

**CLARENDON PRESS  
SERIES; AN ICELANDIC  
PRIMER WITH GRAMMAR,  
NOTES AND GLOSSARY**

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Clarendon Press Series; An Icelandic Primer with Grammar, Notes and Glossary by Henry Sweet

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**HENRY SWEET**

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Clarendon Press Series

AN

ICELANDIC PRIMER

WITH

*GRAMMAR, NOTES, AND GLOSSARY*

BY

HENRY SWEET, M.A.



Oxford

AT THE CLARENDON PRESS

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## P R E F A C E.

THE want of a short and easy introduction to the study of Icelandic has been felt for a long time—in fact, from the very beginning of that study in England. The *Icelandic Reader*, edited by Messrs. Vigfusson and Powell, in the Clarendon Press Series, is a most valuable book, which ought to be in the hands of every student; but it still leaves room for an elementary primer. As the engagements of the editors of the Reader would have made it impossible for them to undertake such a work for some years to come, they raised no objections to my proposal to undertake it myself. Meanwhile, I found the task was a more formidable one than I had anticipated, and accordingly, before definitely committing myself to it, I made one final attempt to induce Messrs. Vigfusson and Powell to take it off my hands; but they very kindly encouraged me to proceed with it; and as I myself thought that an Icelandic primer, on the lines of my Anglo-Saxon one, might perhaps be the means of inducing some students of Old English to take up Icelandic as well, I determined to go on.

In the spelling I have not thought it necessary to adhere strictly to that adopted in the Reader, for the editors have themselves deviated from it in their *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, in the way of separating *ρ* from *ö*, etc. My own



principle has been to deviate as little as possible from the traditional spelling followed in normalized texts. There is, indeed, no practical gain for the beginner in writing *time* for *timi*, discarding *ð*, etc., although these changes certainly bring us nearer the oldest MSS., and cannot be dispensed with in scientific works. The essential thing for the beginner is to have *regular* forms presented to him, to the exclusion, as far as possible, of isolated archaisms, and to have the defective distinctions of the MSS. supplemented by diacritics. I have not hesitated to substitute (˘) for (˙) as the mark of length; the latter ought in my opinion to be used exclusively—in Icelandic as well as in Old English and Old Irish—to represent the actual accents of the MSS.

In the grammar I have to acknowledge my great obligations to Noreen's *Allisländische Grammatik*, which is by far the best Icelandic grammar that has yet appeared—at least from that somewhat narrow point of view which ignores syntax, and concentrates itself on phonology and inflections.

The texts are intended to be as easy, interesting, and representative as possible. With such a language, and such a master of it as Snorri to choose from, this combination is not difficult to realise. The beginner is indeed to be envied who makes his first acquaintance with the splendid mythological tales of the North, told in an absolutely perfect style. As the death of Olaf Tryggvason is given in the Reader only from the longer recension of the *Heimskringla*, I have been able to give the shorter text, which is admirably suited for the purposes of this book. The story of Auðun is not only a beautiful one in itself, but, together with the preceding piece, gives a vivid idea of the Norse ideal of the kingly

character, which was the foundation of their whole political system. As the Reader does not include poetry (except incidentally), I have added one of the finest of the Eddaic poems, which is at the same time freest from obscurity and corruption—the song of Thor's quest of his hammer.

In the glossary I have ventured to deviate from the very inconvenient Scandinavian arrangement, which puts *þ, æ, œ* right at the end of the alphabet.

I have to acknowledge the great help I have had in preparing the texts and the glossary from Wimmer's *Oldnordisk Læsebog*, which I consider to be, on the whole, the best reading-book that exists in any language. So excellent is Wimmer's selection of texts, that it was impossible for me to do otherwise than follow him in nearly every case.

In conclusion, it is almost superfluous to say that this book makes no pretension to originality of any kind. If it contributes towards restoring to Englishmen that precious heritage—the old language and literature of Iceland—which our miserably narrow scheme of education has hitherto defrauded them of, it will have fulfilled its purpose.

HENRY SWEET.

LONDON,  
February, 1886.

