

**LILJA (THE LILY) AN  
ICELANDIC  
RELIGIOUS POEM OF THE  
FOURTEENTH CENTURY**

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Lilja (the Lily) an Icelandic Religious Poem of the Fourteenth Century by Eysteinn Asgrímsson

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**EYSTEIN ASGRIMSSON**

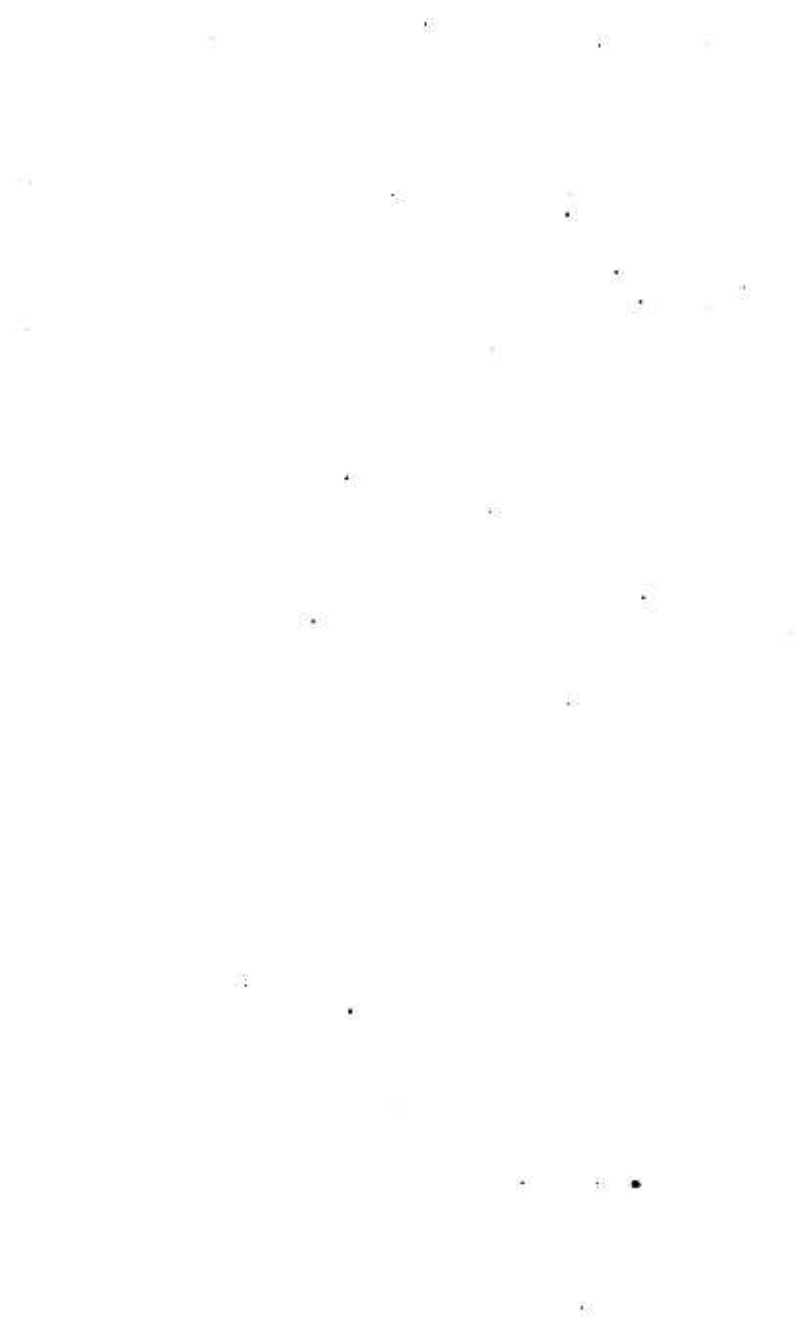
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## CONTENTS.

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	PAGE
PREFACE . . . . .	v
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	vii
I. NOTICE OF THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR . . . . .	vii
II. THE POEM 'LILJA' . . . . .	xxii
1. TEXT . . . . .	xxii
2. METRICAL CONSTRUCTION . . . . .	xxix
3. SOURCES . . . . .	xlii
4. TIME OF COMPOSITION . . . . .	xlvi
5. POSITION IN ICELANDIC LITERATURE . . . . .	xlvii
6. THE TRANSLATION . . . . .	xlviii
7. THE GLOSSARY . . . . .	1
8. ARGUMENT . . . . .	1
SHORT GUIDE TO THE PRONUNCIATION OF THE ICE- LANDIC LETTERS . . . . .	lii
ABBREVIATIONS . . . . .	lv
'LILJA — THE LILY' . . . . .	1-101
GLOSSARY . . . . .	103-124



## PREFACE

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THE Lily all bards would fain have sung, 'öllum skáld vildu Lilju kveðið hafa,' is the short and pithy award which Iceland accords to the following song. I have explained (p. xlix) how I am not able to introduce it in its sonorous graces to the English reader; but I have given him all aid in my power towards the realisation of them, by the explanation of the sounds of the Icelandic letters, and the metre: which, although an unsatisfactory aid, is still better than nothing. The manner in which my work is done needs no explanation here. Any one desirous of satisfying himself on that point will find no difficulty in forming an *independent* opinion on the subject by the aid of the Introduction, the Translation, the Notes, and the Glossary.

In a bibliographical point of view it may in-

terest some readers to know that the present is the first Icelandic text which has ever been published in England itself from manuscript sources.

As to the rest, let the work speak for itself.

EIRIKR MAGNUSSON.

*London, September 1870.*



## INTRODUCTION.

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### I.

#### *Notice of the Life of the Author.*

EYSTEIN ASGRIMSSON—Brother Eystein, as he is commonly called—was an Icclander by birth, an Augustinian friar by profession. His early life is wrapped in thorough darkness, and his latter days only glimmer here and there through a general mist of uncertainties. We know that he lived in the earlier half of the fourteenth century; but our knowledge of his life, long or short as it may have been, extends only to the latter eighteen years of it, through which period we can trace him by stray notices of chroniclers, contemporary documents, and legendary tradition.

The life of Eystein has not been written before. Notices of him may be found in Bishop Finn Jónsson's '*Historia Ecclesiastica Islandiæ*,' Havnise, 1772-78; in Finn Magnússon's observations accompanying his Danish translation of '*Lilja*' in Liunge's '*Dana, Poetisk Lommebog*' for 1818, a work which I have not seen; and in Espolin's '*Arbœkur Islands, Kaupmannahöfn*, 1821-55.' The sources whence nearly all information on record concerning him is to be drawn are '*Annálar Islands*,

Kaupmannahöfn, 1847.' The fragmentary information to be gleaned from these authorities I have tried to bring here together into an intelligible order, as well as their disjointed condition would allow.

Brother Eystein's historical career opens with an unpleasant scene. A regular of the monastery of Thykkviðar,<sup>1</sup> we find him, in 1342, involved, with a couple of accomplices, in an assault upon the abbot of the establishment, Thorlak Loptsson,<sup>2</sup> whom they handled so roughly that he had to fly for his safety, and take shelter in the far distant monastery of Viðey.<sup>3</sup> It is not known what complications actually gave rise to this quarrel, but, from what followed, it may safely be inferred, that it was brought about by zealous reproofs levelled by the abbot at the lax morals of the community. For when, in the following year, the new bishop of the diocese, Jón Sigurdsson (Bishop of Skálholt, 1343-48), took the matter in hand, he found himself justified in warranting the arrest of the

<sup>1</sup> This monastery, founded 1166 by a wealthy magnate, Thorkel Geirsson (ob. 1187), was situate in the district of Skaptafellaping in the East of Iceland. It often occurs under the parochial denomination of 'The Minster in Ver,' or 'Alptaver,' i.e. Swanshaunts. The first abbot of it was Thorlak Thorballsson, a student of Paris and Lincoln, Bishop of Skálholt, 1178-93, and after his death a saint of the Icelandic Church. It was dissolved in 1561.

<sup>2</sup> Abbot of the monastery, 1314-51. He was declared a saint after his death, and translated in 1360.

<sup>3</sup> *Hist. Eccl.* iv. 60; *Annals*, p. 260.—The convent of Viðey, instituted 1220, was an Augustinian establishment, situate on an island of that name, within the district of Kjalarnes-þing, about six miles from the present capital of Iceland. Bishop Sigurdsson abolished the Augustinian and introduced the Benedictine rule in this monastery 1344, but his successor re-established the Augustinian rite there 1352. This monastery, the first that succumbed to the rapacious Danish reformation, was dissolved in 1542.

ringleaders, among whom the *Annals* assign to Brother Eystein a position of unenviable prominence, and having them arraigned, handcuffed and shackled, before the tribunal of the Church, which, having proved them guilty of immorality and serious misdemeanour, committed them to prison.

According to Bishop Jónsson, Brother Eystein was released from his prison this very year (1343), but on what grounds does not appear.<sup>4</sup> Out of prison, he is said to have betaken himself to Helgafell,<sup>5</sup> another house of his order, where it is likely he sojourned during the next six or seven years, in which no mention is made of him.

The see of Skálholt having become vacant in 1348, by the death of the aforesaid Bishop Sigurdsson, Brother Eystein was selected from among the clergy to perform the duties of an 'Officialis'<sup>6</sup>—a title also given in Iceland to one who acts as vicar during an episcopal vacancy—and in the discharge of these functions we find him from 1349 to 1351, when the new bishop, Gyrd Ivarsson (1349–60), took possession of the chair. This prelate, formerly an abbot of St. John's, Bergen, was nominated to the see already in 1349, and consecrated the following year, but was prevented from leaving Norway on account of the fearful plague which, during these years, devastated the whole

<sup>4</sup> *Hist. Eccl.* i. 587.—Bishop Jónsson knows that his release was effected either by penitence or sufficient fine, which is obvious in itself, but of which I have failed to find any other record.

<sup>5</sup> *Hist. Eccl.* l.c.—This Augustine monastery was originally founded by Bishop Klæng of Skálholt, 1172, on the island of Flatey, situate in the broad bay, called Breiðfjörðr, which cuts into western Iceland. Twelve years afterwards it was moved by Bishop Thorlak to Helgafell, a farmstead on Thoranes, on the south side of the bay. It was dissolved in 1530.

<sup>6</sup> *Annals*, 282.