

ICELANDIC PILGRIMS TO THE TOMB OF BECKET.

Dear Mr. Secretary,

In Vol. X. of the *Archæologia Cantiana*, pp. 27-8, is printed a document discovered by Mr. Sheppard among our Cathedral archives—"Littera fraternitatis concessa Wytfrido filio Juarii de Insula de Island."* At the time when this document was published, I called the attention of my friend Mr. Magnússon (editor of the Icelandic Saga of St. Thomas in the *Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain*) to it; and I lately had the pleasure of receiving a letter from him, by which it appears that the Icelandic pilgrim to Canterbury of 1415 was a person who has left his traces in the records of his native island. The information contained in Mr. Magnússon's first letter to me has since been extended in a second letter, which I now venture to forward to you, in the hope that you will give it a place in our next volume.

Yours very truly,

J. C. ROBERTSON.

March 25th, 1880.

* "Littera fraternitatis concessa Wytfrido filio Juarii, etc." :—

"Omnibz Xpi fidelibus ad quos p'sentes l're 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 merita persequamur, et in ejus meritis confidentibus subsidiùm pietatis divine, quantum ad nos attinet, caritative imperciamur. Hinc est quod nos Prior et Cap'l'm p'fate ecclesie, dicti martiris ministri humiles et devoti, ob devocionem et precum instanciam, quibus penes nos vir venerabilis Wytfridus 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 clargimur; teque Wytfridum in domo nostra capitulari una nobiscum presentem,

My dear Canon,

The last note I sent you was only intended briefly to call your attention to the identification of Wytfridus filius Juarii. I propose now to send you a little more detailed account of the matter. As to the name, its spelling should be, I imagine, Wycfridus, or Wychfridus—such, I presume, must have been the spelling of the original letter. This I infer from the fact, that this same Wytfridus procured from Frater Augustinus de Undinis, ordinis S. Benedicti, Apostolicæ Sedis Nuntius at the court of Queen Margaret of Denmark, a letter of indulgence or absolution for one hundred persons in Norway, which letter is dated 8th March, 1402, with Wytfrid's name spelt *Wichfrid(o) Ywari*. (*Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, V, No. 415.) It can hardly be doubted, that, when Wytfridus came to Canterbury, he took this very letter with him as forming an important item of his credentials to the chapter. From that letter the secretary of the chapter, I take it, copied the name. *Juarii* is, of course, *Ivari*.

There can be no shadow of doubt as to "Wycfridus, filius Juarii de Insula de Ysland" being Vigfús Ívarsson Hólmr from Iceland. *Hólmr*, in Icelandic, means an island (as, indeed, *holme* does in English), so that *de Insula* is a translation of Vigfús's surname. This Vigfús was of a Norway-Icelandic family, members of which we find frequently connected with Iceland in an official capacity from 1307—1429. At one time the Holms were allied by marriage to the two most noble and powerful families of southern Iceland,—the men of Oddi, or descendants of Sæmund Sigfússon the Learned, the reputed collector of the poetic Edda, and the men of Hawkdale, the descendants of Isleif Gizurarson, the first bishop of Skálholt. But the earlier records of the family are too fragmentary to enable us to trace the family relations with anything like absolute clearness.

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'rm co'e p'sentibz est appensum. Dat' Cantuar' in domo n'ra capitulari vii^o die mens. Octobr. secundum cursum et computacionem eccl'ie Anglicane, Anno D'ni Millesimo quadringentesimo quintodecimo.' (*Canterbury Cathedral Register*, R. 19, fol. 83.)

What we know about Vigfús Ívarsson Hólm's immediate family connections amounts, in short, to this. His mother was named Margaret; she was the daughter of Össur, and is supposed to have been of a Norwegian family. Vigfús's wife was Guðríðr, 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; Margret, who married Thorvald, one of Lopt's many sons; and Erlendr, for whose soul the mother gives a manor *ad pios usus* in a (misdated) Charter of 1407 (Arn. Magn. No. 238, 4^o, fo. 246.) Ivar was slain by the attendants of the Danish Bishop Jón Gerreksson of Skálholt, whose episcopal career terminated in a sack sunk down in a river; but Margret became mother of a family which still flourishes in various branches in Iceland. (I myself happen to be a lineal descendant from one of Thorvald's brothers, Orm Loptson.)

Vigfús Ívarsson Hólmr is mentioned for the first time in Icelandic annals in 1389, and then as *hirðstjóri*, or governor of the country. During the following years he is referred to not unfrequently, and mostly as occupying the highest offices in the island. In 1393 he had the unpleasant mission to fulfil at the Althing on behalf of Queen Margaret of Denmark, to attempt the enforcement of new taxes on the inhabitants, and his popularity is attested to by the resolution which the diet passed:—that they would, for the sake of Vigfús, give a certain amount, once for all, but it should not be called a scat or tax, nor should it ever be demanded again. In 1415, king Eric of Pomerania invested the then Bishop of Skálholt, Arni Olafsson, with the governorship of the country. On learning this, Vigfús Ívarson 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 managed to substantiate his claim to blood relationship with the great Cantuarian Saint; but that he

did it by means of some other logic than that of his substantial offerings, I myself am inclined to believe. We have seen, that the names of Vigfus's mother, wife, and three children who are known in Icelandic annals—Margret, Guðríðr, Margret, Ívar, Erlendr—are in absolute agreement with the Canterbury document:—*Margareta, Gutreda, Juvarius, Ellendrus*. The name of Gudrid's father, Ingimundr, reappears here in the form of her son's name, *Edmundus*. The other children, who are unknown in Iceland, must have either died young, or else left the country to live abroad. It would seem as if all the members of the family who are mentioned in this letter were alive at the time it is dated (1415). Vigfús himself died in A.D. 1429. I shall have more to say on this subject in vol. ii. of "Thomas Saga."

This is not the only pilgrimage mentioned of the kind from Iceland to Canterbury. Some twenty to twenty-five years after the death of Archbishop Thomas, Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, an Icelandic chief, repaired to the Saint, with an offering consisting of a couple of walrus teeth, the ivory of the North, and much wealth besides. Apparently he founded a chapel in the cathedral, and acquired the Saint's special protection.* The relation between Iceland, on one side, and Saint Thomas of Canterbury,—the literature relating to him especially—on the other, forms not the least interesting chapter of mediæval ecclesiastical literature.

Yours most truly,

EIRÍKR MAGNÚSSON.

University Library, Cambridge.

* "It so fell in Dyrafirth at a spring-mote, when Raven was there, that a walrus came upon the shore, whereupon people set on it to wound it, but the whale plunged into the sea and sank, the wounds having penetrated into the hollow of the body. Then people went in ships to the spot, and made grapnels, 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 fixed in the head (=the scull with the teeth in), if they should succeed in getting the whale ashore. As soon as the vow was made, no difficulty had they to bring the whale to land. Next to this, Raven went away, and he with his crew brought his ship into harbour in Norway. That winter Raven was in Norway. In the spring he went west to England, and visited the holy Thomas Archbishop of Canterbury, and brought the holy Thomas the teeth; and there he spent his wealth towards a temple, and commended himself to their prayers." (*Sturlunga*, vol. ii., 277.)