(April 14th, 1913.)

Iceland and Canada.

By Professor W. H. Schofield.*

AT a regular luncheon of the Canadian Club, held on the 14th April, Dr. Schofield said:

Your Honour, Mr. Chairman, Gentlemen,—It is indeed a great pleasure to hear such courteous words as your Chairman has just spoken. I thank him, and I thank you, gentlemen, for your friendly reception. May I also add a word of thanks to your Hon. Secretary, Mr. Wilson, for his kind letters which just made me feel that my presence among you was really desired.

It is now over twenty years since I left Canada for the United States, and I have enjoyed many privileges and pleasures during my connection with Harvard University; yet I confess I never cross the border to this my native land without a genuine feeling of elation. There must be something down deep in one's heart to make this natural; it was established in my boyhood, and has been confirmed by my steadily-growing confidence and invincible faith in this our Dominion. I say "our" advisedly, for, despite many temptations to the contrary, I have still the honour to be your fellow countryman. (Applause.) More and more Canada seems to have the power to rivet affection and establish loyalty, affection and loyalty which are not incompatible with similar sentiments for the land where her sons may happen to dwell, let alone to the Mother land to which they eagerly cling. Winds of distrust blow at times over every people, but, if I mistake not, high-minded Canadians are now particularly filled with reverent hope. You revere the traditions of European culture upon which your civilization is based, but you aspire to full participation in American progress. Sometimes, when disturbed by

* Professor William Henry Schofield is a Canadian who has attained eminence in educational circles abroad. He was born at Brockville of U.E.L., stock and has been identified with Harvard University since 1897, first as instructor and professor in English literature, and since 1906 as head of the Department of Comparative Literature. Under the German Emperor's plan of exchanging German and United States university professors, Dr. Schofield lectured at Berlin University in 1907-8. One of his works is "English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer," and he has written widely on Danish and Scandinavian literature.

the turmoil or crudity of the new world, we hasten to the old hoping to find solace and repose there, but it does not take us long to discover that on this side of the water is our true home, that hopes have been born within us which we can realize only here, and few properly-constituted persons born on this continent turn back to the West—sail into the sunset—with a glad heart.

To-day I should like to tell you a little of a land from which in the year 1000 sailed to the West, this same West, the enterprising men who first discovered Canada and, as has been conclusively shown, reached no farther south. It is not, however, because of this fact of history, nor for the further historical fact that recently a larger body of men have emigrated from Iceland to our own Northwest, and made their presence felt there in intellectual as well as in other ways; it is not primarily for these reasons that I associate Iceland and Canada to-day, but for matters of the spirit, because I feel that there is much that we can learn from the ancient Norse now that we, in much the same mood as they long ago, have begun to build up a new cohesive nationality, which may attain similar distinction for unique quality.

Iceland, gentlemen, is a dangerous topic to let a lover of that land get launched upon. I remember well that when I first projected a visit there, I wrote to the Rev. Stopford Brooke, asking him whether he would rather I should call upon him in England before or after the trip, and he implored me to go to see him before, since, he said, if it affected me like others of his friends, I should be simply intolerable afterwards. I would talk of nothing else. The other day, Mr. Bryce, our Ambassador in Washington, told me at length of his journey there some thirty-five years ago and maintained that it was one of the most memorable experiences of his life.

Iceland appeals to travellers for various reasons. Sportsmen go there because of the splendid fishing for salmon and trout. (If I had time, I could tell you many stories of our achievements along that line, some of which would be true.) (Laughter.) Yachtsman, go because it is a very picturesque cruise; artists, for fine landscapes to fix on glowing canvases; men of science, to study the geysirs, glaciers, volcanoes and other natural objects of wonder; linguists, to master the most complex extant form of our old Germanic speech; and plain literary fellows like me, apart from a sheer love of adventure and beauty, because we are deeply interested in the Eddas and Sagas, and hope better to understand the environment of those men of distinction of the past whose lives are there set down.

A little girl in Boston, when she heard we were going to Iceland, remarked that she thought Icelanders must resemble native Bostonians, for they were cold and distant. (Laughter.) It was because we had the feeling that it might be cold there, and in any case knew it was distant, that we made elaborate preparations. Finally, we took ship at Quebec on the 1st of July, and sailed to Liverpool. Nine days later we went on board a little Danish trading steamer of about 1,000 tons at Leith. The first day out on our voyage north we suffered a good deal, for the boat kept going "wop with a wiggle between" in the troughs of a vicious sea, but then the weather improved and we enjoyed the rest of the sail. On the fourth day we were roused very early in the morning by the shuffling of feet on deck, and divining what had happened, we hurried from our bunks. Already those who had preceded us had sunk into silence, and we spoke from the first only in subdued tones.

One first view of Iceland, we agreed, was unforgettable—the variegated, escarped cliffs beaten by the foaming blue sea, immense glaciers pushing down from far-away summits to the very waves, a brilliant light spread over all. It was stimulating, mysterious, quieting. Iceland! No wonder it was so called. It matters little where he who established the name first saw the shore. One might have got the suggestion anywhere. Let one leave the great Vatnajokull, the largest glacier in Europe, which we were viewing in the south, and travel around the coast to the west where on a projecting point beautiful Snowfell, rises nearly 5,000 feet, amply justifying its name, or farther on where in Icefjord magnificent fields of white reach from water to cloud, or still farther on in the north to the harbour of Akureyri, where even in midsummer Arctic floes sometimes prevent a steamer's entrance. Even in the interior as well as on the coast there is ice and snow in view. Plainly this is Iceland. Yet only in neglected regions of volcanic ruin does the ice repel. Throughout the island abound green pastures. In among austere crags and lava washes are fascinating fjords and delightful waters. Iceland has always been able to inspire love more than awe, yet both at once in the same heart. Far to the west, in 982, an outlawed Icelander discovered a region with broader tracts of ice, more barren and bleak, yet, in order the more readily to promote travel thither, called this place Greenland. But though there may be much for the moment there is nought in the long run in a name. "Greenland's Icy Mountains" we now sing about as an ultimate of unappealing space; but Iceland's green valleys breed more and more longing in those whom they have once thrilled. It is only the ignorant whom the name sets shuddering.

It was in 860 that a Norseman discovered Iceland, but it was not till 874 that the Norse emigration thither really began. Political conditions in Norway helped the movement. Then King Harold the Fair-haired was trying to extend his dominion in all directions, but the vigorous chieftains of this land resisted obstinately, until, when nothing else availed, they determined to leave their homes. Some went to the Orkneys, Faroes and Shetlands; some to Ireland, where they founded Dublin, and held sway for three hundred years; others went to Northern Gaul, and founded there the dynasty from which came the vigorous Norman Dukes and English Kings; while many made their way to Iceland, to build up there a republic, the like of which has never been seen elsewhere in the world.

These men were democratic aristocrats. To them Iceland was a sweet land of liberty, where they felt they might live without tyrannical overlord and worship what gods they would undisturbed. And there they had the joys of upbuilders, of rescuers of waste places, of creators of a new democracy. In 930 they adopted a constitution for the whole island, and from then till 1262 Iceland was a republic with an elaborate system of representative government the enlightenment of which under the circumstances modern writers on jurisprudence unanimously applaud.

It is narrated that when the first settler was nearing the land he threw overboard the sacred pillars of the high-seat he had brought from his Norwegian hall, and let them drift ashore, trusting himself thus to the guidance of the gods as to where he should reside. These pillars escaped from his view, and he decided to make a temporary abode on the southern coast, but later he discovered them in a sheltered harbour around the desert point in the southwest, and there he "took land," as was said, and established a colony. There were many hot springs in the neighbourhood emitting clouds of smoke, and from this prominent feature of the landscape he called the place Reykjavik, "the vik, or bay, of smokes." Reykjavik, at present the capital of Iceland, though beautifully situated, did not commend itself to us, and we immediately prepared to depart for the interior to visit prehistoric natural wonders and mediæval saga scenes. We were ten in all, including four guides, and we had thirty-two horses. It took us some time to get used to the discombobulating jog of

our ponies, which had never learned to trot properly. (Laughter.) Our sleeping packs were placed on either side of the pack-horses' saddles, and they were allowed to run loose, except in places where it was necessary to go in single file, when they were sometimes tied to one another's tails.

We had not gone far in the direction we first took before we observed certain physiographical features to which I shall briefly refer: Iceland has the geographical uniquity of being the most fiery within, and the most frigid without, of any land on the globe. It contains no less than a hundred and seven volcanoes, twenty-five of which have erupted within historic times. Lava covers one-fifth of the island, and just by that one-fifth Iceland is larger than Ireland. To traverse these lava-fields is not, however, so tiresome as one might think, for the soil is all so fantastic in form that the scene never lacks interest. Everywhere little caverns are visible, and certain large ones, over a mile long, in which outlaws lived of old, appeal strongly to the imagination. There are no trees in Iceland, but one does not feel oppressed by monotony on that account since great wealth of colour vivifies the rocks. Many travellers to Iceland have commented on the resplendent sunsets they found there, but to me Icelandic day-gleams were more beyond the power of words to depict.

As a result of the island's volcanic nature, one expects indications of inner turmoil. Most conspicuous of these are the so-called geysirs, or bubblers, mysterious wells, whence water is projected high in the air by subterranean forces. The largest geysir has a conical opening about twenty yards wide. To stimulate it to activity we fed it seventy pounds of soap; but, the weather being cold, it did not respond for several hours, about midnight, and even then it sent the water to a height of only about fifty feet, while at other times it had been seen to go up to a hundred and fifty feet. Near this great geysir are nearly 100 boiling springs; but the most interesting perhaps are at Reykir, where some are yellow or green in colour, one enormous bowl a glowing pink.

Geysirs, little or big, did not fill me with the awe they have done some folk, but I confess that those sulphur pools at Reykir fill me to this day with foreboding and unrest!

A large proportion of Iceland is covered with glaciers, and from these flow many chalk-coloured rivers, which are extremely destructive and dangerous. I remember one in particular in the south. We traveled for several hours along its bank, till we came to a point where we thought it might be possible to cross. We then secured four extra local guides

and pushed in. Since the bottom often changes, the head guide never crossed any one of the twenty-two streams without examining it carefully. One frequently felt as though one's horse had lost his footing and was being swept away, but that was only because the water was rushing so rapidly past. It was with a distinct feeling of satisfaction that after an hour I saw the last one of our party ascend the hither slope, and we then watched the pack wind like a serpent along the route we had ourselves come.

I wish I could tell you the history of the place we were then seeking in pilgrimage, the ancient home of Gunnar the Brave, but of that you can read in the *Saga of Burnt Njal*, a brilliant narrative of particular interest to lawyers. Then, I recall, our tents blew down, and our aluminum poles were twisted into unrecognizable shapes, so that we had to take refuge in the church. It was not the first or the last time when we were in Iceland that we were invited to use churches as places of shelter. On such occasion we took in our sleeping-bags, inflated our rubber mattresses, and then tossed up to see who should occupy the Epistle side and who the Gospel side of the chancel; then we lay down and slept like saints. In the morning we took turns dressing in the pulpit.

Though not the largest, Hecla is the most famous of the volcanoes of Iceland. It is impossible now to give you an adequate idea of our ascent or of the view from the summit of that great fiery furnace, where the fires still burn low in obscurity. Mistral maintains that Dante got the suggestion of his Inferno from the wierd rocks about Les Baux in Provence. But had Dante looked out from Hecla he would have painted a picture of a different kind. One does not wonder that Icelanders conceived a hereafter of cold torment. As one gazes to the east over the limitless glacier washes one recalls how Odin conjured up the Sibyl to tell the fate of Baldur the Good. Like the Witch of Endor wailing "Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?" she rose at his command, and thus spake: "I have been snowed on with snow, beaten with rain, dripped over with dew, dead was I long." Natives still people the land with giants and tolls.

To me, however, the most impressive place in Iceland was Thingvellir or Plains of Parliament, where for nearly 1,000 years representatives from all parts of the country gathered in midsummer to adjust disputes and to determine the laws of the land. The legal system of this early republic was extraordinarily complex. The old Icelanders had a positive genius for jurisprudence, and some of their enactments amaze us by

their modernity. The place itself is magnificent—a broad lava field which has sunk down, and in its subsidence left great rifts on either side. Through one of these a river runs. Near by is the chief lake of the island. All around are snow-covered peaks. At Thingvellir there never were conspicuous habitations or halls. Here, if anywhere, one might say:

"Not to the domes whose crumbling arch and column
Attest the feebleness of human hand
But to that fane most catholic and solemn
Which God hath planned!"

Here is a place of natural majesty and marvel where no sort of human architecture would seem to fit. I felt, with Lord Dufferin, that it would be worth while to travel back to Iceland if only to spend another day on that spot.

The district of greatest charm in Iceland is the west coast, with its deeply-indented fjords, lovely valleys, and gleaming waterfalls. Here above all are the scenes of the Sagas. Here were enacted those events which reveal the spirit of the inhabitants and have made the history of Iceland for ever memorable.

Outer conditions made it impossible to build enduring buildings in Iceland. Outer conditions, especially after the Danes came and exploited the island, deprived it of all prosperity. Outer conditions, plague pestilence and famine, have more than once reduced the peasants to extreme poverty and distress. But outer conditions at their worst have never been able to conquer the pride and virility of this race. There is at present not a single illiterate person in the island. (Applause.) The men are earnest, self-reliant, eager for knowledge, and impatient of vice. They cherish with zeal the records of their past. Though subjects of one kingdom or another for many centuries they seem never to have lost the democratic spirit of their ancestors in the days of their independence. At present, to be sure, the land lacks all marks of outer distinction, but it could not have been always thus. Undoubtedly the mighty have fallen, but elsewhere it has been the same, and the marvel is that the mighty of Iceland endured so long.

Wherein did the greatness of ancient Iceland consist? If I mistake not, chiefly in three things: amplitude of vision, fortitude of character, and honesty of heart. It is primarily because of these things, these matters of the spirit that I have ventured to associate Iceland and Canada in my remarks to-day, for I am convinced that if Canada is to attain to the same inner greatness, along with her vastly greater outer prosperity and power, she, too, must have, more and more, amplitude of vision, fortitude of character, and honesty of heart. (Applause.)

"Little does the man seem to know, who knows only Iceland," said a Saga-writer of old. And little does a man seem to know who knows only Canada. In order to be truly great, one must transcend the limits of locality, get out of parochialism and provincialism, and learn to comprehend the ways of other men and other times. Twenty-five years ago, it seemed to some of us that Canadians, as a whole, were but dimly conscious of the fact that there was a world elsewhere. Most seemed content to live humble lives in a comfortable colony. The United States, to which so many of the ambitious went, seemed like the Celtic other world, "a land from which no stranger returned." Why, indeed, should they—when there was opportunity for effort, prospect of preferment and, above all, understanding of ideals? There a man might hope to participate in, to realize—the world elsewhere.

Amplitude of vision! By that, gentlemen, I do not mean mere practical far-sightedness, but rather that spiritual amplitude of hearth and home, that power of discernment which may come simply from reading and reflection but which establishes permanent standards by which men and measures may be judged. Yet that alone is insufficient. Success in ideal struggle means personal fortitude, and only by being true to oneself can one be true to one's neighbour and one's nation. It is by the measure of the individual that the nation is great.

We are here in a land which has received the name—to me a happy name, one in any case that is likely to last—"Our Lady of the Snows." This name brings to mind the holy, gentle Virgin and evokes the mood of tender Christianity. "Our Lady of the Snows" seems to smile winsomely, inspire consecration, and point to honour in peace. (Applause.) She wears an altogether different mien from the Valkyrie, heathen goddess, whom one may imagine as hovering over Iceland from her cradle-days. Odin's messenger, fateful, unfaltering, firm, Valkyrie, chosen of those who, when doomed to die in conflict, passed straightway to Valhalla there to keep strong *for ever*, each day measuring their might.

For ever! That idea dominated the thoughts of the ancient Norse—"Lasting is the doom over a dead man," we read in the Lay of the High One, expressing a conviction of power. I have many times seen upon banners "Canada for ever!" But I have often questioned whether we Canadians

were individually doing what we must in order to make our deeds deserve to last for ever. To make Canada distinguished in the eyes of the world—for ever—we need more and more in ourselves amplitude of vision, fortitude of character, and honesty of heart. These will always make for liberty under the law, distinction in restraint, and achievement that is lasting because true! (Applause.)