

Early cultural links between Great Britain and Scandinavia

Autor(en): **Kirby, I.J.**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Études de Lettres : revue de la Faculté des lettres de l'Université de Lausanne**

Band (Jahr): **6 (1973)**

Heft 4

PDF erstellt am: **22.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-870983>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Inhalten der Zeitschriften. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern.

Die auf der Plattform e-periodica veröffentlichten Dokumente stehen für nicht-kommerzielle Zwecke in Lehre und Forschung sowie für die private Nutzung frei zur Verfügung. Einzelne Dateien oder Ausdrucke aus diesem Angebot können zusammen mit diesen Nutzungsbedingungen und den korrekten Herkunftsbezeichnungen weitergegeben werden.

Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Die systematische Speicherung von Teilen des elektronischen Angebots auf anderen Servern bedarf ebenfalls des schriftlichen Einverständnisses der Rechteinhaber.

Haftungsausschluss

Alle Angaben erfolgen ohne Gewähr für Vollständigkeit oder Richtigkeit. Es wird keine Haftung übernommen für Schäden durch die Verwendung von Informationen aus diesem Online-Angebot oder durch das Fehlen von Informationen. Dies gilt auch für Inhalte Dritter, die über dieses Angebot zugänglich sind.

EARLY CULTURAL LINKS BETWEEN GREAT BRITAIN AND SCANDINAVIA

Anyone who has merely glanced through an English history book may be pardoned if he assumes that the early relations between Great Britain and Scandinavia had nothing cultural about them! In the year 911 the king of the West Franks, Charles the Simple, ceded part of Northern France to a Viking army. But more than a century earlier than this the forefathers of these Vikings had descended on Northumbria, laying waste that great centre of European learning and culture, which had produced such men as Bede of Jarrow, historian and father of the Church, and Alcuin of York, scholar and teacher, who in his later life took charge of Charlemagne's palace school. In the course of the 9th century the Viking raids on Britain developed into a full-scale attempt at invasion and conquest. Yet King Alfred the Great of Wessex, who spent the first part of his life campaigning against the Viking armies, and the second part guarding his kingdom vigilantly against further encroachments, was by no means incapable of taking a more general interest in his lifelong enemies. From one of the most interesting passages extant in Old English prose¹ we may reconstruct the scene in Alfred's royal hall when, with his men around him, he listened with rapt attention to a Norwegian named Óttarr, who had undertaken a voyage right round the North Cape of Norway and into the White Sea, and was describing what he had seen on his travels, and what he had learned of the peoples who lived in those areas, their way of life, customs and languages. Alfred's interest in this and similar information about the Scandinavian countries was such that he had it incorporated into his Old English translation of Orosius's *World History*.

Leçon inaugurale, prononcée à l'Auditoire XVI du Palais de Rumine, le 22 février 1973.

¹ Found e. g. as extract IV in *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader*, rev. Whitelock, Oxford 1967.

Alfred's successors gradually reconquered the north and east of England, which had been ceded to the Vikings by the Treaty of Wedmore, and his grandson, Athelstan, can be regarded as the first king of all England. In Norway, however, he is better known as the foster-father of the third king of that country, Hákon, nicknamed « the Good ». Hákon was the son of King Harald Fairhair of Norway and a servant girl. The Icelandic historian Snorri Sturluson tells us² that Harald Fairhair had been insulted by the English king, and that in reply he sent Hákon (then a child) with thirty of his men to Athelstan's court. On being admitted, the leader of the Norwegians placed the child on the king's knee, thus (as he explained) making Athelstan the nursemaid of a servant girl's child ! Athelstan, pardonably annoyed, seized a sword to kill Hákon ; the Norwegian commented that he could of course do as he liked with Hákon, but he was mistaken if he thought that he could get rid of all Harald's sons as easily as that ! On reflection, Athelstan allowed the child to live ; and when he had grown up Hákon returned to his own country to secure the support of his countrymen and seize the Norwegian throne from his brother. Although no specific evidence is available to us, it can hardly be doubted that Hákon took with him some of the culture of Athelstan's court: he was assuredly the first Christian king of Norway, and it is by no means unlikely that he was the first literate king too, though this honour is usually accorded to Olaf Kyrri, who reigned more than a century later. However, Hákon's failure to persuade the Norwegians to accept Christianity³ — the only major failure of his long and mainly peaceful reign — probably explains the silence of the historical records. We may reasonably conjecture that Hákon took with him priests, scholars and books as a gift from his foster-father, or obtained them at a later date⁴ : but of any such there is no certain memorial.

² See *Haraldz saga ins hárfagra* chs. 39-40 (found e. g. at pp. 66-67 of Finnur Jónsson's edition of *Heimskringla*, København 1911, and translated at pp. 80-81 of *Heimskringla : Sagas of the Norse Kings*, Everyman's Library vol. 847, Samuel Laing, London 1961).

³ In a recent article, « The Earliest Missionary Activities from England to Norway » (*Nottingham Mediaeval Studies*, XV, 1971, pp. 27-37), Fridjov Birkeli argues that Hákon's missionary efforts had more lasting success in the south and west of Norway than in the area around (and north of) Trondheim.

⁴ Snorri Sturluson mentions that he obtained « a bishop and other clerics » from England (see, respectively, pp. 78 and 94 of the works cited in note 2); and Birkeli (see note 3) claims that a certain « Sigefridus norwegensis », listed among English bishops in a necrology from Glastonbury, participated in Hákon's missionary work.

The cultural contacts between England and Norway in the early part of our period, then, were comparatively limited. When we turn to Iceland, we find a more intimate connection, and with Britain rather than just England. The country's first known inhabitants would seem to have come from the British Isles, for the Icelandic records tell us that when the earliest settlers got there towards the end of the 9th century they found « Christian men, whom the Norwegians call *papar* »⁵; and by « *papar* » they almost certainly meant Celtic monks from Ireland, to judge from the Irish books and other things these people are reported to have left behind them. But there is a closer connection than this. The Norse settlers came not only from Norway but also from the existing Norse settlements in the British Isles; and these latter took with them to Iceland their Celtic slaves, concubines and wives. Ingolfr Árnason, traditionally the first to settle in what is now the capital, Reykjavík, went to Iceland with his fosterbrother Hjörleifr. Hjörleifr was killed by the Irish slaves he had picked up on a viking expedition a few years earlier, and Ingolfr took a bloody revenge on them in the islands which still bear their name, the Vestmannaeyjar, or « Westman Islands »⁶. Relations between the Celts and the Norsemen were not always bloody, however, and there is substantial evidence, historical, literary, linguistic and even anatomical, to show that the Celts were a not insignificant minority in Iceland. And the Norsemen who were their masters (or husbands!) had in some cases already been influenced by their way of life: some had become Christian, and at least one must be regarded as literate — a certain Ørlygr Hrappsson had with him a *plenárium* which his fosterfather, an Irishman named Patrick, had given him along with the wood to build a church⁷.

From the very beginning, therefore, there was a substratum of Celtic Christian culture, reflected in the establishment of a few Christian homes, and a church or two, in different parts of the country. The Icelandic records make particular mention of one Norse family from the Hebrides, of whom the daughter settled in the West of Iceland and set up a cross as a place of worship close to where she lived, while her cousin, the Ørlygr I have just mentioned, settled near Reykjavík and built a church on his farmstead. This church

⁵ See *Islendingabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, Reykjavík 1968 (= *Islensk Fornrit* vol. I, 1), page 5.

⁶ See *Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson (ed. cit. note 5), pp. 42-45.

⁷ Op. cit. (note 6), page 52.

stood quite close to a heathen temple, but seems not to have aroused the hostility of the pagan majority in the neighbourhood : indeed, there is no substantial evidence of religious intolerance until the period of the conversion of Iceland, a century later. This may well be because the Christians among the early settlers did not, apparently, try to foist their beliefs on their heathen compatriots : in fact, Christians and pagans seem to have been content to tolerate each other without establishing closer contact than was necessary. One consequence of this is that clear evidence of direct cultural influence is lacking. But the possibility of influence cannot be ruled out : and it may be that, just as it is frequently suggested that the first flowering of Old English literature resulted from the contact between Germanic literary traditions and Celtic Christianity, so a similar blend of Norse and Celtic elements in Iceland contributed in some measure to make her the centre of Scandinavian literary culture in the Middle Ages.

So much by way of a purely general introduction to my subject. My lecture proper must of necessity be limited to the consideration of one major aspect of cultural influence in each direction.

The major early contribution of England to West Norse culture was in the field of religion and religious literature. Just as the Anglo-Saxon monks Willibrord and Boniface had taken Christianity and Christian culture to Holland and Germany in the 8th century, so in the 10th and 11th centuries churchmen from England played a major role in the establishment of Christianity in the West Norse area. It is true that such historical records as are available credit the two missionary kings of Norway, Olaf Tryggvason and Olaf Haraldsson, with the conversion and the establishment of Christianity in their country : but these same records also state that both kings were converted while raiding in the British Isles, and that when they returned to Norway they took with them English (or at any rate English-trained) clergy to help them in their Christian mission. Olaf Tryggvason, who may have been present at the Battle of Maldon in the year 991, was converted to Christianity a few years later (though in the light of subsequent events one is inclined to wonder just how much he understood of it !); and he returned to Norway in 995 with a bishop called Sigurd and (presumably) other English clergy. In the five years of his turbulent reign he took Christianity

round the country, killing or maiming those who refused to accept it, and sending his emissaries to the Faeroes and Iceland with the same message, which we may well paraphrase as, not the Koran, but « The Bible or the Sword ! ». One of the more lurid tales that is told⁸ concerns his treatment of a certain Raud, one of his foremost opponents. After an unsuccessful sea fight against Olaf, Raud fled to his home in Northern Norway, which was situated at the end of Salten Fjord. This fjord is a particularly dangerous one, for the sea exit is very narrow, and at flood and ebb tide the water rushes in and out at high speed. Raud, obviously thinking himself secure, was surprised and captured by Olaf who (accompanied by Bishop Sigurd) had sailed safely through the tidal race. Olaf offered him peace and friendship if he would accept baptism. Raud, however, refused, whereupon Olaf had him put to death by the spectacular method of forcing a snake down his throat ! Small wonder if most Norwegians took the line of least resistance ! At any rate, the more accessible parts of Norway were at least superficially Christian by the end of Olaf's short reign ; and Olaf's chroniclers also credit him with the conversion of the Atlantic islands, including Iceland, which (influenced in part by what had been going on in Norway) accepted Christianity by a decision of its parliament in or about the year 1000. By comparison with what is told of Olaf, we hear little of Bishop Sigurd : but what there is suggests that he was a gentle cleric, who tried without much success to restrain the king's more violent excesses, and to confirm the faith of the newly-converted, for after Olaf's death in battle he went to Sweden, where he came to be regarded as a saint.

Olaf Haraldsson, whose early career matched that of his namesake, took another bishop, Grimkell, with him from England when he returned to Norway in 1015 to claim the crown ; and although it is Olaf's doings we hear of in the historical sagas, it cannot be doubted that Grimkell and his companions and successors did much to confirm Christianity in Norway and to establish English-type ecclesiastical customs there. As long ago as 1890 the Norwegian A. S. Taranger demonstrated⁹ that Norwegian ecclesiastical practice was based on that of England ; and as more becomes known of

⁸ See *Heimskringla* (Finnur Jónsson's edition, see note 2), pp. 158-160, translated e. g. at pp. 69-70 in *Heimskringla : The Olaf Sagas*, Everyman's Library vol. 717, Samuel Laing, London 1964.

⁹ In *Den angelsaksiske kirkes indflydelse paa den norske*, Christiania 1890.

West Norse religious literature it appears that, although its origins are international in the main, certain features of it, as well as certain individual works, can be traced to English sources. To touch first on more general aspects of this literature : as to Norway, the late Rektor of Oslo University, Didrik Arup Seip, has reiterated¹⁰, with reference to the early manuscripts, that the English scribal tradition was dominant in Norway in the early period; and he has also observed that (for instance) Norwegian royal letters correspond in certain respects to their English counterparts. As regards Iceland, the situation is rather different. It is true that the historical records indicate that in the first half-century of Christianity at least three bishops with British connections spent varying periods of time in Iceland : thus, Bernard, nicknamed « the Bookwise », who stayed five years, was apparently an Englishman who had gone to Norway with Olaf Haraldsson and was then sent by him to Iceland in or about the year 1016 ; another bishop, Rudolf, who later became abbot of Abingdon, stayed 19 years, while a third, John of Ireland, is said to have stayed only a few years¹¹. But bishops from other countries, notably Germany, also spent time in Iceland in these early years. And in any case the work of these bishops seems to have consisted mainly in establishing churches and finding priests for them : the beginnings of literary activity in Iceland are generally dated somewhat later, to the period when the Icelandic church was under the control of Icelandic bishops, who had obtained their education on the Continent. This is perhaps why the scribal tradition in Iceland, as evidenced by the early manuscripts, is essentially Carolingian and not English. However, here too there is some evidence that the English insular script was not unknown : the Icelandic scholar Hreinn Benediktsson, for example, has drawn attention to certain features in the orthography which point to English influence¹². One may perhaps speculate, too, that the reason why the English bishop Bernard was nicknamed « the Bookwise » was that he had a collection of books with him when he came, some of which at any rate would have come from England. From the evidence we have, however, we can do no more than conclude that England was only one of the sources of cultural influence on Iceland in this period, and that the extent of this influence remains relatively uncertain.

¹⁰ In « Hvordan Latinsk Skrift kom til Norge og Island », *Kirke og Kultur* 57, 1952, pp. 163-173.

¹¹ On this, see *Islendingabók* (op. cit. note 5), page 18.

¹² See his *Early Icelandic Script*, Reykjavík 1965, page 34 et al.

Secondly, the content of the manuscripts. In attempting to evaluate this material, we must take into account two factors which considerably reduce the likelihood of our finding substantial evidence of English influence. The first is that the majority of the extant manuscripts are Icelandic in origin, content or both, whereas it is in Norway that we would have expected to find most of our evidence. The second is that the earliest manuscripts from either country date from the middle of the 12th century, and the earliest ones of any size from the period around 1200. This is two centuries after the coming of Christianity to the West Norse area, as we have seen, and more than a hundred years after the virtual submergence of English as a literary language, consequent upon the Norman Conquest; further, it is the period of the establishment of Paris and its University as the new cultural and educational centre of Europe. For these reasons, we are I think justified in making the most of the limited material available to us.

Among the earliest manuscripts extant are two which contain in the main homilies and sermons¹³. One of them is distinctively Norwegian, the other equally distinctively Icelandic, though in fact they have certain homilies in common. An examination of these brings to light two names which I have already had cause to mention. The first is that of the Venerable Bede. Bede's numerous works include a series of homilies « de tempore »¹⁴: this series was among the better-known sequences in the Middle Ages, and a number of Bede's homilies appear in the two Norse works. Unfortunately, the value of this as evidence is reduced by the circumstance that the direct source of these homilies either is, or is likely to be, an intermediate work, rather than that of Bede himself. The immediate source of the Norwegian book is an 8th century compilation by Paulus Diaconus¹⁵ which also contains homilies by Gregory, Augustine and others. As to the Icelandic collection: although it contains Bede's homilies on the Circumcision and the Wedding at Cana (Nos. 10 and 13 in the *Patrologia Latina* text, see note 14 above)

¹³ These are, respectively, ms. 619 qto in the Arnamagnaean Library (at present in Copenhagen), and ms. 15 qto in the Royal Library, Stockholm. The former has been edited inter alia by Gustav Indrebø (as *Gamal Norsk Homiliebok*, Oslo 1931), the latter by Th. Wisén (as *Homiliu-bók*, Lund 1872).

¹⁴ See *Patrologiae cursus completus*, series Latina, ed. J.-P. Migne, Paris 1844 sqq., vol. 94.

¹⁵ See J.-P. Migne, op. cit., vol. 95, cols. 1159-1566.

in a form independent of Paulus Diaconus, it is impossible to maintain with any certainty that the Icelander was consciously using Bede because in both cases Bede's text is considerably re-worked. However, we are on firmer ground with our second Englishman, Alcuin. Alcuin's works include a treatise entitled « De Virtutibus et Vitiis »¹⁶; and not only do we find material from this included in certain of the Norse homilies, but we also find a close translation of the entire work prefixed to the Norwegian homily book. There is good reason to think that this translation is to be dated to the 11th rather than the 12th century, which would make it one of the earliest Norse works of which we have record; and it is therefore by no means fanciful to suppose that Alcuin's work may have made its way to Norway with one of the earliest English missionaries.

The works of Bede and Alcuin are English in origin, but they are equally part of the international heritage of the Church, not least because they are written in Latin. Fortunately, we also have evidence that the work of the greatest Anglo-Saxon prose stylist, the monk Ælfric, was also known in the North. In the early 14th century the Icelander Haukr Erlendsson copied up a large quantity of diverse material (Eddic poetry, sagas, religious matter and what not) into a substantial folio codex, since named « Hauksbók »¹⁷. Of the religious matter, two consecutive passages were long thought to be derived from Martin of Bracara and Peter Comestor respectively; but it has recently been demonstrated that they both come from a single homily by Ælfric entitled « De Falsis Diis », newly edited by J. C. Pope in the Early English Text Society series¹⁸. Comparison shows clearly that Ælfric's Anglo-Saxon text must have been available to the compiler of the Norse material, which is in any case thought to be very much earlier than the text in Hauksbók.

At this point we approach the limits of existing knowledge on this particular subject — knowledge which, though significant as far as it goes, is admittedly sparse. But in the course of my own research during the last ten years I have necessarily had to delve into, on the one hand, the religious history of Scandinavia and the

¹⁶ See J.-P. Migne, op. cit., vol. 101, cols. 613-638.

¹⁷ Edited under this title with an introduction by Finnur Jónsson (København 1892-96).

¹⁸ See « *Hauksbók* and Ælfric's *De Falsis Diis* », Arnold Taylor, in *Leeds Studies in English*, vol. III, 1969, pp. 101-109.

sources of its religious literature, and on the other hand the religious history and literature of Anglo-Saxon England. In consequence, I feel quite confident that this limited evidence of English influence on West Norse religious literature represents only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. I should thus like to conclude this, the first part of my lecture, by summarising my reasons for this view.

As we have seen, the presence of English clerics in Norway and Iceland in the missionary period is unquestioned. On the other hand, the lateness of extant manuscripts, the submergence of Anglo-Saxon culture after the Norman Conquest, the emergence of Paris as the new cultural centre of Europe, and (most important of all) the view generally held up to now that Norse literature was first written down in the early 12th century — all these factors have tended to suggest that in the field of religious literature English influence was minimal. But there is in fact no compelling reason for the assumption that Norse literature was not being written down in the 11th century ; indeed, this view is beginning to find support among present-day scholars. It is clear, too, that many books have not survived : in spite of the old Icelandic proverb « Better shoeless than bookless » we know all too well that books, particularly the older ones, were often broken up for use as shoe-leather, book-covers, book-marks and the like. Further, of what has survived, not all has yet been traced to its source ; and indeed there are still fragments in the Arna-Magnaean collection in Copenhagen which have not been precisely identified ! While working there I have myself been able to identify a few of these, notably a fragment of a commentary on the Penitential Psalms, and an extract which comes either from a shortened version of Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica* or else from one of his sources¹⁹. In the present state of our knowledge, it would indeed be foolhardy to assume that because little material of English origin is known to survive it did not therefore exist !

As to the more positive evidence available : first, there seems to be a considerable degree of interest in people of English origin or having specific connections with England. Thus, there is a marked predilection for the works of Pope Gregory, Apostle of the English,

¹⁹ This question, and others on which the earlier part of this lecture touches, are dealt with in detail in my doctoral thesis entitled *Vernacular Quotation from the Bible in Old Norse Religious Literature* (London 1973), which is to appear in print shortly.

among those of the Fathers of the Church ; and at quite a late date we find works concerned not only with such an internationally famous figure as Thomas Becket, the martyred Archbishop of Canterbury, but also the more local figures of Archbishop Dunstan and King Edward the Confessor. Our main evidence, however, must be deduced from the likely activities of the English missionaries. Sigurd, Grimkell and their associates in Norway, and Bernard the Bookwise and his successors in Iceland, must assuredly have had at least the bare minimum of books with them for preaching and teaching purposes. They may well have had more, for the conversion of Norway and Iceland followed hard upon that great step forward in the English church which is known as the Benedictine revival ; furthermore, it coincided with the lives of Ælfric and Wulfstan, whose homilies are among the great achievements of Anglo-Saxon prose. To such English missionaries a substantial library was theoretically available, both in Latin and English : apart from the homilies and lives of saints (and of course more general literature), large parts of the Bible, notably the Gospels, the Psalter, and much of the historical literature of the Old Testament, had been translated into English. There were of course limits to what such missionaries could take with them on their travels ; but it would have made particularly good sense for them to take such English material with them where possible, as, although English and Norse were quite distinct as languages by the year 1000, they were by no means mutually incomprehensible, and missionaries could therefore use such material with the minimum of adaptation in their preaching and teaching duties. Any conclusion must, of course, remain hypothetical : but I think it very likely that the Norwegians, and to a lesser extent the Icelanders, first heard the Word of God in a form little different from that in which we have it in extant Old English manuscripts ; that English homilies were among the first to be heard in the West Norse area ; and that the books of the English missionaries, whether Latin or English, were among the first to be rendered into the Norse language.

This is not, of course, to claim that Norway and Iceland were influenced only by England. For most of the 11th century the Norse churches had their metropolitan at Bremen, and towards the middle of the century we hear of Saxon clerics being sent to strengthen the Norwegian church. In the 12th and 13th centuries France became the major source of foreign influence, with Scandinavian students attending the University of Paris and being influenced on the one

hand by the new mood of the international church following on the death of Thomas Becket and on the other by the works produced by the monks of St. Victor, Peter Comestor, Vincent of Beauvais, and others. But the earliest influence, particularly in Norway, was English : and I think we may well anticipate that, as the origins of Norse religious literature become better known, more detailed evidence will come to light of this major literary and cultural impact of Anglo-Saxon England on Scandinavia.

The second part of my lecture is concerned with the Scandinavian impact on England. As this aspect of my subject is more familiar to English students and scholars, I make no apology for adopting a more general approach !

We may begin by saying that there is little evidence of the influence on England of Scandinavian literature or general culture. Anglo-Saxon England may have needed to be reminded how to wage war, by sea as well as by land ; but in the 7th and 8th centuries the northern kingdom, Northumbria, was in some respects (as I implied earlier) the cultural centre of Europe. Quite apart from the religious writings of Bede, Aldhelm, Alcuin and others, it produced a vernacular literature of no mean significance — a literature of which little has come down to us, but which almost certainly included one of the finest religious poems in any language²⁰. By comparison, the invading Vikings, though by no means entirely lacking in culture, appeared as heathen barbarians. And such apparent evidence of literary influence as there is turns out, on examination, to be either illusory or superficial. One of the puzzles of Old English literature is that the only surviving epic poem, *Beowulf*, is concerned not with English history but with that of Denmark and South Sweden in the 5th and 6th centuries : we should very much like to know exactly why, and for whom, it was written. But one of the few things we can be reasonably certain about is that *Beowulf* existed in its present form well before the Vikings came, and that it is distinctively English in its presentation of common Germanic material within the framework of a Christian tradition. As to the remainder of Old English

²⁰ I refer to « The Dream of the Rood », in which the re-interpretation of the Christian message in terms of the Germanic literary tradition reaches its most refined level.

literature : such poems as *Widsith*, and such stories as those concerning Wayland the Smith and Ingeld, deal with characters and events which are also found in Norse works ; but this is evidence, not of cultural influence in one direction or the other, but of their common Germanic heritage. Turning to the Middle English period, we note that two of the earliest works extant, one a quite respectable treatment of British history in verse form, the other one of the most tedious religious treatises ever written, have as their authors two clerics with Scandinavian names, Lazamon and Orm respectively: but in neither case does the subject-matter lend itself to the possibility of significant Norse influence. It is not, then, in the fields of literature and general culture that we find significant evidence of Scandinavian influence. We find it, rather, in the development of the English language.

The Norsemen made three major attempts to conquer England. The first culminated in the battle of Ethandun (fought in 877 or 878), in which Alfred the Great defeated the Viking army. By the provisions of the subsequent treaty of Wedmore, England was divided into two parts, the north and east of the country remaining under Norse rule. Although in the course of the following century this district was won back to the English crown, very substantial Norse settlement took place; and thus it came about that two closely related Germanic languages were for quite a long period spoken side by side over a large part of the country. As I have mentioned, the two languages were by no means mutually incomprehensible : indeed, in many cases the only real difference between an English word and its Norse counterpart lay in its inflectional endings. Now, early Old English had already been moving in the direction of inflectional simplification : one example among many is that the forms of the present tense plural in verbs had fallen together, even in the verb « to be », whereas they were still distinguished in other Germanic languages, including Old Norse. But when we consider the tremendous acceleration of this process of inflectional simplification between late Old English and early Middle English, it is impossible to resist the conclusion that the existence side by side of two similar languages, differing substantially only in just these inflectional endings, was a prime cause of the simplification. If, for instance, a child of mixed parentage hears his Norse father, referring to the family dog, use the forms *hundr*, *hund*, *hunds*, *hundi*, whereas his English mother prefers *hund*, *hund*, *hundes*, *hunde*, it is hardly surprising if he attempts to neutralise the differences; and in this instance the modern

English forms *hound*, genitive *hound's* are (allowing for the later vowel change) exactly what we should expect to result from such a simplification.

The impact of the Norse vocabulary on English was very considerable indeed. Those Vikings who settled in Northern France found themselves in contact with a completely alien language, and seem to have given up their own language in favour of French relatively quickly. Even so, a few Norse words made their way into French : we may cite, for instance, the French word *marsouin* (porpoise), whose origin is reflected by the modern Icelandic *marsvín*. In England, the Vikings were in contact with a closely related language, which facilitated on the one hand the retention of their own language for a much longer period (indeed, in some outlying parts of the British Isles a Norse dialect survived for almost a thousand years), and on the other hand a much more fundamental influence on the English language, extending as it did not only to the names of things, but to all parts of speech, and even some grammatical structures. In some cases, a Norse word replaced its Anglo-Saxon counterpart ; in others, it was retained alongside the English word because it differed somewhat in meaning ; in yet others, it reinforced a comparatively uncommon English word, or modified the phonological form or the meaning of the native word.

Until comparatively recent times the extent of Scandinavian influence on our language had been underestimated by scholars and the general public alike. This is understandable : French and Latin loan words, coming as they do from languages only distantly related to English, are much more easily recognised, whereas even scholars cannot always be sure that a given word is Scandinavian in origin. In many cases we have to depend for our evidence on phonological criteria, or the apparent absence of a word from Anglo-Saxon as we know it, and neither test is foolproof. Another factor to be taken into account is that the form of English most of us are familiar with developed from a dialect on the fringe of the Scandinavian area of influence, and thus shows very much less evidence of modification than the dialects of the north and east of England. Indeed, many of the difficulties which foreigners and southern Englishmen alike have in understanding northern dialects arises directly from the Scandinavian features in these dialects. So, as this is neither the time nor place for a fully-documented treatment of Scandinavian influence, I have chosen to base my illustration of the major aspects of it on a

single verse in the Lincolnshire dialect. It forms part of a verse monologue, written a century ago by Alfred Lord Tennyson²¹, in which a northern farmer, faced with a son who wants to marry the daughter of the village parson, tells him not to be such a fool, but to marry, not for love, but for money. It reads as follows :

Parson's lass 'ant nowt, an' she weänt 'a nowt when 'e's deäd,
 Mun be a guvness, lad, or summut, and *addle* her *breäd* :
 Why ? fur 'e's nobbut a curate, an' weänt niver git hissen clear,
 An' 'e maäde the bed as 'e *ligs* on afoor 'e coom'd to the shere.

My starting-point, then, will be the three words italicised in the above stanza. The first, *addle*, is the only word in the passage likely to be entirely unfamiliar to, for instance, a Londoner: it is a straightforward loan word, corresponding to the verb *öðlask* in Old Norse, and has the same meaning, viz. « to earn ». This is one of the many Norse loan words which have not spread into Standard English; but many others have done so in the course of the centuries. Thus, our 3rd person plural pronouns, « they », « them » and « their », are of Scandinavian origin: they appear in texts from Lincolnshire and further north from the 12th century, and gradually spread southwards; two centuries later, we find Geoffrey Chaucer (writing in the London English of his day) using the nominative form « they », but preferring the forms « here » and « hem », reflexes of the Anglo-Saxon forms, for the oblique cases. A rather more recent example is the word « gormless », whose first element is almost certainly to be associated with the ON *gaumr*, meaning « heed, attention ». This word, for long a dialectal form only, became very popular in Standard English in the 1960s to describe a person who, in colloquial language, is « not quite all there ». Although it appears in the huge Oxford English Dictionary, it did not make its way into the more popular one-volume Concise Oxford Dictionary until the 5th edition of 1964.

Of the examples I have just quoted, the pronoun forms are definitely of Norse origin, whereas *addle* and *gormless* are almost certainly so; but one cannot always affirm that because a word appears in Norse and not Old English it is therefore a loan word. In the case

²¹ This poem, entitled « Northern Farmer, New Style », may be found e. g. in *Poetical Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, The Globe Edition, London 1950, page 231.

of the verb « to call », for instance, it has long been maintained that the commonness of the word in Modern English and its virtual absence from Old English justifies us in regarding it as a direct borrowing of the common Norse word *kalla*. But in a recent essay²² E. G. Stanley has cogently argued that the Old English word, which appears once in a late poem in the form « ceallian », and once as the second element of a compound word, had a very restricted sense in Old English — it was used of loud formal pronouncements, particularly in the context of a battle. This would imply that our modern verb is not a Norse loan, but a word originally English whose meaning has been generalised under the influence of the common Norse word.

To move on to the second example from our stanza : the word *breäd* looks as English as it possibly could be, and indeed this word did exist in Anglo-Saxon. But its primary meaning there was « a bit, piece, morsel or fragment (of food) ». The ON cognate word *brauð*, however has the meaning « bread » in extant texts ; and as this sense of the English word, which appears in 10th-century Northern texts, has become the primary one by the year 1200, we may regard it as probable that the semantic shift was due to Norse influence. The regular OE word for « bread », incidentally, was « hlāf », which appears in Modern English as « loaf », i. e. a unit of bread.

I mentioned earlier that there are also certain phonological tests which can help us to recognise Norse loan words ; and one of these is illustrated by the last of the three words underlined in our stanza. In the course of the Old English period the quality of certain consonants was modified in certain positions. In more detail : before certain front vowels, the Germanic stop consonant *k* was fronted and in due course developed into [tʃ] ; similarly, *sk* developed to [ʃ], the back spirant [ɣ] was fronted and developed in some cases to [j], and in certain circumstances the Germanic stop consonant *g* (single or double) developed to [dʒ]. These changes did not take place in Norse, at any rate during the period we are concerned with ; and thus we have a regular series of one-for-one contrasts between English and Norse, some of which are reflected in Modern English. Thus, our verb « to choose » contrasts with ON *kjósa*, the noun

²² « Old English '-calla', 'ceallian' », in *Medieval Literature and Civilisation*, Studies in Memory of G. N. Garmonsway, ed. Pearsall and Waldron, London 1969, pp. 94-99.

« ship » with ON *skip*, the noun « yard » with ON *garðr*, and the noun « bridge » with ON *bryggja*. From this it follows that English words which do not show the expected change are (other things being equal) of Norse provenance: thus, the verb « get » is almost certainly from the common ON *geta* (the uncommon OE *zietan* would have given « yet » in modern English), and to this we may add, for example, the nouns « skirt » (but not « shirt ») and probably « dike » (but not « ditch »). We may likewise note that those two well-known Lausanne institutions, the English « church » and the Scots « kirk », differ in their linguistic as well as their geographical and ecclesiastical origins !

To return to the third word in our stanza : the OE verb *licgan* had 3rd person singular present tense *līz(e)ð*, in which the middle consonant had fronted ; later, the consonant was lost and, with the compensatory lengthening of the preceding vowel, the form *līð* emerged. This appears as *lieth* in (for instance) Shakespeare, by whose time it was being replaced by the modern form *lies*. Our word *ligs*, on the other hand, is a reflex of the Norse *liggr*, from the present tense of the verb *liggja*.

The other reasonably reliable phonological test of the Norse origin of a word is a one-for-one vowel contrast. Primitive Germanic **ai* (from Indo-European **oi*) diverged in the different languages of the Germanic family to give *ā* in OE but *ei* in ON. This OE *ā* generally developed to give [ou] / [əu] in Modern English ; and we may thus expect, other things being equal, a contrast between [ou] / [əu] in English and [ei] in the Scandinavian languages. Many examples of this might be quoted: « bone » contrasts with ON *beinn*, « stone » with ON *steinn*, « whole » with ON *heill*, and so on. As to Norse words in English : in some cases, the Norse form of the word has replaced, or stands alongside, the original English word. Thus, in « swain » the vowel reflects the ON *sveinn*, OE *swān* having disappeared ; the form « hale » is found (alongside « whole ») in such a phrase as « hale and hearty ». Furthermore, if we turn to English dialects, we find many instances where the Norse form has survived. One of the meanings of the OE verb *lācan* was « to play » ; but it is undoubtedly the cognate ON *leika* which lies behind the form [leik] which a northern mother would readily use to her child. The ordinary English negative « no » corresponds to « nei » in all modern Nordic languages ; but « nay » is widespread in England even at the present day.

The Norse influence on our vocabulary is certainly the most interesting to an English audience, and perhaps also to those of us who are interested in diachronic linguistics. But if we widen our perspective, and consider English as an international language, other aspects of the Norse influence assume greater proportions. I have already mentioned the part played by the Scandinavian settlers in the acceleration of the process of inflectional simplification — a role which has unquestionably earned them the gratitude of all foreign students of English ! But we owe the Norsemen another debt, one which students at Lausanne will no doubt rate just as highly. As the Viking settlers in England gradually gave up their own language in favour of English, so their Norman cousins across the Channel adopted French : and when William of Normandy defeated Harold of England in 1066 and succeeded to the English throne it was French, not the Norse language of William's ancestors, which for a time largely replaced English as the educated language of our country. It is to the Norsemen, then, that English owes in large measure two of its greatest assets as a major international language — its inflectional simplicity, and its mixed Germanic and Romance vocabulary. Thus, despite the undoubted losses to our cultural and literary heritage, we may fairly conclude that it was not entirely an ill wind that blew the Vikings across the North Sea and the Normans across the Channel.

I. J. KIRBY.

