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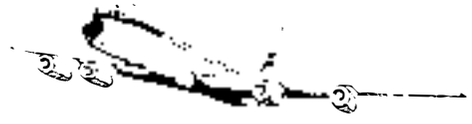

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The Icelandic Canadian

Volume XLV, No. 1 Winnipeg, Canada Autumn, 1986

THE ICELANDIC CANADIAN

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EDITORIAL

"CHANGES!"

by Eric Jonasson

Without a willingness to change from time to time and re-adjust to circumstances affecting it, any organization will stagnate within the mould of preserving the status quo — and this stagnation will mark the beginning of the decline and demise of that organization. Willingness to change is a sign of health and vitality — a signal that trumpets an optimism for the future. Desire to maintain the status quo, however, merely indicates pessimism and the withdrawal of the organization within itself — catering only to itself until such time as there is no one left within it to cater to!

In 1942, a small group of Icelandic Canadians defied the status quo and announced that the future of Icelandic heritage preservation in North America did not lie with publications in the Icelandic language but, instead, would be found within the mainstream language — English — of their new homeland. These progressive individuals launched the "Icelandic Canadian" magazine amidst the criticism of Icelandic-language traditionalists and to the predictions that such an enterprise could not survive more than a few years. Over 40 years later, the "Icelandic Canadian" is still here and vibrant, while the Icelandic-language publications have been forced to amalgamate and to introduce the English language as the medium of communication for most of its published material.

Over the past decade, many new faces and perspectives have been added to the Editorial Board of the magazine, most by the actions of our present Editor in Chief, Axel Vopnfjord. Many of these new faces are those of young Icelandic Canadians, third or fourth generation Canadians whose mother tongue is English, but within whose hearts beats a fervent desire to preserve their Icelandic heritage. In the past few months, this desire spilled over the floodgates of the status quo which has gripped our magazine for some years now, and signalled an enthusiasm for change in our publication and its organization.

This past summer, the Editorial Board studied the need for change in the "Icelandic Canadian" and overwhelmingly endorsed a change in its structure — as well as to consider other changes for the future. Up to now, the Editorial Board has served primarily as an advisory body to our editor in chief, providing him with assistance only when requested. As a result of his guidance, encouraged by Paul Sigurdson of Morden, the structure of the Editorial Board has been altered — establishing two committees, the Editorial Committee and the Business Committee, to deal with the two major aspects involved with the production of the magazine. Members of both committees also serve on the Magazine Board. The implementation of this new structure will ensure that not only will our magazine publish high-quality articles but that it will be produced efficiently within a constant and pre-determined schedule. It also ensures that all members of the Magazine Board will be active members and not just a name on a list. The new structure and committees are illustrated on the table of contents page of this issue.

The new committees are already in operation, proposing and implementing positive changes for our magazine for the future — and there will be more changes to watch for! These changes will be gradual, however, because too many changes all at once can be as disturbing and as dangerous as no change at all. The Magazine Board hopes that you will approve of our changes — we mean to improve our magazine and make it a more valued publication — and we hope that you will have patience with us while we

struggle with the changing responsibilities of our roles.

Our greatest desire is to make the "Icelandic Canadian" a stronger and more vibrant force in the preservation of our cultural heritage, and we look forward to your support in our movement toward that goal! □

MEMBERSHIP NOW AT 536!

The recent **Manitoba Reunion** at the Pacific Coliseum was a great event for meeting people of Icelandic descent from Manitoba. At least four club directors attended to the Gimli (New Iceland) tables with the intention of greeting people and introducing them to our society. As a result Alda Steele, membership chairperson, reports that we picked up 15 more members. Oscar Howardson spread the good word about learning Icelandic and managed to sell nearly all of his tape lessons. It was nice to see so many of our club members there. Overheard: *"The only problem with this event was sore jaw muscles the next day from all the talking!"*

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REMEMBRANCE DAY, 1986

On November 11 in humility and with deep gratitude we will pay reverent tribute to a memory, a beautiful remembrance that will not — must not — fade with the passing years.

They responded to a call!

From remote fishing villages on the misty shores of the turbulent Atlantic, from the factories, offices, and schools of the big cities, from the lonely farms of the vast prairies, from the lumber camps of the region where the roar of the Pacific holds eternal sway, they came, men and women of many races, many creeds.

It was 1914!

The Western World looked upon its many blessings, and was satisfied. It had the supreme blessing, DEMOCRACY. Many generations had planned for it, toiled for it, fought for it, died for it. Neither opposition, discouragement, nor the bitter cup of defeat could halt its slow but steady progress throughout the centuries. In 1914 it was a reality, man's supreme achievement.

It was a cheerful, optimistic, friendly world, confident that nothing could stop or delay the onward march of progress.

Then appeared a black cloud on the horizon, at first no bigger than a man's hand. A few shots in a remote Balkan town, and the Western World awoke to the realization that all its blessings could be lost in one fell swoop.

The response was quick!

The founder of Christianity once said, "He who wouldst be the greatest amongst you, let him be the servant of the rest." When the youth of Athens were inducted into the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship, they took an oath, "I will transmit my fatherland, not only not less, but greater and better than it was transmitted to me." Along these lines did they think, the young and the brave, as they marched to war in the far-off days of 1914 to the tunes of "It's a Long Way to Tipperary," and "Keep the Home Fires Burning."

Some of them came back to their places in the community. There they accepted their responsibilities seriously, purposefully, striving against obstacles and opposition to create the kind of world we all dream of, hope for, long for.

Some of them did not come back. They paid the last supreme sacrifice of love.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.
We are the Dead. Shorts days Ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we
lie in Flanders Field.

Even in death they were still mindful of humanity; they were still their brothers' and sisters' keepers, and they flung to us a challenge:

Take up our quarrel with the foe;
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die,
We shall not sleep, though poppies
grow in Flanders Field.

I like to think — and I believe I am right — that the author meant no human enemy. The theme of the poem is too noble and lofty to contain such a sentiment as hate. The "enemy" refers to the conditions that create war and destruction: insecurity and ignorance, greed and hate, indifference and selfishness, and the lust for power.

How well did we take up that challenge? For its response in the period between the wars, the human race has good

reason to hang its head in shame. There followed the Roaring '20s, when too many flung all sense of responsibility to the four winds. The pursuit of pleasure became the main goal in life.

Then came the depressed, hungry '30s. Finally a discouraged, disillusioned, cynical world drifted unwillingly and helplessly into another world war.

How well the democratic world responded can best be exemplified by quoting an article that appeared in the *New York Times* shortly after the miracle of Dunkirk:

"So long as the English tongue survives, the word DUNKIRK will be spoken with reverence. For in that harbour, in such a hell as never blazed on earth before, at the end of a lost battle, the rags and blemishes that had hidden the soul of democracy fell away. There beaten, but unconquered, in shining splendour she faced the enemy.

"They sent away the wounded first. Men died that others could escape. It was not so simple a thing as courage which can be hammered into men by a drill sergeant. It was not the result of careful planning, for there could have been but little.

"It was the common man of the free countries rising in all his glory out of mill, office, factory, mine, farm and ship, applying to war the lessons learned when he went down the shaft to bring out trapped comrades, when he endured poverty and hard work for his children's sake.

"This shining thing in the souls of men Hitler cannot command, or attain, or conquer. He has crushed it where he could from German hearts,

IT IS THE GREAT TRADITION
OF DEMOCRACY!
IT IS THE FUTURE!
IT IS VICTORY!"

Humanity is now at the crossroads. The wrong turn may lead to the abyss whence the road back may be long and toilsome, if not impossible. Along that way the grim stark drama of human misery, intensified a thousand-fold, may be re-enacted.

Across the dark abysm of time that separates the far-off days of 1914-18 from our own echo and re-echo the ringing tones of the challenge:

To you from failing hands we throw the torch.
Be yours to hold it high.

If mankind heeds, then stretched out before it will be the road forward and upwards to the Eden-like heights of human brotherhood, sisterhood and continued human progress.

FLANDERS! DUNKIRK! DUNKIRK! FLANDERS! Beacon lights shining brightly across the dark and troubled waters of human relations, summoning mankind back to sanity and to good-will.

Across the years, the frustrating years, the unforgiving years, the dynamic years, the heroic years, as crystal clear as the dulcet tones of a church bell wafted across the snow on a cold, clear winter's evening comes the comforting, reassuring answer to that summons.

WE MUST NOT, WE SHALL NOT AGAIN FAIL THAT RENDEZVOUS.

NOVEMBER 11, 1986

by Gus Sigurdson

NOVEMBER 11, 1986

First it was our fathers' lot...
Then forty years ago we fought
For peace and yet we fight
To gain the peace we've always sought
—The peace that is our right.
Many thousand men have died
And all too many mothers cried
Could it all have been for naught?
No, never!
No one has forgot, nor ever will forget.
When right to wrong has been applied
It can but conquer yet.

PAUL BJARNASON, POET AND APOSTLE OF A BRAVE NEW WORLD

by Roy St. George Stubbs

Paul Bjarnason has done as much as anyone to open the enchanted gates of Icelandic poetry to English readers. Equally at home in English and in Icelandic, he has written original verse in both languages, and he has translated from English into Icelandic, and from Icelandic into English.

He published four books: *Fleygar,* in 1953, when he was 71 years of age. Written in Icelandic, this book was his favourite brain child; *Odes and Echoes,* in 1954, which is in English and contains original verse and translations from Icelandic; *More Echoes,* in 1962, which contains Icelandic and Swedish poems in English translations; and finally *Flisar,* in 1964, which is mainly in Icelandic, but contains three important poems by Th. Erlingsson and one by St. G. Stephansson translated into English.

He never expected his books to be a success at the box office. In a letter to me, he wrote: "They were not written with the idea in mind of making money. I just wished to express myself in the open." Needless to say, because of the law of financial gravity, he never had a commercial publisher.

He had an unobtrusive modesty. He never panted after worldly honours, or enlisted under the gawdy banner of ambition. As a consequence he never enjoyed great affluence. But he did achieve what he valued most in life. He was always on good terms with himself.

As a poet Paul Bjarnason was uninfluenced by current fashions. He never committed himself to any of the modern 'isms.' Loyal to the traditional forms, he had no regard for the new brand of poetry which, in his words, has "a studied avoidance of anything suggestive of symmetry and order, either in thought or form." He complained that modern poets are in too great a hurry. They have no time to pass their raw material through their heads and their hearts. They slip straight into high gear without waiting for promptings from within.

The poetry which mankind has cherished down through the ages, he argued, has not been free but has had the support of traditions. The modern rules of poetry or the lack of them, could not have produced Icelandic poetry which was written to be spoken. Free verse does not capture the memory like verse which follows the old-fashioned rules of alliteration and rhyme. What a strain it would be on the memory to memorize Eliot's *The Waste Land!*

Paul Bjarnason did not regard poetry as an end in itself. It had to serve a moral and ethical purpose, to be an influence for truth and enlightenment. Dr. Johnson once declared that the purpose of poetry is to enable us to enjoy or to endure life. Paul Bjarnason would have added a caveat to these words. In his view the main purpose of poetry is to help to make the world a better place in which to live. A poet should be a guide and a teacher committed to the task of improving the standards of living and the quality of life.

He believed that poetry should live in the open, in the work-a-day world; it should not lead a secretive life in the study, or in some airtight closet to which only an esoteric few hold a key; that it should not be the possession only of those who have been initiated into the mystery, but that it should be democratic, of the people and for the people and by the people as it has been in Iceland from time immemorial.

His original verse in English has an objective tendency. He was an impersonal poet who never made a display of his inner self. He did not specialize in the smiling aspects of life. There is no excess of sweetness in his work. He tapped as the source of his inspiration the great commonplaces of everyday living. He referred to his original poems as "verses assembled from stray thoughts picked up on the byways of life."

T.S. Eliot once suggested that the question we should ask of a present-day poet is not, "Is he great?" but "Is he genuine?" The jury that sits in final judgement of poets is enpanelled by Time.[1] Time is the great critic — the only critic that can pronounce the verdict of greatness. According to Shelley, poetry "lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar."[2] As a poet, Paul Bjarnason achieved this purpose. He belongs in the ranks of the genuine poets. Here, in proof of this claim, I cite one of his poems. It is called *Moods.*

MOODS

Spring, lovely spring! Thou art
In Nature's files
The cheery counterpart
Of human smiles.

Summer, so gaily guised!
Life's chronograph
In thee has symbolized
The merry laugh.

Autumn, so bleak and brown!
On Nature's chart —
As on a face — the frown
Of Time thou art.

Winter! Time's icy shell!
On Life's quick page
Thou art the parallel
Of human rage.

The seasons, one by one,
The moods we feel,
Are but the skeins upon
Life's spinning wheel.

1934

"A poem," once wrote Paul Bjarnason, "is an artistic composition with a message." If a poet concentrates on delivering a message or preaching a sermon or teaching a doctrine, the propagandist in him may get the upper hand of the poet, as in these verses of Bjarnason, which seem to be overcharged with a message:

REMOTE CONTROL

"God is in His Heaven"
And things are far from right.
We slave from seven to seven
For shelter through the night.
Our plans to pots are driven
By press and racketeer,
For God is in His Heaven
And doesn't seem to hear.

The shelves with goods are swaying;
The shops are full of meat.
Yet many a man is praying
For more to wear and eat.
Our wheat is sent to Sweden,
While bread is very dear;
For God is up in Eden
And doesn't interfere.

The birds are blithely singing
And bravely flying north.
A vernal breeze is bringing
The buds and crocus forth.
Just man, the wise, must wonder
And worry what to do;
For God is still up Yonder.
—I think He's puzzled too.

No beast will stalk another
Within the selfsame clan,
Nor prey upon a brother,
As man does unto man.
If Nature is to leaven
Our daily bread of fear,
God's place is not in Heaven.
I think He should be here.

1935

The message of these verses is clear and it is one that must be taken to heart before it is too late. Since the beginning of time, man, with God looking the other way, has been steadily fouling his own nest. The burning question now to be answered is: How long can this process continue before disaster strikes? Is it later than we think? Is Ragnarok, the day of doom, just around the corner?

Poetry should only be translated by poets. Paul Bjarnason was well-equipped for his work as translator. In the first place, he had a spark of the divine fire; secondly, his roots were buried deep in Icelandic culture, in particular, he had nourished himself on the imperishable poetry of his fatherland; and thirdly, he was prepared to pay the price in time and in hard, unremitting toil that is demanded of anyone who would drink of the magic spring of poetry. He took the road to Parnassus late in life. As a late-starter, he came to the task fully-armed.

Only good poems should be translated. Bad poems cannot stand the strain. Salvador de Madariaga has put the point thus: "Trust a good translator to unmask nonsense and exhibit it in all its nakedness, shorn of its verbal drapery. A translator has to undress the throught clad in one language before dressing it up again in the other garb. What secrets, what sad secrets could dressmakers tell."[3]

Every language has a distinctive flavour of its own. A translator must avoid two pitfalls. If he observes strict fidelity to the original language he may do violence to the spirit of the language into which he is translating. If he adheres to the spirit of his own language he may be unfair to the spirit of the original.

Paul Bjarnason steered safely between these two pitfalls. Loftur Bjarnason, professor emeritus, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, has summed up Paul Bjarnason's philosophy of translation nicely: "He translated concepts and ideas rather than the words themselves... (in his view) the translation must retain the ideas rather than the individual words and he must present these in the poetic tradition of the language into which he is translating."[4]

No translator can do a good job if the personality of the person from whom he is translating is uncongenial to him. Bjarnason only translated poems that fired his imagination, written by poets for whom he had a fellow feeling, with whom his mind marched in sympathy. He never overstepped the license which any translator may claim. Those who have the right to an opinion give him high marks as a translator.

Vilhjalmur Stefansson gave him his high praise: "For an appropriate rendition of modern Icelandic lyric poetry into English is required the linguistic gift that Pushkin had for translating Poe's *Raven* into Russian (just imagine what a feat that would be), and we have this gift in Bjarnason's volumes."[5]

Dr. Stefan Einarsson, sometime professor of Scandinavian philology at John Hopkins University, is no less lavish in his praise. "(Bjarnason's) translations from the Icelandic," he writes, "are most remarkable for the fact that he has attempted to transpose the Icelandic form (alliteration, inrime, assonance) intact into English. This is no easy matter, but I believe he has often been successful and not least so when most was at stake, as in translations of great poems by Stephan G. Stephansson and Einar Benediktsson, both masters of the ornate skaldic form."[6]

Dr. Watson Kirkconnell, who translated from more than 50 European languages, and who, in his busy lifetime, wrote more than 170 scholarly books, confirms this opinion of Bjarnason's translations from Icelandic into English. In a review of *Odes and Echoes,* he wrote: "Paul Bjarnason has given us a superb introduction to modern Icelandic poetry, one of the best collections of it ever to be published in English dress. He is particularly to be commended on the range of his renderings from Stephan G. Stephansson and Einar Benediktsson. This is an important volume."[7]

Stephansson and Benediktsson are two

of the truly formidable poets of Iceland whose place among the immortals is secure. Dr. Kirkconnell has this to say of Stephan G. Stephansson: "(He) who spent most of his life on the Canadian Prairies was a self-taught poet whose rugged verses bear the unmistakable marks of strong intellect and masculine genius."[8] In *Odes and Echoes,* Bjarnason translated six of Stephansson's poems (including the lengthy masterpiece *Armistice*) and in *More Echoes,* three.

Speaking of Benediktsson, Sigurdur A. Magnusson, translator of *The Postwar Poetry of Iceland,* say: "(He was) the oustanding poet of the early part of the century, a giant and cosmopolitan among poets. He was the first to bring foreign subjects into Icelandic poetry, describing his experiences of great cities such as Rome and London, and also expressing in majestic and sometimes almost pantheistic poems his vision of the human condition." In *Odes and Echoes* there are 18 and in *More Echoes,* 12 of Benediktsson's poems in translations by Bjarnason.

Odes and Echoes contains a translation of Guttormur J. Guttormsson's great poem *Sandy Bar.* In a letter to me, Bjarnason said, "My friend of old, Baldur Olson, tried to translate that poem, like many others, and precisely because of such failures I took on the job myself. It has always pained me to see good poems turned into doggerel by even highly educated men who lack the poetic instinct or touch... every line in *Sandy Bar* starts with a stressed syllable, a very rare and difficult thing in uninflected English. Also to do the poem justice it has to be meticulously aliterated, as it is in the original, otherwise it could be only a shadow of the poet's picturization. And if you will re-read my version in *O. & E.* you will find that I have nowhere departed from the original form nor overloaded aliteration, which so often happens to writers in English — even Browning and Tennyson."

Bjarnason was proud of his translation of *Sandy Bar* — as well he might be. Another poem of Guttormsson's which he translated in *More Echoes* did not please him so well. I wrote to tell him how much I had enjoyed his translation and asked him if he knew the occasion for which the poem was written. He replied: "I don't know why Guttormur wrote the *Bridal Ode,* presumably only to please a neighbour. I was asked by a friend of mine to translate it for the pleasure of some kin, and so I did without any personal feeling of pressure; and I am not the least bit proud of the result — though you say it is delightful, probably because of the status of the original author."

Here is the translation. He who reads, may judge of its quality.

A BRIDAL ODE

Our Gestur fought for freedom's holy treasure—
Not fame and riches—deep in no-man's-land,
And scarred and bleeding bravely took the measure
Of bandit hordes determined to command.
So why should he, who hated all repression
And held the line on dread Golgotha's field,
Come back to plod the pathway of regression
And, placed again in fetters, learn to yield?

The surest way to overcome reaction
In any form that meets the naked eye,
Is taking bold and independent action
Through efforts that the laws of men deny.
For all the black decrees and creeds of ages
That kept the world benighted to this day,
Should be deleted from our lettered pages
And left to moulder, with the dead, away.

Today with every kind of crime and blunder
Men charge the holy matrimonial band
—A magic tie no imp could ever sunder,
Though all its parts were braided out of sand.
For love can join two souls that seek each other,
To serve the will of Life's recurring urge,
As long as womanhood is half a mother
And human appetites are on the surge.

If any threatened case of cooling pressure
The county fathers should take heed and act:
Take Love's precise thermometer and measure,
In minims, whether love is still intact.
If doubt remains, the medical profession
Should muster all its scientific skill,
Prescribe love-nectar pills for the depression
And perk to life again the dormant will.

The union honoured here, so wholly plighted,
We hope may last forever and a day.
That only bond, while blest with love requited,
Can be our guide upon life's thorny way.
But love that has no fire nor faith remaining
Is food for no one save the optimist.
A person with a heart whose heat is waning
Should have the irksome bond of law dismissed.

And whatsoever spirit moves the masses
Where married love is rare and counted bad
—Such heresy in higher circles passes
From Hollywood to bloody Stalingrad—
We pray that Gestur may enjoy with leisure
The gifts that love deserved and fame provide,
And this his freedom, forfeited with pleasure,
He'll find recaptured with his pretty bride.

—1947

Guttormur J. Guttormsson
b. 1878

Not in any spirit of boasting, but simply to state a fact, Bjarnason wrote to me, "No one else has translated more Icelandic poems than I have. Of all others whom I know Jakobina Johnson is by all odds the best. And she has done such a job of two of Guttormur's poems and two or more of Stephansson's that I would not presume to improve on them. She started much earlier than I did and had already done what I would have loved to attempt if the field had been open. However, it is well that it has been done worthily, no matter who the author was."

Stephan G. Stephansson shared Bjarnason's high opinion of Jakobina Johnson as a translator. Speaking in Markerville, Alberta, in October, 1926, he said: "Mrs. Johnson has kept much of her work from public view so I have to content myself with saying that I have found her to be a better translator of Icelandic poems into English than anyone else in these parts. Her accomplishments are enviable, and the proof comes when an Icelander sensitive to poetry finds an Icelandic poem equally good in a language other than his own. This is something she has done. We make particular demands for specific reasons, because of a poetic language and its uncompromising vocabulary. Even when the meaning of the words is strictly rendered and the rhyme fully observed, a work has not been translated if the spirit in it does not come through. The tone and mood of the poetry must continue on through the rewording. Jakobina reclothes a poem so skilfully that it is hardly noticeable: she excels in this uneasy task, patched-up as English is compared to the Icelandic outfit. She also understands that a good translation does not adhere rigidly to the sentence structure of the original tongue. Languages differ conceptually, and what is controlled and lovely in one language becomes rough in another, if the rendition is literal. This is especially true for poetry, based as it is on imagery to a large degree. There is a way to get around this problem, to find words that are analogous instead of strictly correct."[10]

Confirmation of these high opinions of Mrs. Johnson's excellence as a translator is to be found in her volume *Northern Lights,* which was published in 1959. Her

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translations can stand on their own feet as poetry in their own right. In 1933, she had been awarded the Order of the Falcon by the Icelandic government for extending the boundaries of Icelandic culture.

In *Odes and Echoes,* Bjarnason translated into English a poem written by Jakobina Johnson in Icelandic. Here is the translation:

YES, I HAVE LOVED BEFORE

I've loved before, I know, but never,
never quite like this.
No task nor fear can fag me now,
and few things seem amiss.
Yes, I have loved, I know, but never,
never quite like this.

For if I watch him as he sleeps,
from every care set free,
I feel as if for evermore
it's all I wish to see
—I'd drive away the daily ghosts
of dread reality.

And sometimes when he opens up
his eyes so brown and clear,
Effulgent with a faith and love
that fill the heart with cheer,
I hope and pray their light may last
as long as time is here.

And if he lifts his little hands
and lays his cheek to mine,
I feel within my eager soul
an ecstasy divine,
That quivers to a lay of love
no language may define.

And if he murmurs "Mama"
I just melt with sudden bliss;
Forget that I am ill or spent,
and every fear dismiss.
Yes, I have loved, I know, but never,
never quite like this.

Jakobina Johnson
1939

A poem, either in the original or in translation, succeeds when thought and emotion are held in balance. On this criterion this translation is a success.

Paul Bjarnason was on the same wave length as another Icelandic-Canadian poet — the much-loved Dr. Sig. Jul. Johannesson. Their spirits were in tune with each other's. They looked at the social and political problems that beset the current age through the same eyes. Bjarnason once wrote to me. "As you will see in *O. & E.,* I translated three of S.J. Johannesson's great poems, and in my opinion he has never received the honour due him. I think he was one of the ablest and best Icelanders that has lived and died in America, and without doubt was one of our top poets."

Here is one of Dr. Johannesson's poems in Bjarnason's translation, in which history and social philosophy are entwined with poetry.

ICELAND

A fire of hate throughout the earth is burning,
As if King Death dictated all our learning
—As if life's sunny day to dusk were turning.

The lords of war write every act that passes,
Each edict that would starve the poorer classes.
Like witless sheep, they fool and fleece the masses.

The deadly strife is high and low alarming.
Each land prepared the cause of man is harming;
For, strange to say, our hope lies in disarming.

Our motherland that lesson now is teaching,
While long-embattled states continue preaching
Of wars, and strive each other overreaching.

Dear isle, thou art a haven consecrated,
A country by the god of peace located,
Where human rights, not raids, are emulated.

I know thy sons their swords at one time rattled.
The sagas much about their valor prattled.
But now they stand for better things embattled.

The age-old ways of other lands thou breakest;
From errors seen a lesson new thou takest;
From broken rafts a bridge to Heaven makest.

No race nor clan on earth our own transcended.
Some innate law our sturdy growth attended.
From kings and slaves our blood was truly blended.

Remember, then, thy destiny and dower,
Thy duty to the world each pregnant hour:
To be a guiding light to peace and power.

God bless thee, mother by the outer ocean,
And all thy hundred thousand souls' devotion
To peace and art and every true emotion.

May countless "Jons" be born to be thy genii,
To bless thee with a halo deep and sheeny
—But never a "Hitler," never a "Mussolini."

Sig. Jul. Johannesson
1940

If we exempt the King James version of the Holy Bible, the greatest translation in the English language is perhaps Edward Fitzgerald's *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.* In an early review of this work, Charles Eliot Norton, editor of the *North American Review,* said: "It is the work of a poet inspired by the work of a poet; not a copy, but a reproduction, not a translation, but the redelivery of a poetic inspiration."[11] In many of his translations, Bjarnason has given a redelivery of a poetic inspiration. In his translations the original poetic inspiration has been reborn. Even in his less happy translations, he never sank to a pedestrian level. Incidentally, one of his most successful translations in Icelandic is Fitzgerald's *Omar.* Other translations from the English are Gray's *Elegy,* Oscar Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol,* Edward Markham's *The Man with the Hoe,* and John Howard Payne's *Home Sweet Home* (Axel Vopnfjord, present editor of *The Icelandic Canadian* has remarked, "The translation of *Home Sweet Home* is so well done that the Icelandic version appeals to (me) more than the English one."[12]

One may well wonder why Paul Bjarnason thought that translating Icelandic poetry into English was worthy of the exercise of so much of his time and energy. I suggest that the answer to this question is clear. For him, poetry was one of the principal avenues to a full life. And, of course, poetry was as much a necessity to the first Icelandic settlers in Canada as their daily bread. But a new wind was blowing. As he looked about him, Bjarnason saw that the new generation of Icelandic Canadians were relaxing their hold on the cultural heritage that their forebears had brought to Canada from their native land. He deplored the fact that few of the new generation were learning Icelandic at their mothers' knees in the old memorial way. Fewer and fewer of them could speak the Icelandic tongue in which were enshrined the old cultural and intellectual traditions of Iceland.

The very crown and flower of these traditions were embedded in Icelandic poetry. By translating Icelandic poems into English, Paul Bjarnason determined to make them available to those who had lost their ancestral tongue. And in aiming at this purpose, he achieved a wider purpose. In keeping the flame of Icelandic poetry, in translation, burning, he opened the enchanted gates of Icelandic poetry to English readers. As Dr. Richard Beck has nicely put it, "He extended the realm of Icelandic literature by making excellent selections available to English readers... He was an ambassador of literary and cultural values, a bridge builder between Europe and the Western World."[13]

Paul Bjarnason was born at Mountain, North Dakota, on March 27, 1882. Both his parents started life's journey in Iceland. He was educated at the primary school in Mountain. He obtained his secondary schooling in Grand Forks. One of his classmates was Vilhjalmur Stefansson. They struck up a close friendship which lasted while they both lived. His first job was as a farm labourer. For a few years he followed the honest and useful occupation of school teaching. He never acquired any alphabetical appendages to write after his name but he must not be discounted intellectually on that account. He had no formal education in Icelandic, but this was the language spoken in his parents' home and it was the first language that he learned to speak. At school he made his first acquaintance with English. English appealed to him as a language and it was his favourite language until he was in his 40s. Then something happened to him. As he once said to Rev. Albert Edward Kristjansson, a kindred spirit, "When I discovered Stephan G. Stephansson, I realized that I was an Icelander."[14] It was after this discovery that he began seriously translating from Icelandic into English.

Sir Richard Livingstone said wisely: "It is not the amount of knowledge that a pupil takes away from school, but his ap-

petite to know and his capacity to learn.''[15] Paul Bjarnason had a rich and questing mind. The range of his intellectual interests was wide. All his life he had an appetite for knowledge and coupled with this appetite was the capacity to satisfy it. Over the years he succeeded in well-educating himself.

In his generation, school teaching was used as a stepping stone to some other occupation — usually one of the learned professions. For Paul Bjarnason it was a stepping stone to the noble occupation of farming. In 1906, he moved from North Dakota to Wynyard, Saskatchewan, where he took up a homestead. Farming on the Western Prairies proved not to his taste. He soon gave it up and moved into the village of Wynyard where he became a real estate agent and a car salesman. For a period, he edited the weekly newspaper, the *Wynyard Advance*.

The red-letter day of his life was May 10, 1912. On that day he married Halldora Jonsdottir, whose Icelandic credentials were as sound as his own. Theirs was a most successful marriage. They shared the trials and tribulations of life for 55 years, happy in having the support and comfort of each other. They had seven children — five boys and two girls — and joyed in seeing them grow up to adulthood.

After his marriage, Paul established a comfortable home in Wynyard and kept open house for visitors to the village. His favourite visitor was one with whom he could have a good argument. The theme that he upheld in argument was ever that a man's first task is to support the concept of a better world to come. This argument did not appeal to some of his visitors to whom life had dealt an excellent hand and as a consequence they were well-content with things as they are.

With his family, Bjarnason moved from Wynyard to Vancouver in 1933, where he lived for the rest of his life, working as a carpenter and house painter to earn his daily bread. All his books were published while he was living in Vancouver. They were published in small editions, and I suspect at his own expense. *More Echoes* which was printed in an edition of 300 copies, bears these words on its dust cover: ''*More Echoes* is obtainable only from the author, Paul Bjarnason, 1016 W. 13th Avenue, Vancouver 9, B.C. The price postpaid is $4.50.''

In 1913, Paul Bjarnason sent the first car to Iceland. In 1958, the Automobile Association invited him to make a visit to the land of his fathers. He saw Iceland for the first time at the age of 76. On his visit he made many friends and had many good arguments with opponents worthy of his steel. His friends tried to get him to settle permanently in Iceland. When he returned to Canada, they said: ''Canada is getting a poet and Iceland has the Ford car.''[16]

The rugged beauty of Iceland is ''Meet nurse for a poetic child.'' There are many poetic children in Iceland; ''Some learned and reputable writers,'' Paul Bjarnason has written, ''have said that the Icelanders are a nation of poets, or at least rhymesters; that anyone who has the inclination can write some sort of passable verse. That is not quite true.''[17] No, these words are not quite true. But what is true is that there is more literary activity per square mile in Iceland than in any other country in the world. And, it may be asserted with confidence, and I adapt to my purpose what Dr. Johnson said of Gray's *Elegy,* that the crown jewels of Icelandic poetry abound in images which find a mirror in every Icelander's mind and with sentiments to which every Icelander's bosom returns an echo.

In politics, Paul Bjarnason was a radical in the very depths of him. He never conformed to the habits of the crowd. He was a born non-conformist in the most extended sense of the word. With no desire to be on the side of the big battalions, he never embraced a cause to serve personal ambition, but chose his side according to his conscience. Shortly after his death, his widow wrote to me. ''He had the courage to voice his convictions no matter what the consequences.'' His actions always kept faith with his thoughts. No base alloy of hypocrisy could be discerned in anything he ever said or did. Never at any time in his life could he have been found in the reactionary camp on any social, political or economic issue. His sight pierced too deeply into the present confusion of society for him to have harmonized with the established order of things.

He looked the world straight in the face and was not pleased with what he saw. A century before him, Walt Whitman had seen much the same thing:

''Many sweating, ploughing, thrashing and they the chaff for payment receiving.
A few idly owning, and they the wheat continually claiming.''[18]

In a recent dark period, when, as Charlie Chaplin said, a communist was anybody who stepped off the curb with his left foot, Bjarnason had the reputation of being in the communist camp. But the communist label did not fit him. He could not have lived under a regime in which conformity was the 11th commandment. The safe and formal men who always swim with the current, who always agree with the existing order of things and bend the lance to whatever has become established, they could conform, but not Paul Bjarnason. He never could have delivered his conscience into the keeping of a Big Brother. He could not have taken anything on trust because it came from the Goliath of authority. Imagine his reaction if he had been told that his translations must be the handmaid of official propaganda. His inborn individualism would have asserted himself. Soon he would have been accused of rocking the ship of state and he would have been sent packing on the lonesome road to Siberia.

He might conceivably have been a communist in theory. But in practise, never. Politically he stood upon old-fashioned ground. As a descendent of a long line of Icelanders who never had a monarch or an entailed nobility and knew no class distinctions except those that rest upon personal ability, he did not believe that nature has created all men equal. He did believe that all men are created free, with the inherent right to make actual any potentialities that nature may have endowed them with.

The best word to define him politically is 'anarchist.' A fair summary of his political faith is to be found in these words of Sir Herbert Read. In a letter to Edward Dahlberg, Read wrote: ''What kind of anarchist am I? My own kind, no doubt. I do not believe that I shall bring the anarchist ideal one step nearer by joining an artificial commune, accepting the standard of life of savages, or wearing a loin-cloth in a sub-arctic climate. I do not believe that I shall bring that ideal any nearer by selling all I possess and giving the proceeds to the poor. I believe that I can best serve that ideal by cultivating my small holding of seven acres, by establishing a sense of community in this village, by living at peace with my neighbours, by creating what Eric Gill called a cell of good living.''[19] In my view, Paul Bjarnason, who was his own kind of anarchist, would have endorsed these words.

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He never gave up his firm faith that the world is capable of improvement. He had a vision of a better world to come, a world in which the crusade against the present imperfect order would be won, in which the social injustices of our competitive society would be corrected.

In 1923, there appeared in *The Minneota Mascot,* when it was edited by Gunnar B. Bjornson, an editorial which gave some account of Paul Bjarnason's philosophy of life.

This editorial quoted Bjarnason as follows: "Individual freedom is the natural state, therefore every man should act with the utmost freedom. What man wants to do, that he should be permitted to do — with the possible exception of the violently vicious, or the insane.

"There should be no money as we know and use it. There should be no such thing as compelling people to work. There should be no government to tell people what they must or must not do.

"I did not say you would not have to work. What I said was that in an ideal state one would not have this thing that you understand by work. In the state of society that I am talking about, I would not compel any man to work. I would let everyone do just as he pleased and I would have the state responsible for housing, feeding and clothing all. When everybody is free to work at the thing that he likes, work ceases to be work in the sense that we now understand. It is because we are compelled to do the things that we do not like to do that work becomes a drudgery and labour a curse. Let people follow their inclinations, do the things in which they take pleasure, and work produces joy and gladness instead of pain and depression."

This sounds to me to be vintage anarchism.

In a review of *Flisar,* Bjarnason's last book, Dr. Watson Kirkconnell wrote: "His choice of subjects is most significant in Robert Ingersoll's *Voice of Freedom* and in the strongly rationalistic and anti-establishment poems of Thorsteinn Erlingsson." Point may be given to these words by these four stanzas of Erlingsson's poem *Indigence and Wealth* in Bjarnason's translation.[20]

Though God Himself was never known to you,
Your neighbors and your friends reveal your station.
The chosen fill the envied inner pew
In every house of worship in the nation.

Among the rich the method is the same.
God's mercy all their patent sins erases.
The young inherit all their elders' fame
If under-brained, God's grace the lack replaces.

For theft and fraud the favored have a "pull"
And Father God protects the wealthy classes.
But countless jails on earth are always full
Of indigents and drifters from the masses.

So you, the lowly, poor and penniless,
The pious mark for Hell when life is ended.
But if by chance you come to gain "success,"
Your case in Heaven and earth will be defended.

If Bjarnason did not approve of something that was happening in the world, he believed in speaking his mind lest his silence be construed as approval. He never spared his friends. If he thought they were taking a wrong turn in the road, he would not hesitate to blow the gaff. His longtime friend, Valdimar Bjornson, a former associate editor of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press and Dispatch,* and for 22 years treasurer of the State of Minnesota, after a visit to Iceland, wrote a short piece for *Logberg-Heimskringla* in which he rejoiced in Iceland's important role, because of its strategic location, in NATO. Bjarnason took him to task severely for speaking in praise of Iceland's identification with problems which he felt Iceland should leave strictly alone. But Valdimar had learned how to take Paul. In writing to me, he gave me this verbal snapshot of his friend. "(Paul) had a real poet's gift, a sharp mind, a rather melancholy view of much in life, but an excellent fellow."

Bjarnason's view of the world was not altogether dark. He was not a nay sayer. He did give a resounding "yes" to life. He enjoyed the better things on the earth — the love of family and friends, the good, the true and the beautiful, in nature, and in the works of man. Poetry was first in his heart but he did have an eye for painting and an ear for music.

In every season of his life, he lived a life of thought. He valued ideas without regard to personal interests or popular prejudice. After years of reading and studying, communing with his own mind and discussing and arguing with his friends, his intellectual wardrobe became well stocked indeed. As the shadows began to lengthen for him, there were two days he struck from his calendar — yesterday and tomorrow. He lived only for the day in hand. On January 21, 1967, he wrote to me: "Though I am old and almost through I would love to hear from you once more on any subject or topic. I am just trying to pass the time with as much comfort as seems available." This must have been one of the last letters he ever wrote. Ten days later, he made a quiet exit from life.

[1] *On Poetry and Poets* (1957) p. 51
[2] *A Defence of Poetry*
[3] *Essays with a Purpose* (1954) p. 56
[4] Paul Bjarnason: Poet and Translator *The Icelandic Canadian,* Autumn 1973
[5] Foreword to *More Echoes*
[6] Bjarnason quotes these words on the dust cover of *More Echoes* — see Einarsson's article: *Instinctive Translations, The Icelandic Canadian,* Summer 1955
[7] Letters in Canada, *University of Toronto Quarterly* 1954
[8] *The North American Book of Icelandic Verse* (1930) p. 15
[9] *The Postwar Poetry of Iceland* (1981) p. 33
[10] Dr. Finnbogi Gudmundsson, Stephan G. Stephansson, *In Retrospect Seven Essays* (1982) p. 10
[11] A.J. Arberry, *The Romance of the Rubaiyat,* (1959) p. 26
[12] *The Icelandic Canadian,* Autumn 1965
[13] *History of Icelandic Poets* 1800-1940
[14] *Logberg-Heimskringla,* May 25, 1967
[15] *The Future in Education,* (1941) p. 28
[16] On a visit to Iceland, in 1984, I was told this by Dr. Finnbogi Gudmundsson.
[17] Foreword to *Odes and Echoes*
[18] *Song of Myself,* Section 42
[19] University of Victoria: *The Malahat Review, Number Nine*
[20] Letters in Canada, *University of Toronto Quarterly,* 1964

FOR SALE, ONE POLAR ISLAND

by Dr. Willard A.E. Larson

Iceland has endured many indignities over its harried lifetime but one never mentioned in history books is the time the island itself was up for sale to the United States for $10 million. "There are strange things done in the midnight sun," as says the Robert Service ballad.

The year was 1867, the year a united Canada was born, and neighbouring infant-giant America had just emerged shaken from the bloodbath of its fratricidal civil war over the abolition of the institution of slavery. The United States foreign policy, if it had one, was fragmented and seemed to lurch in all directions at once.

Czarist Russia had been teasing the U.S. for a decade about a sale of Alaska, in part hoping to stir up trouble betwixt the U.S. and England. In the generation prior to the American Civil War the United States had lusted covetous eyes on independent Texas, on Cuba, and on the near-empty Mexican west in a desperation attempt to maintain an internal power balance between its industrial northern states and its agricultural southern states. Now, the war behind them, political ex-

pansion to the south and southwest was to be the healing balm. The United States felt it needed a naval base in the Caribbean to juxtapose its new navy between a weak Mexico and the European great powers. In 1865, under President Andrew Johnson, the United States opened price haggling with Denmark's King Christian IX for the purchase of one or more of his Danish West Indian Islands on which to build "an American Gibraltar." The obvious first choice was the deep-water port of Charlotte Amalie on the island of St. Thomas. Danish administrative offices for the three small islands were at Christiansted on the larger agricultural island of St. Croix. The third and smallest island of the group was named St. Johns.

When hard bargaining time arrived, the opening bid by Secretary of State William Seward was $5 million for all three islands in June 1866. King Christian's "firm" counterproposal in 1867 was $15 million, or $10 million for just St. Thomas and St. John. Secretary Seware proposed $7.5 million for the three: the King countered with $7.5 million for John and Thomas only and now broadened the bargaining by discussing the sale of Iceland and "part of" Greenland. On October 24, 1867 a final consensus was reached of $7.5 million for the three Danish Indies islands plus a pot sweeting unamplified political "understanding" concerning Greenland. Denmark's government ratified the sale treaty in 1868, but concurrent U.S. ratification was to run into a fatal snag in the U.S. Senate. Only months earlier the Senate had been steamrollered into ratifying the precipitous purchase of Alaska for the lesser sum of $7.2 million, and now a slighted Senator Sumner, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, deliberately bottled up this Danish Island ratification bill "in committee" for over two years, successfully obstructing its adoption. [These islands were, however, ultimately purchased 49 years later for $25 million.]

The concept of the purchase of Iceland, however, did not die in the mind of ex-secretary of the Treasury, Robert Walker, formerly a senator from Mississippi for nine years, then "legal counsel" to Secretary Seward and privy to the Danish negotiations. Iceland's population of 50,000 souls was not that much larger than that of the Danish West Indies and Secretary Walker could not conceive that in their poverty the Icelanders would mind changing allegiances. The floodgates of Nordic immigration to North America were already opening. Walker was an ardent expansionist and it was his thinking that American ownership of Iceland would be an inexpensive containing wall to partition off compartmented British America of 1866 from Mother England's influence. A united Dominion of Canada was but "a gleam in the eye" of its designers and it was unclear which settlements would "opt in" and which would "opt out."

The contemporaneous "gleam in the eye" of ex-secretary of the Treasury Walker was the intoxicating grandiose vision of a great North American commonwealth sea-to-sea engulfing Alaska, Texas, the Mexican West, the British American territories, Cuba and perhaps Mexico "as far south as Yucatan." Secretary of State Seward, a fellow expansionist, requested of Walker a formal evaluation of the purchase of Iceland and Greenland. The completed white paper was deemed publication-worthy by a cautiously approving Secretary of State Seward. In this paper, after extolling the "superb" fisheries of Iceland, Walker's report goes on to the geopolitical meat of the matter:

> "... the government recently partially established in British America called the Dominion of Canada... was and still is intended to embrace all British America, extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific, with a railroad from Halifax to Puget Sound, and an area exceeding that of the United States prior to the purchase of Alaska (now in consumation). By this great purchase we have flanked British America on the... Pacific.... Now the acquisition of Greenland (and Iceland) will flank British America for thousands of miles on the north (and east)... and greatly increase her inducements, peacefully and cheerfully, to become a part of the American Union."*

At this moment in time Walker and Seward had fully expected Congress' routine approval of Seward's deftly negotiated treaty for the purchase of the Danish West Indies, and its obstruction in the Senate reflected a swing back towards a fiscal conservativism that induced Secretary of State Seward to conclude that proceeding with serious negotiations to procure Iceland would not be consumatable.

We all know how the tale concluded: Alaska went to the United States, Iceland was to remain Danish, and Canada was to be the new home of the Western Icelander. □

*U.S. State Department, *A Report on the Resources of Iceland and Greenland,* compiled by Benjamin Mills Pierce (Washington, 1868), 1-5.

ANOTHER VERNAL EQUINOX

The author is the grandson of Gudny Runolfsdottir of Snjoholti, Eidarhreppur who was a sister of Jon Runolfsson of the same place.

by Larus Runolfsson

ANOTHER VERNAL EQUINOX

On Turtle Lake the ice will soon
Be gone and waves will wash the shore.
And from the South the plaintive loon
Will seek her secret nest once more.

The sun will warm that sylvan scene
And fish will spawn while ducklings swim.
The trees will don their robes of green
And birds will carol Nature's Hymn.

Should we who treasured carefree days
And nights of love at Turtle Lake
Let the world and our peers' ways
Dictate the course that we should take?

Are we to sadly just sit still
And let our lives be rudely rent?
Or can we somehow find the will
To govern how our lives are spent?

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BRONCO BUSTING IN ICELAND

by Robert T. Klose

It was in Iceland that I learned how to ride a horse. More specifically, it was as a working guest on the ancestral farm of Eggert Lárusson in the beautiful Vatnsdal of the northwest that I was introduced to the stocky Icelandic pony with its thick mane or "fax" combed over its eyes as comely bangs.

Being an avid reader of westerns, standing 6′3″, and assuring my Icelandic host family that as an American I was ready for anything, Eggert's eldest son, 16-year-old Páll, took me out to the heath one evening and showed me the pride and joy of their stable — four prime animals which caused Páll's chest to swell as he recited a battery of adjectives in their praise: fast, strong, hearty, loyal, obedient, etc. He was, however, fully deflated when the most potent impression I could come up with for his (in comparison with our breeds) diminutive favorites was — "snotur" (cute).

After going over the Icelandic vocabulary of saddlery and equine anatomy, Páll introduced me to a jet-black, level-backed stallion named Djöfull. He was somewhat shorter at the shoulder than the others, but his eye was quick as a razor, though rather cold in a malevolent way, softening only when Páll was very near.

"I'll look like Sancho Panza on that thing," I said as I sized Djöfull up.

Páll suggested that Djöfull might not be the animal for me to learn on, since he was "independent."

"Like all Icelanders," I smiled, watching as Páll strained to tighten the saddle straps.

Páll took hold of the bridle and Djöfull immediately began to jog nervously in place. I still managed to slip on board his firm back as readily as if I were mounting a sawhorse.

Páll gave me the "thumbs up" sign and raised his eyebrows. "Allt í lagi?" His concern was palpable.

Now entrenched in the saddle, suddenly the horse looked, well, pretty big, actually. "Já," I said contritely, at the same time reconsidering Páll's list of outstanding qualities of the Icelandic horse. "Allt - í - lagi."

I took the reins and we were off.

My first controlled thought was that, as equestrian developments would have it, I would probably by dying in Iceland. My panic was as free-running as the sweat which began to stream down my face and back. Djöfull had taken off like cannon shot. He was a furious monster, a reactor on overload, an animal compensating for his stature with a sudden and massive release of energy that had immediately forced me to abandon the reins and hunker down around his neck if I was to avoid being thrown against the stable wall or into the barbed-wire fences. Tears and sweat mingled in my eyes, and this compounded with our velocity served to turn the surrounding landscape into a kaleidoscopic blur.

"Bobby er cowboy!" rejoiced Thröstur, Páll's 11-year-old brother who had come up through the manure patch for the festivities. I had always liked Thröstur, and, in fact, had somewhat of an ongoing competition with him as I strove to show a farm-raised Icelandic boy that I, a city-bred American with a Datsun truck, could rake, mow, and heave bales of hay as well as he, which I couldn't. The result was that my desperate horseback horror of the moment became seasoned with a dose of acute embarrassment.

"Allt í lagi?" shouted Thröstur through cupped hands as the horse convulsed and jackknifed under me.

"Já — allt í lagi!!" I managed through a mouthful of fax as Djöfull suddenly noticed a wall which I feared might be worth a good jump.

With a crack of his hind legs we charged for the wall at full gallop, with

my face buried deep in the horse's mane as I went through the declination of the noun "hestur" (horse) in an effort to keep my head. Hestur — hest — hesti — hests...

On the way to the wall Eggert himself showed up, out for a stroll in his new Wellingtons, hands slung in his seat pockets. "Allt í lagi?" he called dutifully in a casual sort of way.

"Yow!!" I screamed as we approached the wall and I realized Djöfull would never make it over with me glued to his back.

"Allt í lagi," said Eggert and turned away.

I felt Djöfull rear back and it occurred to me that Páll had never enumerated common sense as an attribute of the Icelandic horse. The thing was going to try it. It was really going to kill us both, and all because I didn't have the sense early on to dive into the tangle of rusted barbed wire. Hestur — hest — hesti — hests...

And then — it stopped.

I felt a shiver snuggle its way under the skin of my back as if a cold, wet blanket were being drawn down my spine. I heard a pattering of anxious footsteps and when I looked up I saw the blank faces of Páll, Thröstur and Eggert. Then a broad smile broke across Thröstur's face.

"Bobby, thrú ert cowboy. Hooo!"

The three of them helped me from Djöfull's back and to a sitting position on a bale of hay. Djöfull himself stood facing the wall, his sides heaving and his nostrils distended and steaming like a locomotive.

Páll repeated his suggestion that maybe another horse would be a better starter.

Stripped of my pride, and my willingness to learn from these patient Icelanders having been graphically restored, an old adage settled over me like morning dew: something about falling from a horse and getting back on again. I told Páll I wanted to give it another try — and yes, on another horse.

Páll told Thröstur to go around to the pasture behind the stable and get "Afi," the Icelandic word for "grandpa." And, true to its name, Afi appeared on the scene as a sway-backed, frazzled old hack which looked at me in a manner I could only perceive as affectionate. Encouraged by this obviously more suitable animal, I remounted, and, joined by Páll and Thröstur, had a lovely and serene ride along the banks of the salmon river of the Vatnsdal.

Later that evening Páll sat down with me for one of our frequent vocabulary-building sessions.

"Let's start with the Ds tonight," he said as he flipped through the pages of his dictionary. "The word 'Djöfull,' for example, means 'devil.'"

My head shot up from my notebook and I threw a venomous look at Páll, one worthy of Djöfull himself. But Páll's eyes never met mine, and a smile never appeared on his face. Neither would one ever be forthcoming whenever I mentioned my experience with the Devil of the Vatnsdal.

And so I wrote. D-j-ö-f-u-l-l: devil. It is a word that forever remains in my active vocabulary. I can even decline it. □

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AUTUMN

by Albert L. Halldorsson

AUTUMN

Autumn sighs. Her cape of brown is tossed playfully about by the wind. Like a tale from "A Thousand and One Nights" is her gown of red and gold sprinkled with amber sequins.

Yes, it is autumn: the leaves have lost their summer verdure and are blushing with the rigors of the autumn wind...

Does your heart leap up within you
When the leaves begin to blush
With the rigors of the autumn?
Do they cast a rev'rent hush
O'er the scene, a sylvan glade,
And the flowers God hath made?
With the pleasant earth beneath me;
And the heaven's arch above;
I can see Him ever present
In these tokens of His love:
When the autumn leaves are falling,
God is calling, ever calling.

Yes, He's calling from his Heaven,
From His Golden Throne of Glory,
And we see His loving kindness
Like a living Bible Story;
For within this sylvan glade
Are the wonders God hath made.

This is an excerpt from a booklet (80 pages) by Mr. Halldorsson entitled Wings of the Wind. □

THE ROCKY SHORES OF HISTORY

by Marlin J.G. Magnússon

The *Icelandic Canadian* is getting more interesting, and deserves another thousand subscribers.

I enjoyed the last issue very much and was captivated by the article *Beowulf* by Emil Bjarnason. He is a known *tröll* as an Icelander, and came down heavily in favour of an Icelander being the author of the old legendary work, Beowulf or Beowolf.

Good try, but I rather think that this was not so in the light of historical facts. Let us study some of the facts and get them on record in the *Icelandic Canadian* magazine.

(1) If the classical work dates to the middle of the sixth century, then the author was definitely not Icelandic. The historical fact is that the island country at the Arctic Circle was uninhabited till the year 874, when it was settled by Ingólfur Arnarson from Norway. There were no Icelanders before that. This was 1,112 years ago, and we can be proud that we know the year of the origin of our nationality. This precludes an Icelander being the author of literary work done in the sixth century.

(2) The letter W is in the title of the work. This letter is not in the Icelandic alphabet, and neither was it in the old Norse, from which the Icelandic language derives. The letter W does not belong in any Scandinavian language, even today.

The New Imperial Reference Dictionary says that the letter W was introduced into the Roman language in the fifth century, and from the thirteenth century it was regularly used in writing English. At this point it is interesting to note that the Romans used the letter V as the digit 5, and also V as a U, and the W was a double-U, which is the name of the twenty-third

letter of the English alphabet. A rather strong case for the manuscript (found in the English attic) being English.

(3) The work seems to have been translated at least in part from another older manuscript from centuries past, for it is not pure old English, old Norse, Swedish or Danish, and not Germanic, French or Dutch.

(4) The manuscript from the English attic is very likely written with quill pen and ink, or steel pen nib, and on paper. Steel pen nibs had not yet been invented in the sixth century. Neither was writing paper except in China.

The old Scandinavians had their own graphic language, but those were the Runes, letters which they carved into wood, on their shields, and chiseled into stone, which was not likely to be found in an English attic. What a weight of stone it would have taken to chisel out the work Beowolf!

(5) The title of the work is a mystery in itself whether spelled *beowulf* or *beowolf*. A wolf anyhow. But in Icelandic and in old Norse it is *úlfur*. The title is not *beoúlfur,* so we may dismiss the premise that the work is old Scandinavian. The best way to deal with this puzzle is to hyphenate the title, thus: *Beo-wolf,* or *wulf,* if you wish.

What meaning do we derive from this title? It has to have a meaning. Well, there is the wolf, to be sure, but what is a wolf doing in the title of this masterpiece?

Perhaps it is best to leave that as a classical question. It is really the word *beo* that really bugs us. What language is that supposed to be? What is the real meaning of the title is what we want to know. It certainly is not Icelandic and it may not have come from any Scandinavian language. We know that wolves do not howl *beo,* while dogs howl *bow-wow*. So, where are we at?

I have a sinking feeling that we are totally lost in the face of this great mystery, and also the feeling that Beowolf does not date farther back than the fifteenth century, in view of the language used, as well as the writing on paper.

Scraped and parched skin from lambs, sheep and calves was used to write on, and these were known as parchment. This was used extensively, even into the fifteenth century, but apparently the manuscript found in the English attic was written on paper. It may have been copied from an older manuscript, but even so, it is precious enough now for the English to treasure it.

Marlin J.G. Magnússon
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Icelandic Service Personnel of the Second World War An Index of the Biographies Published in the *"Icelandic-Canadian Magazine"*

(Continued from summer issue, 1986)

by Eric Jonasson

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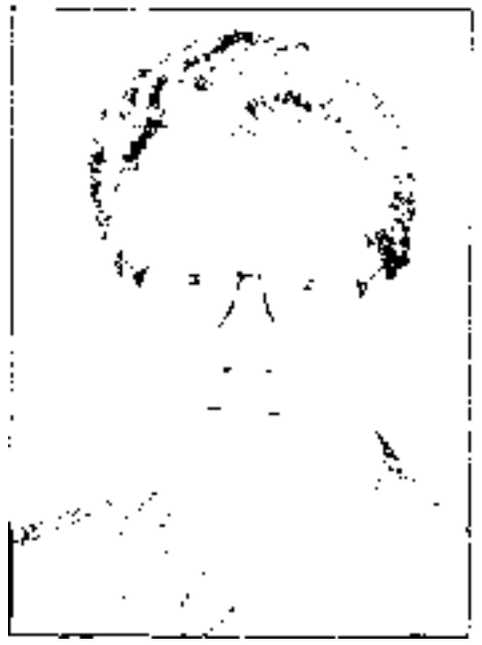

President S. Glenn Sigurdson

Malmfridur Emily Benjaminson

FJALLKONA'S ADDRESS 1986

Honoured descendants,

I bid you all welcome to this celebration. Many of you reside here in Gimli or in the vicinity. Many, however, have come a long way, from the various provinces of Canada or from the United States or all the way from Iceland. This day, as in all the years gone by, is thus the symbol of the collective unity of us all.

Over 111 years ago Icelandic "west-farers" settled at this place and in the districts around it. To honour the memory of these pioneers and the heritage they bequeathed to us we now celebrate Islendingadagurinn. What is this heritage then? The first answer is that we firmly believe that we ourselves reflect upon, to some degree, the tenacity, unselfishness, and faith in the future that characterized the life and labour of our forefathers and foremothers. Their culture, that culture which we wish both to preserve and nurture, has various other characteristics, however. Uppermost in my mind is the Icelandic language, the language of the settlers, and all that is linked to it in one way or another. This language the Icelandic people had preserved and developed for a thousand years when its representatives came to the wilderness here on the western shore of Lake Winnipeg. In it the Icelanders wrote their sagas and poetry. This mighty word-spring was also the source the vikings of old drew on when they conversed out on the vast oceans in their search for new lands. Their language thus put

down roots throughout much of continental Europe, the British Isles, Greenland, and even in North America, Vinland the good.

The language was precisely that strand of the Icelandic cultural heritage that the founders of New Iceland upheld the most. Amid the trials of the pioneer years they managed to purchase a printing press and began publication of a paper at Lundi, where the town of Riverton now stands. *Framfari* — the name by which this paper was known — is one of the most remarkable monuments of Icelandic-Canadian culture, and in its wake there followed publication of literature, papers, and periodicals. That is to say, the mainspring of all our intellectual culture right up to this very day. The paper *Leifur* in Winnipeg succeeded *Framfari*. Then *Heimskringla* was launched in the year 1886, and *Logberg* a year later. The two last-mentioned papers were combined into one publication almost three decades ago.

From the above it is clear that this year 100 years have passed since that weekly, at least half of it, was established which even today goes out to the Icelandic-Canadian home and to many other lands. For an entire century this publication has proved to be the tie that binds together in one whole the large and widely-scattered western-Icelandic community. It is also the main link in our contact with the land of our fathers and mothers. This publication has in each and every respect strengthened our solidarity and feeling of community.

On us rests now that sacred duty, right at the time when we commemorate the centenary of our weekly paper, to not only commemorate the heritage that the Icelandic language has bequeathed to us, but rather come together anew to strengthen and increase it, so that our descendants, both young and unborn may enjoy it throughout the future.

I wish you good fortune now and always.

Readers' Forum

From Dr. Clark T. Thorstenson,
Brigham Young University,
Provo, Utah.

I was pleased to receive your letter and invitation to write an article for *The Icelandic Canadian*. I would be pleased to make a contribution to your magazine since I have written many articles for various publications. I would like to receive a copy of *The Icelandic Canadian* as well as a proposed date so I will be able to gauge my schedule accordingly.

It's wonderful to know of people who are interested in preserving the historical aspects of our common Icelandic heritage as well as in maintaining our unique culture.

From Oscar Howardson,
Vancouver, B.C.

Just a few lines to let you know what we are doing out here. Our Icelandic lesson program is a complete success. We have sold 180 lessons and tapes mostly by word of mouth. We are now trying to spread the good word across North America, and have asked the consulates to give us the names of all Icelandic organizations in both Canada and the United States.

I see by the paper that Len and Karen are moving to Victoria. The Icelandic lifestyle in Victoria has been dissipating and I hope that they will be able to revive and renew some of it.

I am enclosing our form letter.

JANICE ARNASON HONOURED

Janice Arnason

At the "National Music for Child Carl Orff Canada" conference held May 8-11, 1986, in Winnipeg, Janice Arnason was awarded the Gunild Keetman Scholarship. Janice used this scholarship to study in this field and obtained a certificate in third-level Orff at the University of Manitoba this past summer, and she plans to continue to study courses in music during a sabbatical leave for the 1986-87 school year.

Janice is a teacher of music at the Gimli Elementary School and has worked with the Carl Orff approach to music education for the past six years in the Evergreen school district. Through the Orff approach children experience learning in vocal, instrumental, dance, speech and improvisational techniques which all come together to form a total musical experience.

All the music grades that Janice has taught have been entered in the Evergreen Festival of the Arts in Gimli annually, since its inception in 1981 and have won trophies for leading in school instrumental groups.

Janice is married to Cameron Arnason, son of Gudrun and Baldwin Arnason of Winnipeg; they have two daughters, Signy and Heida. Janice is the daughter of Oli and the late Gudny Narfason of Gimli.

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Kristjana Gunnars, author of six books, poet, and managing editor of The Icelandic Canadian.

MAIDS OF HONOUR

AT THE EDITOR'S DESK

Honourary Members

For their past and continuing contribution to the welfare of *The Icelandic Canadian* the Magazine Board hereby wishes to express its gratitude by appointing the following people honourary members of our quarterly: Gustaf Kristjanson, Nelson Gerard, Bob Asgeirsson, Valdimar Bjornson, Stefan J. Stefanson, Bill Valgardson, George Hanson, Horaldur Vidal, Loftur Bjarnason, Roy St. George Stubbs.

Siggi Einarsson

The Alabama senior is College Leader with his 260-0 in the javelin, which makes him No. 3 performer so far with the new spear. The Icelander placed 4th in the 1985 NCAA. (9/28/62, 6-3/225)

RHODES SCHOLAR

Kerry Stirton, age 22, the son of Laurie and James Stirton and the grandson of Marjorie and the late Asgeir Asgeirson, has recently been awarded a Rhodes scholarship which will enable him to study for two years at Oxford University in England. He will be leaving this fall to take up studies in Jurisprudence.

A graduate of Vincent Massey Collegiate where he was a student president, Kerry was selected as a Manitoba representative to the House of Commons as a page in 1982-83, when he also studied at the University of Ottawa. In 1985 he graduated with honours in political studies from the University of Manitoba and in 1985-86 received a fellowship and master's degree in political science at Trinity College, University of Toronto.

Besides the Rhodes Scholarship, Kerry has received the Jack Blumberg Memorial Prize and the Sonia Hoffman Isenbery Prize in political studies, the Isbister undergraduate scholarship for highest standing, the University of Manitoba Alumni scholarship, the Mackenzie King and the Rotary Club scholarships. In 1985 he was a member of the University of Manitoba debating team which won the McGoun Cup. Kerry is past president of the Young Liberals of Manitoba, was a Big Brother from 1983 to 1985, and during the summer of 1985 attended a World Youth Peace Camp in Helsinki, Finland and a French Immersion program in Quebec. He participates actively in hockey, soccer, golf and skiing. His future goals include further study at Harvard and a career in public service or as a university professor.

Kerry is the great grandson of the late Oddny and Jon Asgeirson.

HEIMSOKN

by Larus Runolfsson

HEIMSOKN

So we who've never seen its shores
Or steaming pools or mountains grand
Are keenly looking forward to
A rebirth in our native land.

Thoughts of Asgrim, tender Gudny
Sveinn the very erudite;
Thorsteinn, Solveig solid people
Fill and warm our thoughts this night.

So at the sunset we'll fly Eastward
Heading for old Island's strands.
We'll walk into the arms of kinfolk
Warmth of kisses, clasp of hands.

This poem was written shortly before my goddaughter, who is of the same lineage, and I fulfilled a dream of long standing by going to Iceland and finding all of the birthplaces of our grandparents.

We have been working on a story of that trip.

GOOD NEWS

Your CANADA PENSION PLAN is changing for the better.

As of January 1, 1987:

On January 1, 1987, your Canada Pension Plan will change. These changes put your Plan on a solid, long-term financial foundation.

It's important to know what benefits are available because your Plan provides you and/or your family with a basic level of earnings protection when you retire, become disabled, or die. You will, however, have to apply for the benefits when you believe you are eligible.

The information that follows highlights the major improvements. It's good news!

Financing a better tomorrow

New financing arrangements will make and keep your Plan more secure than ever.

Right now you and your employer each contribute 1.8% of your earnings up to a maximum amount. Each year until 1991, the contribution rate will rise by 0.2% and from there until 2011 by 0.15%. If you make the maximum contribution, you will pay about $26 more in 1987.

A wider choice of retirement options

After January 1st, you can begin receiving your CPP pension as early as age 60. You could qualify even if you are not *fully* retired.

If you begin your pension before age 65, your benefits will be less because you will have contributed less and will get the benefits for a longer period of time.

Or, if you choose not to start your pension until after age 65, (up to age 70), your monthly benefits will be greater.

Your pension would normally be payable the month after your 65th birthday. For each month between that date and when your pension begins, your benefit will be adjusted by 0.5%. This adjustment will apply for as long as you receive the benefit.

Increased disability benefits

If you qualify for disability benefits, your monthly payment will now be significantly increased. For example, the maximum disability pension in 1987 will increase from $487 to more than $635 per month.

As well, anyone entering or returning to the work force will have disability coverage after contributing in 2 of the last 3 years, in which contributions could have been made.

Survivor benefits continue on remarriage

If you receive survivor benefits, they will now continue even if you remarry.

If you remarried and had your survivor benefit discontinued, you can have your benefit reinstated.

Splitting pension credits

If your marriage ends in divorce, each spouse will be entitled to one half the "pension credits" you earned together. After January 1, 1987, the credits can also be divided if your marriage or common-law relationship ends in separation.

Sharing your pension

When you and your spouse receive your CPP retirement pensions, the benefits you've both earned during your life together can be shared if either of you makes this request.

Additional benefits for dependent children

In the past, dependent children were limited to one flat-rate benefit, even if both parents had paid into the Plan and died or became disabled.

Should the same happen now, your children would be entitled to *double* benefits.

Improved 'Combined' benefits

If you are entitled to a combination of survivor and disability benefits, the maximum monthly amount you could receive will now be greater.

As for combined survivor and retirement benefits, these will now be more generously awarded to those who qualify.

Building on a solid foundation

Being financially prepared for the future is a responsibility we all share. Your new Canada Pension Plan now gives you a stronger foundation. It's a sound base, and it's up to you to build on this foundation.

It's never too soon, or too late, to begin building for your future. We hope you'll start today.

You may need further information to better understand these changes. For booklets about your Canada Pension Plan, call the toll-free number below or fill out the coupon and mail it to:

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