *Ivarius*, *Ellendrus*. The name of *Vigfús'* father, *Ivar*, reappears in that of his son *Ivarius*, as that of *Gudrid's* father, *Ingimundr*, returns here in the form of her son's name, *Edmundus*. The other children who are not mentioned in Icelandic records probably died young or left the country before they became connected with the history of it. But according to this letter it would seem as if all who are mentioned in it were alive at the time it was issued, unless the words *licet absentes* are accepted in a wider sense than they naturally would bear.

It is evident that this document is thoroughly genuine. That being so, a certain charter dated in die Sancti Magni, i.e. 16th April, 1407 (*Arna-Magnæan Coll.* 238, 4to. fol. 24<sup>b</sup>)<sup>1</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> *Bref fyri holum i grimsnesi.*

Þad giore e<sup>r</sup> gvdridr<sup>r</sup> ingemundz-  
dotter ollvm godvm monnvm kyn-  
igtt med þesso mino opnv brefi.  
at ec gef<sup>r</sup> j heidvr med gvð & hans

*A charter for Holar in Grimsnes.*

I, Gudrid, daughter of Ingi-  
mund, make known unto all good  
men, by this my open letter, that  
I give, in honour of God and His

whereby *Vigfús'* wife, *Guðrós*, gives to the Monastery of *Videy* a certain estate, for the soul of her husband and of her son *Erlendr*, must either be misdated or suffer from other still more serious drawbacks to its authenticity. That charter has always been found to be a stumbling-block in the history of *Vigfús Ivarsson Hólmr*, for it is quite certain that he lived long after that date and, according to the *Hist. Eccl.*, did not die till A.D. 1429<sup>1</sup>.

For valuable hints relating to the identification of *Vigfús Ivarsson Hólmr*, I am indebted to the very learned Chief Justice of Iceland, Mr *Jón Pjetursson*; for the transcript of the 'Bref fyri holum i grimsnesi' to the renowned Editor of 'Grágás,' Dr *Vilhjálmr Finsen*, Judge in the Supreme Court of Judicature at Copenhagen.

signada modir Marie til æverndiligx bæna haldz til videyar stadar jordinna sem holar heita med VIII kvigilldum sem lig<sup>r</sup> j grimsnesi fyri sal vigfvsar jvarssonar & hans sonar, ellendz, sem gvd þeirra sal frelsi til æfverndiligrar eignar, med ollvm þeim gognvm & gædvvm sem til hennar liggvr & leigit hefvr fra fornv & nyiv & avngvv vndann skilldv, svo framt sem ec matte framast med logvm hana eignazt, samþyckte minn sonvr jvar, þessa mina giord med mier, og til sanninda hier vm setti ec mitt innsigle fyri þetta bref er giortt var j bravtarholhti jn die sancti Magni martiris anno domini medvij.

Blessed Mother Mary, for perpetual offering-up of prayers, to the Monastery of *Videy* the farm which is called *Hólar*, with a stock of VIII 'cow-gilds' (= farm-stock of the value of eight cows), for the souls of *Vigfús Ivarsson* and his son *Ellend*—on whose souls may God be merciful—in perpetual possession with all commodities and advantages which thereunto have belonged heretofore and at present belong, with nothing exempted, all with as full rights as I might the same by fullest right in law have acquired. To this my deed gave consent my son, *Ivar*, with me conjointly, and in witness thereof I placed my seal to this letter, which was done at *Brautarholt* in die Sancti Magni martiris anno domini medvij.

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. Eccl. Isl.* iv. 170.

