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Stefansson : Explorer and Scholar

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talement. L'eau est montée en 1896 jusqu'à la hauteur des bancs dans l'église même de Batiscan. Des régions basses de la ville des Trois-Rivières ont été endommagées par les glaces. Les cultivateurs perdaient leur foin et leurs animaux. On rapporte que le curé de Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade a perdu 700 minots d'avoine provenant de la dîme de ses paroissiens.

Les documents ne manquent pas pour étudier ce caprice hydrologique du Saint-Laurent. Des témoins oculaires vivent encore assez nombreux dans ces régions. On peut encore déceler dans certaines constructions des indices qui laissent voir que les riverains construisaient en fonction des inconvénients du flot envahisseur. La lecture des journaux de l'époque permet de reconstituer « le film » des événements, avec des détails abondants sur la température, la marche des glaces. Ce phénomène très historique et géographique à la fois mériterait une étude approfondie.

Yves TESSIER

Stefansson : Explorer and Scholar

The interest shared by Canada and the United States in the exploration and development of polar regions was remarkably manifested in the person of Vilhjalmur Stefansson. Born in Canada, educated in the United States, supported in his explorations and research by both nations, Stefansson felt no contradiction in counting himself equally a citizen of Canada and the United States. And in Stefansson's death, August 26, 1962, both nations have mourned an irreparable loss of genius and learning.

An outline of Stefansson's life and work can be brief only with substantial omission. His parents, Icelandic immigrants, homesteaded near Arnes, Manitoba, where in 1879 he was born. Hardships caused the family to move to a region now part of North Dakota. After Stefansson had been expelled from the University of North Dakota, he contrived to do four years' work in one year at the University of Iowa. In 1903 he began graduate work in the Divinity School of Harvard University, but in the next year he changed his study to anthropology. His knowledge of Icelandic literature led him to publish a paper on Norse colonization of Greenland, a paper that brought his name to the attention of Ernest Leffingwell and Ejnar Mikkelsen, who were then preparing an expedition to the Canadian Arctic.

Stefansson accepted Leffingwell's invitation to join the expedition. In 1906, with support from Harvard University and the University of Toronto, he traveled down the Mackenzie River to meet the other members of the expedition who traveled by ship. But the ship, caught in the ice north of Alaska, never arrived, and Stefansson was left alone to face an Arctic winter, without equipment or supplies. To the consternation of local Whites, Stefansson joined an Eskimo family. His initiation into their life kindled in him a warm admiration for the Eskimos' culture and speech, and their techniques of hunting and traveling. He came to realize that competence in Eskimo skills would permit him to accomplish easily and cheaply an ambitious program of Arctic exploration and research.

In 1907 the American Museum of Natural History accepted Stefansson's proposal to search for a group of primitive Eskimos in Victoria Island of whom he had the previous year heard reports. Dr. Rudolph M. Anderson, an Iowa University classmate and biologist, asked to join Stefansson, and the Geological Survey of Canada contributed to their support, thereby establishing

PHOTO I

In March, 1960, Father André Steinmann, o.m.i. and three Eskimos from Povungnituk, Quebec, visited Dr. Stefansson in the Stefansson Collection, Dartmouth College Library.

the precedent for anthropological research within the Survey. Stefansson and Anderson remained in the Arctic from 1908 to 1912, collecting every kind of geographical and biological information. In 1910 Stefansson found a group of some 500 Eskimos in the region of Dolphin and Union Straits, most of whom had never before seen a white man. His was a unique opportunity to study a primitive people at their first moment of acculturation, for he spoke their language fluently and was already deeply familiar with the pattern of Eskimo life.

The spectacular success of his second expedition made it easy for him to organize a third, the Canadian Arctic Expedition, supported wholly by the Government of Canada. The history of this expedition is marked by both triumph and tragedy. One of the expedition's ships, the *Karluk*, sank with the loss of several distinguished scientists. The Southern Party, under Anderson's leadership, did not feel obliged to carry out the orders of Stefansson, leader of the Northern Party and commander of the expedition. This lack of co-operation (called, by some, mutiny) seriously hindered Stefansson's own plans to travel north over the sea ice in search of new land. But in 1915, and again in 1916 he succeeded in making the last major land discoveries in North America, several of the Queen Elizabeth Islands.

Stefansson has described the years of his third expedition, 1913-1918, in *The Friendly Arctic* ; his second expedition in *My Life with the Eskimo* ; the

first in *Hunters of the Great North*. The trilogy must be counted among the greatest narratives of travel, and it demonstrates in lively and entertaining style the development of a mind remarkable for generosity, breadth of learning, and critical keenness.

After 10 winters and 13 summers above the Arctic Circle, Stefansson returned to New York to take up, with instant success, a career of lecturing, writing, and consulting. His personal research library grew to become one of the largest collections of polar literature in the world. In 1951 his library became a special collection in the Dartmouth College Library, Stefansson was appointed consultant to the College's polar studies program, and Mrs. Stefansson librarian in the Stefansson Collection.

Stefansson gave up exploration after the Wrangel Island expedition of 1921-1923, which he had organized and supported, ended in tragedy. But he continued to take the strongest interest in the exploration and development of the polar regions, and, for 40 years, he had, through his publications, correspondence, and conversation, a marked influence on the course and nature of polar research. His influence on young men, whom he inspired with something of his own energetic enthusiasm, was particularly important, as many polar scientists have testified.

The greatness of Vilhjalmur Stefansson lay both in his person and in his work — in the power and clarity of his mental faculties and in the variety and importance of his accomplishments. But a great mind does not lead to great work without a special strength of character, and Stefansson's strength lay in his patience, which knew no end, and in a persistence deterred only by death. The patience and persistence with which Stefansson solved the great and small problems of daily life and travel in the Arctic were as useful to him in the tedious labors of scholarship and composition. Just as Stefansson, the hunter, could walk day in, day out, without boredom, so Stefansson, the scholar, could gladly sit, day in, day out, before a typewriter. He saw in the field and in his research the objects he desired with a near-perfect clarity. Nothing distracted him, nothing discouraged him. But he was not ruthless in his pursuits. He had a sweet patience with his fellow workers, and a sympathetic understanding of his critics and his enemies — indeed, no one could be more gentle with his enemies than Stefansson, as an inspection of the polemical sections of his writings will show.

Attempts to categorize Stefansson's interests end in early failure : his interests were manifold and deep, but all centered on scientific truth and the problems of its propagation. His adventures from his own field, anthropology, into the fields of medicine, diet, philosophy, religion, history, linguistics, biography, geography, military operations, transportation, logistics, etc., were all informed by his conviction of the unity of knowledge and the importance of extending to any discipline the lessons and principles learned in another. It is this conviction that distinguishes a universal mind and sets apart those individuals recognized as great by every age. Just as the politician's cloak has fallen away from our memory of Benjamin Franklin, whom we now recognize to be a pioneer in science and letters, so the role of polar explorer will take a secondary place in our estimate and appreciation of Stefansson, a pioneer in the synthesis of knowledge.

Alan COOKE