

**LAD AND LASS: A STORY OF
LIFE IN ICELAND. TRANSLATED
FROM THE ICELANDIC OF JÓN
PORDARSON THÓRODDSEN**

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Thóroddsen by Arthur M. Reeves

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ARTHUR M. REEVES

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A Story of Life in Iceland

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JÓN ÞÓRDARSON THÓRODDSEN

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BY

ARTHUR M. REEVES

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PREFACE

JÓN ÞÓRDARSON THÓRODDSEN, the author of *Piltur og Stúlka (Lad and Lass)*, was born at the farmstead of Reykhólar on Reykjaness, in Bardastrand-shire, Western Iceland, in the autumn of 1819. He was sent as a lad to the Icelandic High School at Bessastad, and when he had completed the course of study at this school, he sailed (in the summer of 1841) to Copenhagen, to pursue his studies at the University. He continued to reside in Denmark for nine years, visiting his native land but twice in the interval. In 1850 he returned to Iceland, and made his home there during the remainder of his life. He received an appointment to a local office soon after his return to his fatherland, and was continuously in office thenceforward, being shireman of Borgarfirth-shire at the time of his death in 1868.

During his residence in Copenhagen Thóroddsen wrote several poems, which appeared in various periodicals, a number of them in an Icelandic annual (*Norðurfari*), in the editing of which Thóroddsen

was associated with another of Iceland's talented sons, Gísli Brynjúlfsson. In the winter of 1848-49 he wrote the story of *Piltur og Stúlka*, which was published in Copenhagen a year later. Of this work the learned Icelandic statesman, the late Jón Sigurdsson, says, in the introduction to an incomplete work of Thóroddsen's which was published posthumously: "Various attempts had been made in our country before this (*i.e.* before the appearance of *Piltur og Stúlka*) to compose works of fiction similar to those which had appeared in foreign lands in modern times, and which are called in English 'novels,' because they draw their material from modern everyday life, and not from ancient events or historical writings, as do the knightly romances; but this story of Jón Thóroddsen's is the most important of all these tales, and is hence universally conceded to be the first Icelandic novel," which, it may be added, it still remains in point of merit.

In 1867 a second edition of *Piltur og Stúlka* was published in Reykjavík, in which the following epilogue was printed: "The same year, 1850, in which I was wedded to the helm of authority and became a tax-gatherer, on a bough (the word *kvist* has the double signification of 'bough' and 'garret,' and the pun refers to the author's poverty) in Copenhagen a bird was born. The father made acknowledgment of his paternity, and was called J. Þ. Thóroddsen. He caused it to be sprinkled with water, so that it could swim, in Möller's printing-

office. The name given to the new-born was *Piltur og Stúlka*, and when the bird was sufficiently strong for the journey, and was able to fly, it flew to the home of its father, Iceland, and offered itself in competition with southern birds, saying that it was as well-born as they, and was as familiar with the lie of the land. The lads and lasses of Iceland seemed to be better acquainted with the Icelandic twitter than with that of some of the summer birds from the south, which are wearied and exhausted, and altered by their erratic wanderings and flights hither and thither up and down the globe. The father of *Lad and Lass* asks you, lads and lasses, to receive with equal favour the bird which, with slight change of plumage, now wings to you again."

In 1871 the Icelandic Literary Society published a collection of Thóroddsen's poems (*Kvæði eftir Jón Thóroddsen*, Kaupmannahöfn, 1871), many of which are of great beauty, and have won a place for their author among the first of modern Icelandic poets. Thóroddsen's second novel was published by the Icelandic Literary Society in 1876. This novel, *Maður og Kona* (*Man and Wife*), was left by its author, at his death, in an unfinished state, but was edited and completed by the Society before it was published. It has never been translated. *Piltur og Stúlka* has, on the other hand, been twice translated into Danish,¹ and more recently into

¹ An English translation of one of these Danish translations has been published.

German. In the present translation the effort has been to preserve not only the significance but the diction of the original, which in no small degree is conceived in the rugged simplicity of style of the old Icelandic literature. A poem of questionable taste has been omitted; it is not essential to the narrative, and is fairly honoured in the breach. In the second edition of the story the "change of plumage," to which the author alludes in his epilogue, is an interpolation of several pages descriptive of Indrid and Sigrid's wedding, and of the family life of Gudmund of Burfell after his marriage to an extravagant merchant's daughter. It not only mars the symmetry of the tale as it appears in the first edition, but is, in the judgment of critical Icelanders, of decidedly inferior literary merit, and it has therefore been omitted from the translation, which conforms, for the most part, to the original edition. With the exceptions noted, I have taken no intentional liberties with the text of the original.

This translation, originally made several years ago, I have recently had an opportunity to review with an Icelandic friend, Dr. Valtýr Guðmundsson, and have endeavoured, in the printed text, to profit by his criticism. To him I owe my acknowledgments, while I am also indebted to his fellow-countryman, Mr. Bogi Th. Melsteð, for the explanation of "Alkort," which is given in translation in the note.

THE TRANSLATOR.

GENEVA, *September* 1889.

LAD AND LASS

I

IN eastern Iceland is a broad and beautiful district called ——, the scene of the following tale. Although this district is well peopled, its farmsteads were far more numerous in the days of Hall of Side.¹ Now,

¹ A renowned chieftain in the days of the Icelandic republic, whose home was in south-eastern Iceland on the shores of the Alpa-firth. In the year 997 King Olaf Tryggvason sent one Dankbrand, a priest of German origin, to Iceland to convert the people to Christianity. Dankbrand landed in the Alpa-firth, and during the first winter made his home with Hall of Side. It was not until toward the end of Dankbrand's stay that his arguments and persuasive efforts began to win Hall to the new religion. The Icelandic chieftain, however, insisted upon tangible evidence of the efficacy of baptism, before he would consent to abandon his heathen superstitions. There were in his household two aged women who were feeble and ailing; upon these Hall stipulated that the priest should first practise his baptismal rites, and if they should appear to be benefited thereby, he would then himself consent to be baptized. The experiment resulted successfully for the priest, and Hall and his entire household were baptized forthwith in a brook near the house, to which Dankbrand gave the name of Thvattá, *i.e.* the Wash—more euphemistically, the baptismal stream—by which name Hall's home has ever since been known. The influence of so renowned a leader as Hall was most valuable to Dankbrand in his mission, and aided him greatly in effecting the conversion of many other of the leading men of the land. Hall,